

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Tuesday, September 05, 2000*

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[Fourth Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [August 28, 2000]:**That the Bill be now read a second time.**Question again proposed.*

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, when the adjournment was taken last night the Member for Arouca North had completed his contribution and most of it dealt with issues on the environment and many of these have already been addressed by the Member for Princes Town, the Minister of the Environment. I will concentrate my contribution, therefore, on the area for which I have responsibility in the Government and that is the health sector.

Mr. Speaker, the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago has made tremendous strides towards improving the delivery of health care services to the population within the past five years and I will detail these during the course of my contribution.

This was possible in large measure because of the support that has been given to the sector by the Minister of Finance. This morning I thank him and congratulate him for the budget he has presented which has touched the lives of every citizen in this country in a positive way. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we at the Ministry of Health are grateful for the allocation of \$1.05 billion and plans are already in place to use this funding for the advancement of health care in Trinidad and Tobago. The policy of the Ministry of Health involves first of all more aggressive health promotion activities to encourage members of the population to take responsibility for their own health and to live healthy lifestyles. We will continue to strengthen our primary health care centres so that members of the public will feel confident in seeking care both at the levels of the health centres and the district health facilities.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Most of the health centres would offer 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. services with the presence of doctors, nurses and pharmacists. The district health facilities will offer an expanded range of services including a 24-hour accident and emergency, basic X-ray and laboratory services and specialist clinics. All of this will be supported by a reliable and efficient ambulance service. Our aim is that the patient will then only need to go to hospital upon referral there, or in cases of genuine emergencies.

To accomplish all of this, we need to upgrade our infrastructure at both the primary and hospital levels which are well underway. We need to equip the health facilities adequately and that is also underway. We need to have adequate, trained staff to deliver the services which we are addressing as we speak and we need to have an ambulance service up and running and this is already underway.

To support this, we are in the midst of reorganizing the Ministry of Health to prepare for its role as policy formulating, regulatory and monitoring body. We need to continue to strengthen the regional health authorities to deliver the services. This is an ongoing process. We need to be able to regulate the quality of services delivered both in the public and private sectors and legislation will soon be coming to Parliament to give effect to this.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if we must have access to quality care for all our citizens, those who can afford would have to make some contribution to the health care through a system of national health insurance.

Mr. Speaker, when criticisms are made about the health care sector especially by the Members opposite, I think it is necessary to remind all of them and indeed the national community about the state of the sector in 1995. I know this is something that we would probably like to forget, but if I am to account for this Government's stewardship in the field of health care, then it is important to know where we started. *[Interruption]*. I will deal with that in due course. I will then outline the current state of the sector and plans for the coming year.

A little less than five years ago, I was given the privilege to spearhead one of the largest and most challenging ministries in any government. What I encountered and discovered within my first few weeks of touring our health facilities were run-down hospitals; many closed down and dilapidated health centres; insufficient and obsolete crucial medical equipment such as X-ray and ultrasound machines; insufficient outpatient clinics; lack of pharmaceuticals at public hospitals and health centres; tired laboratories; overcrowded wards; insufficient and closed off surgical theatres; few or no ambulances at hospitals and health centres; leaking roofs; poor ventilation and electrical works at some centres and even at the main hospitals; lack of essential supplies and out of order elevators.

Training of essential categories of health care providers was suspended and there were no customer service representatives. This was the legacy left by the PNM when they vacated office in 1995. The responsibility therefore fell on us to put some semblance of order in the health sector and bring it to a state which is acceptable and responsive to the health needs of the population.

Mr. Speaker, there was no single area on which we could have focussed our attention as there was so much to be done. My only option therefore was to bring the health sector into the light step by step and bit by bit. As I report to you and the nation, let me begin with the nation's largest hospital, the Port of Spain hospital.

In the area of equipment in 1995, the X-ray machines there were obsolete. In the year 2000, there is a new X-ray department with state-of-the-art equipment and for the first time in 10 years, the Accident and Emergency Department has a new X-ray facility. This has eliminated the backlog for X-rays to the extent that there is no waiting time for X-rays.

In 1995 CT Scan was non-existent. In the year 2000, we now have a new CT Scan machine installed at the hospital. In 1995, there was one ultrasound machine in a sad state. Today, in 2000, there are two state-of-the-art machines to serve the maternity and the general X-ray departments. The waiting list for ultrasound has also been eliminated.

In 1995, laboratory equipment was obsolete technology unable to provide the volume and the range of tests required. In the year 2000, we have purchased a state-of-the-art haematology unit, biochemistry analyzers, and blood gas analyzers.

In 1995 there were only two operating theatres equipped to do surgical operations. In the year 2000 we now have all five theatres equipped.

In 1995, the Intensive Care Unit was characterized with equipment for four beds which were in poor condition. The equipment was unreliable with frequent breakdowns. We can now boast in the year 2000 of a new 10 bed Intensive Care Unit with state-of-the-art equipment.

There were four obsolete haemodialysis machines in 1995 with frequent breakdowns. In the year 2000 we have purchased four new machines and incidentally, seven of these machines will be installed shortly at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, in order to address this area of inadequate and obsolete equipment for the North/West Regional Health Authority, this Government has invested over \$40 million on new equipment and surgical instruments through the Health Sector Reform Programme. A further \$15 million would be spent on new equipment and surgical instruments for the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex.

Mr. Speaker, it was clearly evident that the general infrastructure at the Port of Spain General Hospital in 1995 lacked proper maintenance and was in urgent need of refurbishment. In the Accident & Emergency Department for instance, in 1995 that was in a general state of disrepair. In the year 2000, there has been complete renovation and installation of air-conditioning units. The North/West Regional Authority is continuing its upgrade.

As I mentioned there were two operating theatres functioning; there are now five and plans are also in place to establish a gynaecology theatre and an Accident & Emergency Operating Theatre.

In 1995, the mortuary lacked maintenance; today we can boast of a new mortuary building with a dedicated new post mortem facility. The laboratory suffered neglect and disrepair; in the year 2000, we now have access to a completely refurbished and renovated laboratory according to international standards.

Most of the wards were in a general state of disrepair. Today we are pleased to say that 16 out of the 20 wards on the central block have undergone major refurbishment works. In the upcoming financial year, the outstanding four wards in that block will be completed and refurbishment works will begin in the northern block.

Mr. Speaker, over 300 general infrastructural projects were undertaken at the Port of Spain General Hospital in order to improve this facility. These projects include roof works, plumbing, painting, general repairs, construction of waiting areas and upkeep of the grounds. This trend will continue into the new fiscal year in order to bring this facility to the standard that it is expected to be.

Mr. Speaker, one of the major challenges and problems with which we had to deal at the San Fernando Hospital was the limited capacity and capability to treat genuine accident and emergency victims. The Accident & Emergency Department was characterized by long waiting times for emergency patients requiring X-rays and there were out-dated resuscitation facilities and no system of prioritizing care. What exists now is a new and vastly improved Accident & Emergency Department, which currently experiences for the first time in the history of

Trinidad and Tobago, the internationally accepted standard of over 90 per cent of patients being assessed and/or treated during peak periods within 15 minutes of arrival at the department.

This was possible through improvements in staffing, pioneering and introduction of a triaging and filtering system to reduce overcrowding and the introduction of dedicated and trained customer service representatives. This department was also furnished with eight state-of-the-art nebulising units for emergency asthma patients; an X-ray unit was established, as well as a dedicated surgery unit.

In the Accident & Emergency Unit at the San Fernando General Hospital we also have state-of-the-art orthopaedic care and plaster room equipment which allows for immediate assessment and treatment. When we assumed office in 1995, the bed capacity at that hospital was 653 with a daily occupancy rate of over 90 per cent. All the wards were in a state of disrepair and there were no stay-over facilities for mothers whose children were hospitalized. Today our total bed complement at that hospital has increased to 720 with a daily average occupancy rate that has been reduced to 80 per cent. As a result, episodes of acute overcrowding are now less frequent.

I am also pleased to state that a 40-bed paediatric ward; a 22-bed female orthopaedic ward, and 22-bed psychiatric unit have been established and equipped on the ground floor of the major hospitals. We also now have for the first time at the hospital, some accommodation for mothers who wish to overnight with their hospitalized children.

In the critical area of surgery, care to patients which existed when we assumed office was constrained by outmoded surgical services, facilities and equipment and substandard sterilization technologies. Today I am again pleased to inform this House that the San Fernando General Hospital can now boast of a new theatre, surgical suites, and there has been a considerable increase in the level of efficiency.

In addition, for the first time in the history of San Fernando General Hospital, patients now have access to surgical services with minimum risk of post operative complications due to a lack of proper sterility. This is as a result of the establishment of a centralized sterile services unit equipped with state-of-the-art technology.

Mr. Speaker, this new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital was built by the previous administration and this is something, as I have said before, the people of San Fernando would be eternally grateful for. I gave them credit for what they have done.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, it is also the intention of the South West Regional Health Authority to establish dedicated theatres and staff for ophthalmology and urology services.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, another challenging issue the Government had to address at the San Fernando General Hospital is the high level of perinatal mortality. I believe that expectant mothers should now be pleased to note that the South West Regional Health Authority has taken the following steps to address this issue:

1. Integrated antenatal care services have been introduced in order to increase the accessibility to specialist care for pregnant women.
2. Eight new and technologically advanced ultrasound pieces of equipment have been acquired for improving antenatal diagnostic services for commission.
3. Construction work on a new antenatal ward has commenced.
4. Plans have been finalized for the start of construction of an operating theatre dedicated solely to obstetric surgical care for pregnant women.
5. New equipment has been procured for the establishment of a neonatology unit.

The South West Regional Health Authority has indicated that current budgetary allocations will meet the incremental recurrent costs for ensuring the highest standards of antenatal care in the south-west region.

During the upcoming year, the following initiatives at the San Fernando General Hospital are expected:

1. commissioning of the 81-bed surgical in-patient suite;
2. the establishment of same-day surgery services;
3. the refurbishment and upgrade of ward amenities;
4. the establishment of a dedicated urology ward;
5. the upgrade of the antenatal and neonatal units; and
6. the commissioning of the Princes Town District Health Facility and the expansion of primary care services to reduce the demand at the San Fernando General Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, one of the complaints of patients for a number of years has been the shortage of linen for our hospital beds. According to international industry standards, each hospital bed requires seven active sets of linen and two sets in reserve. I would like to inform this honourable House that in 1995 there were three sets of active linen per bed in the San Fernando General Hospital and no reserve stock as required. Today I am pleased to state that there are now seven active sets of linen per bed and one sheet per bed in reserve stock. [*Desk thumping*] For the first time in the history of the hospital, Mr. Speaker, we have the required number of sheets, that is a total of 5040 in active service and a reserve of over 1000 sheets. The situation in Port of Spain is as follows: in 1995 there were 2000 active sheets with no reserve stock. Today there are 6400 sheets in use and another 2000 in reserve stock. In 1995 there were 500 pillowcases, today there are 3000. In 1995 there were no draw sheets; today there are 500. I am saying these things because it is the habit of some people to go about peddling false information about the country's health institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the Sangre Grande Hospital. Once again in 1995 we encountered a situation of cramped conditions, dilapidated buildings, old and unreliable equipment and poor ventilation. In the year 2000 that hospital has almost been completely transformed. For example, an accident and emergency department which was once cramped with poor ventilation, and which lent to a poor work environment, has now been reorganized, fully air-conditioned, and the waiting time has been cut from two to three hours to 30 to 45 minutes. The pharmacy has also been reorganized with air-conditioning being installed and the area was previously cramped for space with poor ventilation. The X-ray department, which was also physically confining with poor ventilation and X-ray machines approximately 20 years old, has now been renovated, air-conditioned and new X-ray machines have been installed. Additional staff was also appointed.

Mr. Speaker, it was also disheartening to see the poor condition of the laboratory at the Sangre Grande Hospital. However, under this regime the laboratory now benefits from more spacious accommodation and new equipment has been procured. As a matter of fact, the hospital over the last few years acquired over \$7 million in medical equipment. In the crucial area of ambulance services, and I am speaking about the eastern region, the entire eastern region was served by six old and poorly-maintained ambulances. Remember, Mr. Speaker, the eastern region is the largest in geographical terms, stretching from Toco to Mayaro. Remember also that the Sangre Grande Hospital only offers a limited range of services, making the presence of a reliable ambulance service essential. Today in 2000 under this administration this region now benefits from a fleet of 15 well-maintained ambulances.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

If we turn our attention to the St. Ann's Hospital, we would see that within the last five years over 60 infrastructural projects were undertaken. Some of these works include roof repairs to buildings, improvement to the overall electrical system, refurbishment of wards, an improved water system and general maintenance. Works are continuing to upgrade this facility to acceptable standards.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the St. James Medical Complex. This was one of the most depressing facilities when we assumed office. Today I should like to inform this House that over 30 infrastructural projects were undertaken at the St. James Medical Complex. These again include roof works, plumbing, painting and general repairs, construction of a ramp, a completely renovated physical medicine department and construction of waiting areas. A new skin cancer machine was also purchased and installed and soon the centre would begin to offer services for patient care—patients with skin cancer. More concentration and attention will continue to be given to this complex during the coming year.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to Mount Hope. The Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex was built by previous administrations and, Mr. Speaker, this complex which was a sleeping giant is now coming to life. In 1995 when we assumed office there were no free adult wards. Today there is one medical ward that has been opened, free to members of the public, and by November this year another two surgical wards and one medical ward will be commissioned. We are also attempting to open to members of the public, free of charge, the priority care area by the end of this year. In 1994 the adult open-heart surgery programme was started and so far there are 60 to 70 cases that are done per year, and this is increasing.

For joint replacement surgery this was non-existent in 1995. The programme has begun with approximately eight cases being done per year. Renal transplant—again, there are at least eight cases per year and the programme is being expanded. Paediatric open-heart surgery—again, Mr. Speaker, this was non-existent and so far for the last year or so we have done approximately 60 cases. Coronary angiograms—approximately 250 cases annually, and this programme is continuing, and our pride, Mr. Speaker, is the children's hospital. We have opened the Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

Point Fortin Hospital—in 1995 when we assumed office this is what we encountered at Point Fortin: no ambulance service, no back-up power supply, no laundry service, no back-up water supply, unreliable X-ray service and an inadequate medical staff complement. Mr. Speaker, today the situation is different. We now have an efficient ambulance service in addition to the

emergency health service—which I will speak about in a minute. We have a fully functional back-up generator; a fully-functional laundry on site meeting the needs of the area hospital and the extended care centre; a fully-functional back-up water supply for the accident and emergency department and wards and operating theatre and new X-ray equipment. We now have a registrar in obstetrics and gynaecology on the staff and we have a consultant anesthesiologist on the staff as well.

During this current fiscal year, which will begin on October 1, construction works will begin on the new Point Fortin Hospital to provide for larger and fully-equipped accident and emergency services; state-of-the art diagnostic and therapeutic services in the area of X-ray; ultrasound; laboratory; physical therapy and pharmacy and improved obstetric and gynaecology care and same-day surgery services. Mr. Speaker, our hospitals have come a long way since 1995. There was much to be done then and there is still a lot to be done. However, over the last five years we have taken up the challenge to improve the quality of service at those institutions and these will continue during the coming year.

I would now like to focus a little attention on the area of primary health care. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, one of the ministry's major thrusts is on primary health care. It is a fact that this approach to health care delivery is changing all over the world. As a matter of fact, our national health services plan calls for five general hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago in addition to the St. Ann's Hospital and the St. James Infirmary. These hospitals will be supported by a network of about 90 health centres, including eight district health facilities, and four enhanced health centres. Under the health sector reform programme, all our primary health care centres will be either upgraded or rebuilt in order to shift the focus to the health centre instead of hospitals.

We have refurbished over 31 health centres so far and the remaining centres will be completed by the end of next year. In Tobago, two new primary care centres are scheduled to be built at Moriah and Canaan, Bon Accord, and the Scarborough, Roxborough and Charlotteville Primary Care Centres will also be renovated and refurbished. Currently there are about 15 health centres across the north-west region undergoing reconstruction works, and in the south-west region similar type construction works are being undertaken at Moruga, Cedros, Penal Lengua, Fyzabad, Indian Walk, Granville and South Oropouche. During this fiscal year another 19 will be constructed.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In 1995 in the eastern region we encountered 13 of the 14 health centres in a state of disrepair and the Matelot centre closed. The story has changed, Mr. Speaker, in the year 2000. All of these centres have now been renovated and open for public use. The Mayaro District Health Facility again, which was constructed by the previous administration, was commissioned in October 1996 and now has additional services such as dental, X-ray, laboratory, La Masse clinics, clinics for family planning and 24-hour accident and emergency services.

Another major achievement of this Government in the area of primary care was the completion and commissioning of the Couva District Health Facility. In 1995 when we assumed office the Couva hospital consisted of three rundown buildings, two of which had to be closed because they were unfit for occupation. Today the people of Couva and environs now have a new state-of-the-art health facility. At the Couva district health facility, there are 24-hour accident and emergency services fully integrated with the health centre services, pharmacy, counselling services, mental health and family planning services. Diagnostic services such as ultrasound, ECG and X-ray have also been introduced at this facility. Physiotherapy, dental and ophthalmology services are also offered for the first time at this facility. In addition, there are 10 observation beds and there is the ability to extend the observation area in the event of a major accident or disaster in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. All of these are supported fully by a functional and efficient ambulance service.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform this honourable House that our thrust in primary care has already begun to bear fruit. Statistics reveal that in areas where adequate primary care services are available, for example in the Ste. Madeleine and Penal areas, the number of patients seeking care in the accident and emergency department of major hospitals has decreased significantly, sometimes up to 50 per cent.

The health sector is a labour-intensive sector in which, no matter how much infrastructure, equipment and supplies are available, health care cannot be delivered without an adequate number of health care professionals. In our health sector reform programme, there is a comprehensive human resource development plan, and I want to take this opportunity to mention what we have done so far and our plans for the next few years.

11.00 a m.

Mr. Speaker, firstly, I will deal with the area of training. The Government has increased the number of nationals being trained as doctors at the Ministry of Health from 35 per year when this Government came in office, to 45 per year. While there are still shortages in some areas of specialty, the Government is almost at its full complement of doctors in most areas, and in the next few years, the Government should have a full complement of local staff.

Secondly, earlier this year in furtherance of our primary care thrust, the Government commenced the Family Medicine Post Graduate Programme for Primary Care Physicians. Fifteen doctors have been enrolled in this programme and another 25 are due to be enrolled in January, 2001.

Thirdly, the Government has converted the Diploma Pharmacist Programme to a Bachelor's Degree Programme at the University of the West Indies. This new programme is more comprehensive and better prepares the pharmacists for their new role in the field of work. Last year the first batch of students graduated from this programme and training is ongoing.

Mr. Speaker, when this Government came into office in 1995, the previous administration had discontinued the training of nurses and nursing assistants. In 1996 the Government recommenced the training of nurses with an annual intake of 100 students. Last year, the Government accelerated the training programme with an intake of 200 students. This year the Government further accelerated its training programme with an intake of close to 400 students. So far the Government has spent \$11.6 million in the training of nurses. Last year, the Government also recommenced the training of nursing assistants. So far the Government has trained two intakes of 100 each and another batch is expected to commence training later this year. This programme is at a cost of \$1.8 million dollars.

In the area of post basic training, over 600 nurses have been trained in areas of intensive care, midwifery, health visiting, trauma and emergency nursing, scrub technicians and others. This has been at a cost of \$5.3 million. In March this year, Cabinet agreed to the reintroduction of the three-year apprenticeship training programme in general nursing. One batch has already commenced training. Cabinet also agreed to the commencement of the single trained midwifery programme for enrolled nursing assistants and one batch has already commenced training. These training initiatives together with the health visiting programme will cost the Government over \$27 million over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet has also agreed to the introduction of two courses in integrated education for nursing tutors; one this year and one next year and two courses in nursing administration, again one this year and one next year, tenable at the University of the West Indies. Thirty senior nurses will be trained each year at an estimated cost of \$2 million per year. The first programme is expected to begin later this month. Further the Ministry has initiated discussions to begin training for the nurse practitioners' programme later this year. This will begin on a limited scale and will be expanded later depending on need. This will further support our primary care thrust.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In the area of dental nursing 66 persons have been trained in the area of dental nursing and dental surgery assistants. This has been at a cost of over \$1 million. Eighty three persons have been trained in the areas of public health engineering and vector control at a cost of \$0.6 million. Fourteen persons have been trained in the area of Applied Epidemiology at a cost of \$ 1.2 million. During our term of office over 300 medical interns have graduated from the programme at a cost of over \$14.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, in his contribution, promised the doctors and nurses to deliver in the shortest possible time increased remuneration packages. I addressed this issue last year in my contribution and I would just like to briefly mention just in passing two paragraphs of what I read last year.

In 1991—that is when the previous administration took office—the salary of an intern was \$4,382; in 1995, when that administration demitted office, the salary of an intern was \$4,850. That is an increase of \$468. At present, in the year 2000, the salary of an intern is \$6,274. An increase of \$1,424. With respect to a house officer, in 1991—and this is salary and allowances—was \$6,345. In 1995 when the last administration demitted office, it was \$6,844, an increase of \$499. The present salary is \$8,670, an increase of \$1,826. With respect to a registrar's salary, in 1991, the salary was \$7,686 and when the PNM demitted office in 1995, it was \$8,213, an increase of \$627. Mr. Speaker, a registrar's salary is now \$12,153, an increase of \$3,940. [*Desk thumping*] With respect to a senior medical officer specialist, in 1991, the salary was \$8,316 and in 1995, it was \$8,854; an increase of \$538. Today, the salary and allowances is \$13,056, an increase of \$4,202. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I do not think that anyone can deny that the nurses as a professional body need an increase in salary. The Government has attempted to address this issue in the short term by offering the nurses a 25 per cent increase in salary on the condition that they go across to the regional health authorities. Today, I would not like to get into that debate. In the meantime, the regional health authorities are developing a comprehensive compensation package for nurses which will address basic salaries and all the other allowances. May I just mention however, that at present the regional health authorities are constrained by an injunction, which was issued by the High Court, preventing the regional health authorities from offering employment to nurses in the public service. It is now a little over two months that we are awaiting a decision from the Court of Appeal on this matter.

The Government has established a pension plan after long discussions and deliberations for regional health authority employees and has already injected \$20 million into the plan. This plan is a contributory plan for regional health authority employees with benefits that are superior to those in the public service. The plan already has a membership of close to 200 employees and the rest of the regional health authority employees and those who are transferred from the public service are expected to join the plan before the end of this year.

In another effort to make health care more accessible to all, the Government is introducing an emergency health service through our national ambulance service. The Government is addressing this area so that once and for all the entire country would have access to a reliable and efficient ambulance service. The Government knows this has been a sore area for our citizens for many years. In the past patients suffered the indignity of being transported to hospitals in the back of cars, vans, maxi taxis, trucks and even in police vehicles. Many lives were lost because of lack of proper transportation to health centres or hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, a little less than a year ago, as part of the Government's health sector reform programme, the Government introduced the National Emergency Ambulance Service. This project started out as a pilot in the south west region and in Tobago and it has proven to be a resounding success. Today, nine months after its introduction, the Government has been able to respond to over 7,500 emergency calls at home and on the roads. These ambulances which are fully equipped and professionally staffed respond to calls within 20 minutes or less. The Government has reviewed some of the records and I can assure you that we have been able to save many lives as a result of this service. Currently there are 24 ambulances operating from seven bases in Trinidad and there are two in Tobago. This project has been expanding to the central region over the last few months and it is the intention of the Government to expand it nationally by the end of this year. It is anticipated that there will be 55 ambulances operating out of 22 bases throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The number of emergency medical technicians will also increase from 196 to 306. Mr. Speaker, health care really is now only a phone call away. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read an article from the *Express* newspaper dated September 4, 2000 which was brought to my attention.

11.10 a.m.

It says:

“With a new Highway Patrol Unit to combat crime and reckless driving already in place, ambulance attendants from the Emergency Health Services (EHS) have established a response system for emergencies on the country's roads.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

People at two accident scenes last week said they were impressed with the quick response of the EHS.

They are now being called 'angels on wheels'.

The *Daily Express* met these 'angels' over the past weeks.

The first time, they responded to a call when a car driven by a woman smashed into the traffic lights on the Uriah Butler Highway in the vicinity of the Nestle compound.

People at the scene said they were amazed by the efficiency in which they carried out their work.

The second time was on Saturday night when a Nissan Sunny car ran off the westbound lane on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway close to the Trincity traffic lights.

This time a smiling female attendant said everything was okay: 'Everyone was rushed to the hospital already, there was nothing major, they were lucky'.

Closer inspection showed what she meant. The vehicle had missed a concrete lamp-post by inches. The car was on its side in a ditch.

The EHS team are reluctant to give their names. They say they are not 'out for glory' but are simply doing their job.

An EHS supervisor in North Trinidad said 'We have a plan in place. When one of the vehicles is out, there is one that would come from Chaguanas (the other EHS office) that would stay close by in case of emergencies and this helps us to respond...in a more efficient manner.'"

Mr. Speaker, I did not write this article. This is reported in yesterday's *Express*.

Mr. Valley: You could have had it written.

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: I did not have it written either. Mr. Speaker, when this administration assumed office, we inherited a substantial backlog of patients waiting for all kinds of surgery, particularly cataract surgery. This meant that hospitals have had to deal with cases from this backlog and new cases as well and the list was increasing.

Today, however, I am pleased to state that only two weeks ago, the Northwest and the Southwest Regional Health Authorities signed a contract with the Ophthalmological Society of Trinidad and Tobago to perform 2,000 cataract operations on the most urgent cases on the waiting list within a four-month time frame. The first batch of surgery is expected to commence next week.

A significant arrangement has been made between the two RHAs and the Ophthalmological Society in that patients would be provided with post-operative care for a maximum of eight weeks and, additionally, the Ophthalmological Society has agreed to perform, free of charge, a further 250 cataract surgeries per year for the next 3 years in order to reduce the waiting period for this type of surgery at the Port of Spain and San Fernando hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, there are still some areas in which we had hoped for improvement this year which we were not able to achieve for many reasons. One of them is decreasing the waiting list for surgery in other areas. However, several initiatives have started and significant progress is expected to be made within the coming year.

In the area of pharmaceuticals, I am grateful once again for another increase in our pharmaceutical budget. As a matter of fact, this year's allocation of \$100 million represents the highest budgetary allocation ever for pharmaceuticals in the history of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, let me remind you of the previous years' allocations. In 1991—that is prior to the previous administration taking office—the budget for pharmaceuticals was \$51 million. When the PNM administration came into office, they slashed that pharmaceutical budget from \$51 million to \$41 million in 1992. In 1993, they further slashed it to \$35 million. In 1994 the budget went up to \$45 million, but one may recall that in 1993 there was a substantial devaluation of the dollar.

In 1995 when we took office, the allocation was \$48 million. Mr. Speaker, when we entered office in 1996, we increased the allocation to \$61 million, an increase of \$13 million. In 1997, the allocation was \$60 million. Up to September 1998, the allocation was \$61,620,000. During the 1998/1999 Budget, the figure increased to \$72,487,000. Last year's allocation was \$89 million, which was an increase of \$17 million over the previous year, and this year, the allocation is \$100 million, an increase of another \$11 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

We have come a long way in dealing with the traditional shortage in pharmaceuticals in our public health care facilities and I am certain this will continue to improve. As a matter of fact, because of our competitive bidding process and the fact that we are using now more generic drugs, we are able to purchase close to 15 per cent more drugs with the same money that we did three or four years ago.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you are aware that in addition to these allocations, the Government has introduced the Private Pharmacies Programme in order to further alleviate some of the hardships our citizens endure in purchasing medication for various illnesses. Sixteen products for chronic diseases such as glaucoma, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, asthma and arthritis have been reduced by between 30 to 50 per cent of the cost that they were originally.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention that the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution said that he will provide the necessary funds to improve the health sector. In the four years he was in office, he provided the health sector with a total of \$2.47 billion. In our term, we have provided a total of \$3.783 billion for the health sector.

I now want to answer the queries of the Leader of the Opposition concerning the National Health Insurance System. I want to say up front that a little learning is a dangerous thing. The Leader of the Opposition and the Member for San Fernando East mentioned the National Health Insurance and really displayed monumental ignorance on this subject. [*Desk thumping*]

The Leader of the Opposition said that in 1995 his government had done all the work. It was just for implementation. I had explained this issue to this House on a previous occasion, but since the Leader of the Opposition mentioned it, I will have to explain again. It was the PNM government which had agreed to implement the National Health Insurance System in the second phase of the Health Sector Reform Programme, the first phase being seven years.

The first phase is seven years and this is to be completed in the year 2003, and the National Health Insurance System (NHIS) was scheduled for implementation in the second phase. Mr. Speaker, we have brought forward this and scheduled a pilot phase for this programme to begin early next year. This is an exercise of immense magnitude. This is an entire reform in itself and will change, fundamentally, the way we do business in the health sector.

Before we introduce the National Health Insurance, the infrastructure and health facilities must be brought up to a certain standard. This will be a big departure from the way we do things at present, and it is something we cannot rush into without proper planning. The pilot project is expected to last six months and assessed then with a view to implementing it nationally. We will keep the Parliament and the national community informed of developments in this area.

Mr. Speaker, when we came to office in 1995, there were no cardiac surgical services offered to children in this country. The parents of children who were suffering from heart disease either had to have several fund raising activities to raise the required funds to send their children abroad for surgery, or let them die.

During last year, we started this programme and so far we have successfully operated on 60 children free of charge, and given them a new lease on life. [*Desk thumping*] This programme is continuing and just two days ago I handed over a cheque in the sum of \$3 million to the Heart Fund for the continuation of this programme. My vision is to clear up the backlog of cases within the coming year so that we will become current after that. At the current rate of surgery we are doing, we are well on target for that.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to say a few words on the subject of HIV/AIDS. The epidemic curve of HIV/AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago continues to rise. Between 1983 and 1999, a total of 8,250 HIV cases have been reported. Of these, one seventh or 1,155 cases were detected in 1999 alone. Based on surveys recently conducted, it is estimated that at least 2.5 per cent of the sexually active population between the ages of 15 and 49 are living with the HIV virus in Trinidad and Tobago. This is in the same order of magnitude as elsewhere in the English-speaking Caribbean and this is only surpassed by Haiti and some of the African countries.

The epidemic has become more generalized in that it is not confined any longer to specific groups, but has penetrated the general population. In the early years of the epidemic, the predominant mode of transmission was male to male, and thus, the majority of cases were male. In 1999, however, 45 per cent of the new cases are females. Over 50 per cent of new infections are occurring in young people between 15 and 24 years of age and 70 per cent of AIDS cases are in the age group of 15 to 44 years of age.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a picture of which we are proud. I would just like to mention some of the plans—some of what we are doing to address this issue. We are beginning to implement the reduction of the perinatal transmission of HIV, which is at present being piloted in three of the four regions. Post-exposure prophylaxis policy will be implemented in all health care facilities in Trinidad and Tobago. We are strengthening the capacity of the non-governmental sectors to serve in the multi-sectoral partnerships required for the national expanded response to HIV/AIDS.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

We are conducting an inventory and demographic assessment of the religious groups in Trinidad and Tobago to advocate for their support and participation in the multi-sectoral expanding response to HIV/AIDS. We are encouraging commitment from the private sector to participate in the national response.

The economic impact of this problem threatens the future in more than one way. An "AIDS in the Workplace" project is being carried out. Peer education and counselling programmes aimed at both youths and parents are being carried out in different regions. We are continuing consultation and dialogue with people living with HIV/AIDS to address their needs. We are identifying the needs and planning strategies to address the needs of persons at risk, like commercial sex workers and men who have sex with men.

Mr. Speaker, sometime ago, Government received a request to have AIDS vaccine trials conducted in Trinidad. The Government did the only sensible thing and appointed a committee through Cabinet to consider the proposal, taking into account all the technical, ethical, legal and moral issues. The committee, after receiving the proposal, held meetings and discussions with several groups and individual experts in the field in order to assist them in their deliberations.

Last week, the committee handed in its report to me and a Cabinet note is being prepared to take the report and its recommendations to Cabinet. As soon as Cabinet makes a decision on the report, it will be conveyed to the relevant bodies and to the public.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Members of this honourable House, particularly the Member for San Fernando East. I am sure that his days at Presentation College must have something to do with this. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Rowley: You went there too?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Yes.

Dr. Rowley: Geez! It is like a plague!

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Yes, the Leader of the Opposition was also there. Mr. Speaker, when this Government came to office, there were two basic things that needed to be done in the area of mental health.

11.25 a.m.

Firstly, to bring mental health into the mainstream of the Health Sector Reform Programme and, secondly, to develop a mental health plan which would be in line with the Health Sector Reform Programme and, at the same time, meet the needs of the population.

The plan has since been developed and accepted by Cabinet and implementation of the plan has commenced. In the new plan, there will be emphasis on health promotion and integrated primary care, with each region being responsible for the delivery of primary care products in mental health. A health promotion plan has already been developed and the legislative review will take place within the coming year. Training will be a critical component of the plan and 20 trainers are already being trained in the protective services to enhance their ability to deal with mental health problems. We have now brought mental health within the fold of the Health Sector Reform Programme and next year the world will focus on mental health on World Health Day.

I would like to mention, as I had said previously, the Scarborough Hospital is at present being designed. The hospital will be a modern facility with all the services that I mentioned previously and construction is due to begin early in 2001.

Miss Nicholson: You took very long. You straightened out Couva and all those places.

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: It is coming. Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity to highlight some of the major projects and programmes which will commence or continue in the new financial year 2000/2001.

1. The National Health Insurance Programme—the pilot phase will begin in early 2001.
2. The expansion of the emergency health services throughout the entire country.
3. The continuation of cataract surgeries in order to ensure that we would not have to deal with such a backlog again. Efforts will be made to significantly reduce the waiting list of surgery in all other areas.
4. The continuation of the paediatric cardiac surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

5. The implementation of a national screening programme for cervical and breast cancer—funding for which has been provided by the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development.
6. The implementation of the Human Tissue Transplant (No. 2) Act.
7. The completion of the obstetrics, urology and neonatology theatres at the San Fernando General Hospital.
8. The continuation of the training programmes for all categories of staff for those aspiring to join the health sector as outlined in our training plan.
9. The continuation of our reduction of perinatal transmission of the HIV/AIDS programme with the aim of implementing this programme nationally.
10. The commencement of construction of the Scarborough Hospital as well as the new Point Fortin Area Hospital.
11. To complete the refurbishment and reconstruction works on most of our primary health centres.
12. The opening of three more wards at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex to offer free service to the public and entering into joint venture arrangements for the provision of other tertiary care services at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

As I conclude, there is always a big difference between promises and delivery. The Leader of the Opposition promises that he will divide the Ministry of Health into three areas: the Regional Health Authorities as the delivery arm, the Ministry of Health as the policy arm and the National Health Insurance as the financial arm. We do not have to promise that because we have already structured the Regional Health Authorities as the delivery arm of the health care sector and this exercise is continuing.

We have gone a long way in restructuring the Ministry of Health into a policy formulating and regulatory and monitoring arm. Cabinet has already approved the structure for the new Ministry of Health and steps are underway to fill the new positions. As I mentioned, we are about to begin the implementation of the National Health Insurance as the financial arm of the health sector. In other words, what the PNM is promising, we are already delivering.

I end by saying, as I have said on many occasions, that the health sector today is better off in almost every single area than we were five years ago. [*Desk thumping*] We have improved the infrastructure. We have purchased new equipment and supplies. We have increased the availability of drugs. We have trained all categories of health personnel. We have introduced the ambulance service. We have introduced other services and been involved in so many other programmes. We have attempted to do too much in five years, but we had no choice, bearing in mind the state of the health sector in 1995. There is still a lot to be done but we have set the foundation and we are on the right track. As we come to the end of our first five-year term, we look forward to completing the job in our second term.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the recognition. I commend my friend from Caroni Central for his very lucid report on his portfolio. I simply say that it would be virtually impossible to spend \$63 billion and not have any good news to report. This morning the Minister did report a significant number of items of good news in his portfolio for which he should be commended. However, if we do believe or take him at his word or the impression is being given that the health system has been fixed and it is okay, I simply say that the people of this country can believe that to their peril and the only advice I can give to the people of this country is do not get sick. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we are meeting here to discuss the budget for the next 12 months against the background of our last 12 months and while there is a lot of politics in the air and in the atmosphere in general, I do not think we should lose sight of the fact of what the budgeting process is and what it means because, to do that, would be to allow people like the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development to do other than what the Minister of Health did because the Minister of Health tried to report on his portfolio to account for what he has been charged with in the last five years. That is what a Minister of Government is supposed to do, tell us what has been happening with his or her portfolio. Granted he told us all the good news; he has not mentioned the bad news because he said he would leave the nurses for another place and another time and he knows why.

But the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development has been singularly negligent and deliberately deceitful when he has been called upon to report on his portfolio. I have no difficulty in giving credit where credit is due. If you happen to be on the watch when things are going fine, then I do not begrudge you, as I do not begrudge the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development any good

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

feeling or accolade for being in office when the economy is doing well. I do not begrudge him that. He is entitled to make that claim. My problem is when he goes further and seeks to take claim and credit for things that are patently not his doing. That then diminishes whatever accolades may go to him.

On the other hand, in the same context, if you are going to take credit for what has gone right on your watch, then it follows that what did not go right on your watch, you must also take responsibility and take blame. But no, not this Government. It only wants to take credit and it is because it has taken this position of selective reporting and taking credit for all that went on prior to its existence, why it has two sets of reporting.

In the Leader of the Opposition's contribution, he spoke about a crooked accountant in a business threatening the shareholders' interest. Crooked accountants are notorious for having two books and the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development of Trinidad and Tobago, while not being an accountant for us in this Parliament, in fact, does have two books—one book that he reads here in this House for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and another book that he reads for the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. I want to demonstrate what I mean.

Before I demonstrate, let me say something. This year is my 14th year in the Parliament and my 19th year in the public politics of Trinidad and Tobago and I think there are a few other people in this House—my colleagues from San Fernando East, Couva North, St. Augustine and Oropouche. We are in that category of elder statesmen. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Humphrey: Do not put yourself there. You are not there yet.

Dr. K. Rowley: If you disturb me, I will exclude you.

As a result of that, I can claim that for the last 20 years, I have been following the performance of Trinidad and Tobago as a country as to its economy and, therefore, it would be no surprise to me and certainly to my colleagues on this side, for a Minister of Finance in 2000 to report that our economy is doing well, it is on a sound foundation and we have had growth of, he said 7 per cent. We are not going to quibble with that except to make the point that this growth does not stand on its own. It is a process.

I was in this Parliament during the period when the country experienced eight or nine years of decline. Somebody passed through here yesterday morning and said the previous government did not build a single school. I wonder which previous government he was talking about. He said the PNM, but I can say the same thing of the government before the PNM, the NAR which was in office when

the economy was going through a protracted period of decline and they did not build schools because they hated children—it was because the economy of the country did not permit school building at that time and I will come back to that. But after nine years of negative performance of our economy and wrangling with that problem, economic growth returned to Trinidad and Tobago in the last quarter of 1993 and has continued since then to today. Therefore, it would be a little extra for the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development to claim that the prosperity we are facing today is as a result of something he has done.

He could not point to a single item of intervention on his part that one could say this is what steered the ship from left to right or from north to south. He has been sitting there being carried along by the current of an earlier time. We all accept that. The problem we are facing today is we have to talk about managing the prosperity that we all are looking forward to on the economy that we have built with effort and struggle over the last decade.

In fact, let me tell you what the World Bank has to say about Trinidad and Tobago. The World Bank does not generate its own information. The World Bank makes assessment based on information provided by the Government of the country, therefore, when you get a report from the World Bank, it is, in fact, an unbiased assessment of the situation.

What the World Bank has to say here in this document, the World Bank Report—Memorandum of the President of the International Bank, World Bank, for Reconstruction and Development to the executive directors of the bank. It is reporting on Trinidad and Tobago—recent political economic and social developments. It has this to say:

“The Government continued to implement the economic programme of the previous government.”

So, if there is credit to be taken, we will all take some and if there is blame to be taken, we will all take some. That is what you are doing. Secondly, it says:

“Under the 1988 to 1994 Reform Programme...”

I will repeat that.

“...the 1988...”

NAR—

“...to 1994...”

PNM—

“...Reform Programme, the economy was successfully stabilized.”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

It had absolutely nothing to do with these people who are in Government today.
[*Desk thumping*] The report goes on:

“Since 1994, despite declining petroleum prices, the country recorded real GDP of over 3 per cent.”

11.40 a.m.

Under oil and natural gas issues, the bank reports:

“During 1988—1994 the Government...”

These are the initiatives taken by the Governments between 1988—1994.

“...sharply reduced public spending;
revised the tax regime;
introduced VAT;
moved to a market-based exchange rate”

that is, floating the currency;

“eliminated exchange control;
deepened trade liberalization;
removed price control on consumer items;
divested 50 per cent of state assets; and
removed excess staff at state agencies.”

None of those initiatives have anything to do with the government in office today. Those are the initiatives that put the economy of Trinidad and Tobago on the sound footing that it is on today. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, the bank reports that:

“Successive governments have consistently shown strong commitment to provide social services. As a result, social indicators are impressive when compared with other Latin American and Caribbean countries.”

Those were the two previous governments.

What does the bank say specifically about this Government? Item 11 on page four says:

“The Government has not yet clearly defined a comprehensive policy regarding education and youth development.”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

[Desk thumping]. This is the current report: the 2000 report. It also says:

“Several civic groups offer punctual responses (NGOs) but they are faced with lack of access to funding.”

I will come back to that. The bank observes:

“Mainly due to its location, Trinidad and Tobago is used as a trans-shipment point for international drug-trafficking, and drug-related crime is increasing.”

[Desk thumping]. The bank reports on local government. It says:

“Lack of capacity within local government is impeding successful delivery of programmes.”

They are probably spending too much time in the Chinese Garden at the Wok. The bank goes on—somebody misled the bank. They managed to mislead the bank towards the end. The bank reports:

“An Environmental Commission that will arbitrate and resolve environmental matters has been established.”

Who lied to the World Bank? Which of you?

Mr. Speaker, that is the scenario from the government’s other book. We had book one presented here by the Minister of Finance which, in fact, was a political campaign speech where—give Jack his jacket—you put your best foot forward, you put your best face on. But this is book two of the real situation.

Mr. Speaker, let me go back to the issue before us, which is—we in Trinidad and Tobago are not worrying too much about the state of our economy, yet. What we are worrying about is the management of our prosperity.

About a year ago I was asked to talk to the Port of Spain Rotary Club. I took the opportunity to raise this very same point: that the crisis facing Trinidad and Tobago is no longer an economic crisis—we have grappled and, successfully so, with that—what we are faced with is how do we manage the prosperity that will arise from that success, and how do we treat with the warning signs and milestones that are there, pointing out to us that we are heading in the wrong direction and could easily return to the place where we came from in the 1980s. That is the concern. That is why when we saw the behaviour of the Government with respect to the management of our prosperity—if there are those in the country who say: “I do not care what the Government does with public money,” the PNM is not saying that because we care: both as duty and as citizens who have to take an interest in our own well-being. *[Desk thumping]*

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, you were here and you saw, as I did, the most disgraceful performance by any Prime Minister in any Caricom or Commonwealth country. [*Desk thumping*]. He was not content with undermining the Chief Justice and the Judiciary, the media and members of the public. They are now trying to undermine this very Parliament where Members of the Government must come and report on how they are managing our money. [*Desk thumping*]. Insofar as we come here and ask questions about how our money is being managed, the Prime Minister takes issue—the Attorney General was asking for evidence and threatening me with all kinds of sanctions.

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, as you would know, any person who threatens the privilege of a Member of Parliament is, in fact, in breach of parliamentary privilege. When I receive a threatening letter from the Attorney General, circulated in the press, that if I do not do so and so by so and so, I will face a penalty, that is, in fact, an action which warrants to be taken before the Privileges Committee. But I would not waste that time, I would take him before the committee of public opinion in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*].

But the Prime Minister comes here in this Parliament and puts on his disgraceful performance yesterday, saying that we have made allegations against this Government, we abused the Parliament, it is a weakness of democracy, which allows us to do so and failing on the part of the Speaker for not conducting this House in a certain manner. That is the Prime Minister of this country because we of the PNM have consistently made accusations against this Government without one shred of evidence. He goes on to say, that in his long life in this Parliament, he has never seen a more disgraceful performance than that of the PNM in this term. He must have forgotten that he led the charge in this House in 1987/1988—the days of Club 88—when a Member under his charge got up in this House and called another Member of this House a slut. Do you remember that story? The Member for Couva South called the Member for Arouca South a slut in this House. Today they want to hold up a “10 days” for my colleague from Siparia as some great achievement for women in this House.

While I say, Mr. Speaker, that there is no more deserving person on the other side to hold that position. [*Desk thumping*]. I sincerely congratulate her.

Mr. Valley: Man, woman or child.

Dr. K. Rowley: On behalf of the PNM, I sincerely congratulate her for the historic developments.

Mr. Valley: Not because she is a woman, it is because she is she.

Dr. K. Rowley: Not because she is a woman, because she is competent to do the job. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: That is right.

Dr. K. Rowley: She was not competent way back as Attorney General when she was humiliated. She was not competent when the fly-by-night Senator was made to act. The Prime Minister is playing games. You are only acting now, my dear, because Gillette is on holidays.

Mr. Valley: General elections is in the air.

Dr. K. Rowley: Because the Prime Minister has to account in this House, and he thinks that by letting her act, the news of her ascendancy to the office will smother what we have to say in this Parliament. That is what it is all about.

Miss Nicholson: They putting pressure on the lady.

Dr. K. Rowley: It has nothing to do with her and her competence. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is a game player. He said we do not have a shred of evidence.

It was in this House that Motions were raised against my friend from Princes Town. Documents showed that he misled this Parliament by lying on the IDB, and the Prime Minister defended him. It was in this House that the Minister of Works and Transport came and told the Parliament that—it is on *Hansard*—with respect to the award of the airport contract, Ernst & Young assessed and approved the award. It turned out to be a blatant lie. It was in this House that the same Minister of Finance came and said interviews were held for the appointment of Soodhoo. But to his eternal credit, he came back here after and apologized. None of the others did that.

Mr. Speaker, I would not talk about the Soodhoo report that only the Prime Minister could read because it is libelous. Only he could read it. We are seeing now that Soodhoo is suing another state company for US\$15 million. If they win the next election, rest assured, US\$15 million of public money would go into Soodhoo's pocket. It is for the public to prevent that from happening.

11.50 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to demonstrate to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago that we have good reason to believe that our allegations of corruption against this Government require serious answers from the Government. This morning I am going to go on record, because these things must be put on the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

parliamentary record for future reference. The Prime Minister and his Government will not be allowed to get away by trying to blow hard in the Parliament and threaten us with the Privileges Committee and, therefore, we would not raise, in this Parliament or anywhere else, the people's business.

Mr. Speaker, the last time the attempt was made to sanction me it was because I said that the wrongdoing with respect to the management of our money in this country is led by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. This morning I am making the same statement again with respect to the airport project.

The airport project which initially, when it was conceived and conceptualized, was supposed to cost \$400 million, by the time a revised contract was let, that contract was let for \$700 million; much to the country's consternation. It turns out that even before the project is complete, while the Minister of Works and Transport was telling the country that the airport project was within budget and on time, both statements are now contradictory: Not on time, and, certainly not within budget. The real cost of the airport, we now know, is \$1.3 billion and rising.

Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of this project there were queries as to how the contract was awarded, and this matter was raised here in this Parliament. The Prime Minister was so moved by what he was told that he organized an inquiry into the matter. A report came to this House. Arising out of that report the contract was stopped and then re-awarded.

Mr. Speaker, before the contract was re-awarded we know that the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago met with the parties involved and he ruled in that meeting that that contract was null and void. He specified that no liabilities—in fact, he instructed NIPDEC to go ahead and re-invite tenders and let the others who feel aggrieved sue. That was the instruction of the Attorney General, because he said that they had no case.

What happened, Mr. Speaker? They prepared the tender process in such a way—in fact, they went straight ahead and gave the contract in defiance of the Attorney General's instructions. Yet, it is the same Attorney General who comes to the Parliament and asks me for evidence and seeks to prosecute me in the Parliament, knowing full well that the first contract in the airport was awarded contrary to his instructions. Even as the contract was awarded, later on, this Government ensured that contrary to the ruling of the Attorney General, \$29 million was paid in compensation for a contract that the Government's own Attorney General ruled did not exist, was null, void and of no effect.

The Cabinet's instruction was to award the contract to the particular contractor; that was the instruction of the Cabinet. Do you know why? I want to put on the record what we have paid for the airport; one contract. Construction Package 9 (CP9), building enclosures and interior construction—this is not the airport, this is only one aspect of it—where there was a sole tenderer as a result of what NIPDEC did to ensure there was a sole tenderer.

Look at some of the costs we have paid. Start up and mobilization, engineer's estimate. Mr. Speaker, you were in charge of this country's construction at one time, you would know what is an engineer's estimate. It is the cost at which the owner, having assessed the situation using expert involvement, determines the market price of what the owner is going to do. Then you go to bid and see what the contractors say they will charge you, so you will have an idea of what you are going to pay.

This is a document I am reading from a NIPDEC assessment: engineer's estimate, what it should really cost, start up and mobilization, \$630,000; the contract was awarded for \$8.5 million.

Mr. Manning: Say that again!

Dr. K. Rowley: Engineer's estimate \$630,000, award \$8.5 million. Bonding and insurance, engineer's estimate, \$3.9 million, the contract was awarded for \$17.9 million; Supervision, engineer's estimate, \$3.4 million; award, \$5.5 million. So total general expenses should have been \$12.5 million, awarded for \$36 million. Aluminum/glass wall, engineer's estimate \$6.7 million; award made for \$13 million. Doors, miscellaneous doors, no high-tech, no nothing, just doors, engineer's estimate, \$76,000; contract awarded for \$591,000.

Bifold door, one bifold door, engineer's estimate \$470.50; contract awarded for \$98,340; one door. [*Desk thumping*] It must be the golden door to heaven; engineer's estimate, \$470.50; the contract was awarded for \$98,340. On that section the total award should have been \$2.9 million; award for \$6.9 million. Painting, no big thing, painting is a normal simple matter, engineer's estimate, \$77,000 to paint the structure out there; contract awarded for \$2.6 million.

Mr. Hart: Murder without a cause!

Dr. K. Rowley: The total wall finishes, engineer's estimate, \$1.1 million; contract awarded for \$6 million. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: “Yuh” hear that Ralph, and you endorsing that?

Dr. K. Rowley: Wall plaque, information signs, \$7,000; contract awarded for \$250,000. Customized signs, \$31,000; contract awarded for \$220,000. Miscellaneous signage, engineer's estimate, \$94,000; contract awarded for \$430,000. Miscellaneous furniture, engineer's estimate, \$6,000; contract awarded for \$450,000.

In the end, the engineer's estimate for this construction package nine, building enclosures and interior construction was \$105 million; the contract was awarded for \$183 million. That is what the Prime Minister is trying to prevent us from telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

He comes here yesterday, the Parliament is treating with the nation's budget, he rushes through here on the way to New York, on the way to the airport. He comes into the House to breathe, to attack, to undermine, to denigrate, to mislead, that we have not got one shred of evidence. What do you call this, Mr. Speaker? Do you know what I am going to do? I am going to find out if this country's institutions are working, or if the people of Trinidad and Tobago are entirely at the mercy of these people who today control the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am going to provide the Director of Public Prosecutions with the documents that show that the Attorney General ruled that that contract was null and void; not even this one. This is only one of the many contracts. This is only how \$103 million was spent. The contract cost \$1.3 billion, so multiply this by many times. I only gave you this to show you how the money was being spent. I will provide it to the Director of Public Prosecutions, but only after this debate. If nobody on the Government side gets up and gives the country an assurance that the Government will do something about it, if nobody on the other side says that the Government will do something about it, we know that the Government intends to do nothing about it.

The Government can start, now that I have made this information public to the country and put it on the country's record in *Hansard*, the Government can start by agreeing to a commission of inquiry into the award of the airport contract. [*Desk thumping*] The Attorney General can say to us here that given the information that I gave and the ruling he made and since this has happened, he must tell us what action he intends to take.

If he does not do that he will go down in history as the greatest hypocrite ever to have held the office of Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] While we are chasing after pennies, five cents, ten cents and dollars,

hundreds of millions of dollars have been stolen in this manner, and this was done on the instruction of this Cabinet. So when I say that the Cabinet is behind the rape of the Treasury, I have the evidence to prove what I am saying. [*Desk thumping*] I have just quoted from the NIPDEC document.

I will tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker. I will go to a bill that Birk Hillman—you know Birk Hillman? Remember that firm? Birk Hillman, as you may recall, Mr. Speaker, is a company that had tendered as a partner with Maritime during the Project Pride days, and did not succeed in the bid. Subsequently, Birk Hillman's name appeared again when Justice Deyalsingh reported to us in this House that with respect to the award of the consultancy for Birk Hillman for the airport project, he had found collusion between Birk Hillman and those who awarded the contract. He recommended that the contract of that company be terminated, and that would have been done at no cost to the Government, because the contract permitted for termination at no cost.

Birk Hillman was not only not terminated, they were given an additional contract, and by last report they had earned \$166 million in this rape of the Treasury at the airport. But Birk Hillman reports to NIPDEC, because the Government put NIPDEC over Birk Hillman, so NIPDEC is paying the bills on statements submitted by Birk Hillman.

I want to draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to your copy, which you would soon have, because I will make this copy available to the library of the Parliament so anybody could go and look at it. Do not depend on the Government, the ministers; I will put it in the Parliamentary library so anybody from any media or any member of the public who wants to go and look at these documents can go to the Parliament library and look at it.

When you look at it you will see an item called GL9180, subhead consultants. This is Birk Hillman paying consultants on behalf of NIPDEC on behalf of the Airport Authority on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They made a payment, No. 8466, of US \$1.691 million, that is about TT \$10 million to a company called Overseas Communication Investment. So Birk Hillman is charging NIPDEC for that payment to that company. NIPDEC is asking: what did this company do for us that you are paying them \$10 million? Birk Hillman refused to answer, and was paid.

We have carried out all the investigations using Dun and Bradstreet, which is that agency that can tell you whatever company you want to find in the United States. This company, Overseas Communication Investment, cannot be found and it is only known to very select people within the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development must tell us today

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

who NIPDEC paid \$10 million; who is Overseas Communication and Investment, and what services they provided to the airport project, because Birk Hillman has refused to tell NIPDEC, having received the payment, who this is and what the service is for.

12.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would have been surprised at that, but I got frightened when I looked in my mailbox after the Prime Minister's conduct last night and I found this which I will now read into the record. It is a letter dated July 30, Mr. Speaker, I want you to take good note of this date. It is a letter from the Ministry of Finance dated July 30, 1996 addressed to the hon. Basdeo Panday, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I read with your indulgence.

“Dear Prime Minister,

As we discussed last week Thursday after Cabinet, I would like to proceed to Miami unofficially as I have been able to secure appointments with American Airlines, Carnival Cruise Ship and a firm called Birk Hilleman which is very experienced in constructing airports. These appointments would take place during Thursday and Friday this week.

For obvious reasons, I would prefer this to be a private trip rather than an official one as these are merely preliminary discussions.

I trust that this has your approval...”

The letter is signed by Brian Kuei Tung, Minister of Finance.

I ask the Minister of Finance and the Government today if a Minister of Government of Trinidad and Tobago is going abroad on official duties why is the Prime Minister requested to treat it as a private visit? On the other hand, I want to ask a second question. Why is a Minister of Finance of Trinidad and Tobago going to Miami to hold discussions with Birk Hillman knowing full well that Birk Hillman is an interested party in a multi-billion contract? *[Desk thumping]*

So you understand the absence and the behaviour of the Prime Minister? It does not end there. I want you to go to the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. I draw your attention to page 410 of these draft estimates and under sub-head 009 called “Other Transfers”, you will see in 1999/2000 the country paid \$51.7 million in interest on a loan and another \$17.2 million on a loan. Those were the original estimates. They actually paid \$50 million on loans and for the coming year for those same

two loans you will see provision being made for \$65 million, another loan of \$27.4 million being made and another loan of \$15.8 million. In total, you will see provisions for loan payment next year of \$175 million for the Airports Authority. That was up from \$75 million last year.

Mr. Speaker, at what point in time will this Government tell the country that that monstrosity being built out there; a steel and concrete shed for a billion dollars was being built by moneys borrowed by the Minister of Finance of Trinidad and Tobago? Did you know that? Did this Parliament know that? Did this country know that? While we were paying up to 1000 per cent of the going rate for works out there and paying \$98,000 for a door that cost \$400.00, we were borrowing money to do that?

In 1998 they borrowed \$300 million on a loan that will end in 2018; another loan of \$300 million borrowed in 1999 on a loan to end in 2019; another borrowing of \$239 million and another borrowing of US \$30 million, and the interest on those loans, the provision that is seen of \$112 million is just the interest for one year to service those loans. The true cost of the airport to the people of Trinidad and Tobago is not \$1.3 billion, it is \$1.3 billion at 12 per cent interest per year and that amounts to \$156 million a year until 2019. That comes up to \$2,340 million, \$2.34 billion and when you add the actual cost of the construction paid to the contractor of another \$1.3 billion, the total cost comes up to \$3,640 million. That is the price of the airport. [*Desk thumping*] When that is compared to the original cost of the airport when it was conceived at \$400 million you will realize it will cost us nine times the original idea. The original airport was supposed to have cost \$400 million and it was going to be funded by the private sector who would have gotten a return from the operations of the airport and after 15 years it would have come back to the Government for a dollar. It would not have cost this country one cent, so this \$3,640 million would have been available to the country to do things in education, health, things for Tobago and so forth; instead, we are now committed to paying that for the benefit and privilege of that airport. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, shamelessly, he is trying to say something. What can this Government say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; even those people who are saying we should have a new airport? The question they are facing is: should we have an airport at this monumental cost with this level of corruption in it? That is what the Government has to answer. That is the issue before us today. An airport costing us \$3,640 million, \$3.64 billion, nine times what was originally conceived when we said let us build a new terminal.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In fact, let me clarify that. We are not building an airport, we have an airport. What we are building is a terminal building. We have a runway, all we are building is a structure to house passengers on their way in and out, and ancillary facilities, so we are not building an airport. We are simply building a terminal building, that is all we are building. And this Government found a way to push the cost up from the \$400 million of 1995 to the \$1.3 billion and rising today to the \$3.6 billion in the years ahead. They would not tell the country, they want to keep that position quiet, but we have a duty to tell the people of this country how their moneys are being spent and how their future is being mortgaged. [*Desk thumping*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. K. Rowley: I thank you very much, and I thank my colleagues for the extension.

Mr. Speaker, when you bear in mind that the Member for St. Augustine and the Minister of Works and Transport rode shotgun on this airport project for its entire life—they kept weekly meetings managing this construction project—they have a duty to explain to this country what has happened at Piarco. The Minutes of those meetings are available, showing the role of the Minister of Housing and Settlements and the Minister of Works and Transport, so they must tell us. We are not going to be browbeaten by the Government, they must tell us who is Overseas Communication and Investment, they must tell us who received that \$10 million. If they cannot tell us in clear, precise language, they must resign their office now. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport is absent—talking about senior and junior Minister. The Minister of Works and Transport who oversees this project, abandoned his ministry, opened a new office in San Fernando—I presume with the Cabinet's approval—and is campaigning for office. I am asking the people of San Fernando to ask him who received this \$10 million and what service was provided for the Airports Authority to receive that money and he must tell us also how he went about awarding a contract of \$80 million more.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what we could have done with \$80 million more? Suppose we had \$80 million more, what could we have done with it? Now, I want the Minister, the Attorney General and the Prime Minister to tell me and the country that no evidence has been provided with respect to our disquiet and our allegations.

When the Minister of Finance, with the support of the Prime Minister goes off to Miami in that way to meet with Birk Hillman of the airport fame, what do you want us to think? When there are other contractors in this country and the JCC is saying other contractors are being prevented from tendering and they want an opportunity to tender and the Minister says yes he will make that opportunity available and it is not made available and a sole selective tenderer is awarded, \$80 million more than the going rate, what do you want us to think? That is only in one of the construction packages, I do not have the extra millions for acceleration. I did not talk about the extras that have gone into the contracts, I did not talk about the penalty clause that is not going to be invoked because they have introduced variations to ensure that no penalty clause can be invoked. I am not talking about that.

I say to all of you on the other side who sit there stone-facedly, every one of you will be held accountable for this because every one of you make up the Cabinet. My friend from Naparima, it is not too late to walk away from them.

Mr. Speaker, now we understand why the Prime Minister was in the forefront of ensuring that the *Hansard* was made available in the courthouse, why the Cabinet which he led did not allow NIPDEC to go back out to tender, and an instruction came to NIPDEC to give the contract in this way to this particular contractor and why the Government has been steadfast in refusing to have an enquiry into this matter.

The President of the Republic says one is required. He is praising Archbishop Pantin. Archbishop Pantin says one is required. The Government says no, and we can see why. They have cocoa to hide. Do you understand? The only people in this country who do not want a Commission of Inquiry into this scandal are members of the Cabinet and their friends. I am talking about the President.

12.20 p.m.

I notice, Mr. Speaker, that the lovely lady who came from India—exquisite beauty—has been humiliated in this country in a way that I could not believe. She has come to this country as her country's ambassador. She had an appointment with our President and did not show up. I exonerate her completely, Mr. Speaker, because it must be because of those people who organized her programme in this country, who so see the President in such a manner, that the appointment was not kept. Could it be, Mr. Speaker, that because of the very vibes as to who the President is and what he represents he should be treated in that way; and that is what caused that to happen?

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, today on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago we accept the apology of Miss Universe. However, I call on the local chapter and the international head office of Miss Universe to apologize to the President of Trinidad and Tobago and, by extension, the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] If the Prime Minister and his friends want to disrespect the President we are not going to have foreigners come here and do that. So I think they should apologize for this.

The Minister of Finance managing the country's finances—one of the problems he has to face is the problem of falling revenues. We saw falling revenues in VAT, we saw falling revenues in goods and service taxes and we know that the National Gas Company has seen its profits fall from \$800 million to \$11 million. We have seen gas-using companies at Point Lisas shut down their operations for a protracted period resulting in loss of revenue to the country, to the Government in particular. We know there is a problem with the gas pricing policy in Trinidad and Tobago. Any Minister of Finance who is on top of the country's finances and who is reporting to the country would have found it necessary to say something about this situation. In this House we were told that the National Gas Company was owed hundreds of millions of dollars by state and private sector companies. There was not a word said about that. However, something bothers me, Mr. Speaker.

I received a letter which talks about some company being formed, and the company is called Energy Holdings Corporation Limited. That company has significant private sector shareholding—recently formed. There is a board in place and this company set out to obtain the Tringen shares. Now, let me read this paragraph for you, Mr. Speaker. This letter is written to the participants of that company. It says:

“We were disappointed that we were unable to obtain the TRINGEN shares last year, after doing much work, when the Government decided to vest its holdings in TRINGEN into a new holding company—National Enterprises Limited (NEL).”

So if NEL did not come into being as advanced by the Minister last year, this Energy Holdings Corporation Limited was seeking to get ownership of the Tringen shares. It goes on to say—[*Interruption*] Well, I mean, one has to assume that they had some reason to think that they would get it. It goes on to say:

“The shares of TRINGEN were valued by Flemming for your company but the Government changed its mind at the last moment and decided to form NEL.”

Did the Minister of Finance tell anybody in this country that Tringen shares were to go into a company with private shareholding? In fact, this letter is signed by one of the major shareholders, the man who provided the money for Carville.

Sen. Kuei-Tung: Who is that?

Dr. K. Rowley: Ameer Edoo. Do you know him? A company has been formed. He is the director. He is talking here about National Energy Limited. What is more worrying to me, Mr. Speaker, is the second paragraph where he says:

“The Board of Directors has taken a decision to make a Public Issue towards the end of September 2000 at which time we propose to raise over one hundred million dollars in new equity to invest in Phoenix Park Gas...and Atlantic LNG Ltd. Your Board of Directors has been negotiating with the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago for quite some time now to obtain capital in these two companies...”

Mr. Speaker, has this Government told the people that it intends to divest any of the assets of the National Gas Company? If so, by what process will those assets fall into the hands of a company that is largely private-sector owned—Energy Holdings Limited—to friends and financiers of the Government? I hope the Minister will take the opportunity when he responds in this budget debate, when he winds up, to give us some answers to these questions. Who is Energy Holdings Corporation Limited? Who has the shareholding there? What is the Government’s policy and position with respect to the National Gas Company? On what basis is this company expecting assets of the National Gas Company? While the Minister is at it, he can tell us his Government’s policy with respect to treating with the gas pricing policy which has seen companies being closed down at Point Lisas and the—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Kuei-Tung: I cannot talk gas-pricing policy.

Dr. K. Rowley: You cannot talk gas-pricing policy? It is because you are on your own. Are you not part of a Cabinet? You are on your own. I knew that all along. You are on your own; for yourself and no one else. [*Interruption*] You understand! In fact, since—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Kuei-Tung: As a Minister I cannot do that.

Dr. K. Rowley: Does the Minister know who is Overseas Communication Investment? NIPDEC, NIB, fall under your portfolio. They paid \$10 million to a company called Overseas Communication Investment for the airport project. Does

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

the Minister know what service they provided? Well, could he find out before the debate ends, and tell us? You understand? Finally I want to ask, since he is here, Mr. Speaker, what was he doing, as a Minister of Finance in Trinidad and Tobago, going to Miami to hold private discussions with Birk Hillman, when Birk Hillman was an interested party in the airport project which his Government awarded? When is this? July 30, 1996.

Sen. Kuei-Tung: I could answer that.

Dr. K. Rowley: I hope he could answer it because we have many questions to ask and we want—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Kuei-Tung: No, well, ask them now. Do not wait until I answer—[*Interruption*]

Dr. K. Rowley: No, we will ask and we hope we will get answers because what we have seen is a closeness between the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, interested parties in the airport project managed by NIB, who owns NIPDEC, with friends of the Minister in charge of the operation and the Cabinet directing how contracts should be awarded. We would like an explanation for that because it has resulted in a project being overpriced and delayed and the country being mortgaged to the tune of billions of dollars for an airport terminal building. I hope, as the Minister has promised, that he will explain these things in detail when he or his Government replies. Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] He will have his chance to reply.

Mr. Speaker, I move on to the question of Tobago. I want to start with the point—for all those who are not paying attention—they might have noticed that the Trinidad/Tobago relationship is now the worst it has ever been. Let me tell the people of this country that insofar as the Prime Minister of this country is concerned and the chairman of the Tobago House of Assembly, an item on the agenda is independence for Tobago. I hope we are all aware of that because, just as the Government has conducted its business like a thief in the night with the InnCogen contract, with the airport contract and with the rice contract, we do not want Tobago to get independence by accident. Mr. Speaker, you will observe that service for the people of Tobago is now a matter of great concern to everyone in Tobago.

Sen. Kuei-Tung: The Member does not represent Tobago. There is the lady who represents Tobago. He cannot speak for Tobago.

Dr. K. Rowley: Do not worry about who I represent. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: He represents everybody. [*Interruption*]

Miss Nicholson: I want him to talk about it. Do not run. Sit down.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the house is suspended until 1.45 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.47 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that the Attorney General is here with us. I had passed this point, but since the Attorney General is here, with your indulgence, I just want to go back to the point so that he could be aware of one of the concerns that I raised in his absence, so that hopefully when the Attorney General responds he will have the opportunity to treat with it so that we can understand what is going on.

Mr. Speaker, I have here notes of a meeting of October 27, 1997, which took place at the Office of the Attorney General. In that meeting there were a number of public officials dealing with this whole question of the award of construction package six of the airport. Mr. Speaker, if I may quote the Attorney General's position on the matter and it says:

“The Attorney General advised the team that based on, AATT (Amendment) Act of 1993, any contracts entered into by the AATT must be approved by the Minister of Works and Transport. The NYC contract did not have the approval of the Minister so therefore, in his opinion; the contract entered into by AATT with NYC was *ultra vires*. This opinion is supported by the Solicitor General and six (6) prominent Senior Counsel.”

Mr. Speaker, item 1.2.4 says that the Attorney General went on to say that the company would be “free to participate in the re-tendering process” under the National Insurance Property Development Company (NIPDEC).

“The Attorney General emphasized and the Solicitor General concurred, that NYC is unlikely to obtain an injunction to stop the project...”

Mr. Speaker, this means that if they proceed in the way the Attorney General was advising and NYC felt aggrieved, the Attorney General's advice was to go ahead. The Attorney General was further advising that NYC was unlikely to get an injunction since they had remedy for damages.

“The Attorney General reminded NIPDEC of the critical importance of bringing this Project to fruition in a climate in which all activities epitomize transparency and equity while simultaneously ensuring that ‘value for money’ is attained...”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, based on what I have presented here this morning with respect to the naked squandamania in Package Nine alone, and the fact that not only was this advice not taken, with respect to this particular Package Six in which the Attorney General very expressly advised along with six senior counsel that there was no contract and no liability, what is the Attorney General's position on the payment of \$29 million dollars for damages with respect to the same contract?

We have seen that the contractor not only received the contract without tender, but also at variance with the Attorney General's position received \$29 million in compensation for a contract which was not binding on the Government. So I hope that the Attorney General will say something about that when he intervenes. On that same point, I notice that the Government having gone through all of this and spent all this money, the project is behind schedule and so on. The Prime Minister then announced that he will visit the place on August 30, 2000 and then it is cancelled. I looked at the *Guardian* Newspapers and I saw this:

“PRIME MINISTER Basdeo Panday's scheduled visit today to the new Piarco airport terminal has been postponed...”

Mr. Speaker, the spokesperson for the Airport Authority went on to say:

“...that the AATT was acting on the advice of the project's consultants, Birk Hillman, in postponing Panday's visit.”

Mr. Speaker, I ask the question again: who is this Birk Hillman? What control does Birk Hillman have in this country that the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development has to go and meet them in Miami before this contract is awarded and conducted in this way. Now, the Prime Minister of the country wants to go and visit the site where all this mayhem and manima is taking place, and Birk Hillman decides that the Prime Minister should not come and the Prime Minister did not go under some spurious excuse that something is happening. How long is the Prime Minister going to stay there? Two days! The Prime Minister's visit would have been for a matter of a few hours for the most. Did the Prime Minister get up and say that he wants to go on that day or did he consult ahead of time and an arrangement was made, so that when the Prime Minister of the country said that he was going there they knew that he was coming.

If anybody had to adjust his or her programme it was Birk Hillman who had to adjust his programme to accommodate the Prime Minister. Instead you have the same Birk Hillman instructing that the Prime Minister of our country should not go to the site of maximum squandermania and, to date, the Prime Minister has complied.

Mr. Speaker, I will go on to Tobago. Before we went to lunch, I mentioned that the issue of independence has surreptitiously—and I mean independence for Tobago—found itself on the agenda at the highest level in Trinidad and Tobago unbeknown to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What we know is that there is no boat; what we know is that the Tobago House of Assembly has an overdraft of \$49 million in banks in Tobago and probably owes in total—bank and other debts—as much as \$100 million. In fact, the Tobago House of Assembly right now—as the Government was advised last year by the Auditor General—is in debt to the extent that it can be virtually bankrupt because it has a whole lot more debts than it can service. The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development made no provisions in the budget to pay off those debts. The only provision made is to continue the operation on the recurrent expenditure. The Government is totally oblivious to the fact that the Tobago House of Assembly is in debt to the tune of approximately \$100 million.

Mr. Speaker, so while the Government is giving away \$80 million in one little contract at the airport, the people of Tobago are mortgaged and cannot get their salaries and wages at the end of the month and the end of the week. That is what this Government is living with.

Mr. Speaker, on the question of independence, I want to quote the Independence Day Address of the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly and this is what he had to say to the people of Tobago and I quote:

“Four months ago, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago placed independence for Tobago on the table. The offer is a good signal that more change may be coming to Tobago and that Tobagonians must be prepared for it.”

1.55 p.m.

“Our entire demeanor must change to deal with a world without guarantees of government in Trinidad.”

This statement refers to the fact that the Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary met and announced that some task force was going to be set up to deal with the problems between Trinidad and Tobago's administrations. To date, that task force has not been set up, because in correspondence from the Prime Minister to the Chief Secretary, over and above the issues which are before us of difficulties with the boat and whatever else, the Prime Minister added an item for consideration on the agenda.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

The Prime Minister added independence as part of the terms of reference, as a result of which, no task force has been set up yet, because the Chief Secretary is now confronted by a Prime Minister who got into office on the vote of two seats from Tobago and when difficulties arose, as they have arisen now, the Prime Minister has taken the position, "I am not going to solve your problem. If you want to go, go and go now". Independence has been put on the table in Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

The people of this country sit there quietly, unbeknownst, as the Government goes on to discuss that. We woke up one morning and found that we have an airport costing \$3 billion. I do not want to wake up one morning and discover that Tobago is becoming independent. They better take heed!

I saw an article in the editorial of the *Daily Express*, a reference to this whole question of Tobago's problems. In that editorial, it said that one of the reasons the task force has not been set up to move this matter forward is that the *Express* understands that the PNM's position is holding the thing up. I want to go on record as saying that the PNM's position is this: We are not going to take part in any election issue on this Tobago matter. We agree that there is need for extensive consultation, sober deliberation and consensus, so in this election week, we are not dealing with that. After the election, we will do what we said, as outlined in our budget response by the Leader of the Opposition. It is very clear.

Secondly, we are saying that any attempt at committing the Parliament to doing anything that they might arrive at, Prime Minister and Chief Secretary, cannot automatically bind the PNM if we are not part of that process. Understand that. We said we are going to the people and restart the process, but I want to make it clear that no approach was made to the PNM to take part in any task force. If the Prime Minister has said so to the *Daily Express*, I want to correct that record. The PNM has not been invited to take part in any process and, therefore, cannot be blamed for any delay. The delay has to do with the fact that the Prime Minister has introduced an agenda item of independence for Tobago to solve the current difficulties.

Mr. Speaker, finally on this matter, I want to say that one of the things the Leader of the Opposition did not say in his response is that one of the problems Tobago is facing right now is alienation of land in Tobago, where Tobagonians feel, and are increasingly feeling, that they are becoming strangers in their own land.

With the change of the Aliens Landholding Act which was meant to facilitate foreign investment, we of the PNM are saying that we support foreign investment in Tobago and in Trinidad. We do not interpret foreign investment to mean that because one likes Tobago and one can afford to buy a house in Tobago, that is foreign investment. That is alienation of the people's land.

We are going to use the provisions of the existing law, and if it does not facilitate it, we will amend the law to ensure that foreign investment in Tobago is, in fact, foreign investment and not land speculation and hotels being marketed in people's home on the Internet in Germany, with no benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We will approve for foreign purchase in approved projects, where there are approved projects like the Plantations-type project, for open investment. We could have foreign investment in that, but to want to build a house in the middle of Black Rock because they like it, or in the middle of Belle Garden because they like it, foreigners ought not to be allowed to do that because if we are not careful, Tobagonians will soon become strangers in their own land.

Already we are seeing the backlash of that and the PNM intends to do something about it, both to encourage the foreign investment, which is real foreign investment, but discourage this question of foreigners pushing the land market up in Tobago where, at the moment, all Tobago land is being quoted in US dollars and the average Tobagonian cannot even think of buying a piece of land anymore. If one does not inherit a piece of land from one's family, one is already out of the market. The PNM intends to address that issue.

Mr. Speaker, this Government, more than any, should really feel very ashamed for how Tobago has been hard done by a government which was put into office by the people of Tobago who voted for the NAR and ended up with this UNC Government which has taken us to hell in a handbasket. On behalf of the people of Tobago, this is not going to continue much longer.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to my constituency, there are two things I want to mention. Firstly, we did have a water problem before this Government came into office. Notwithstanding the sloganeering of "Water for all by the year 2000", as I speak to you now, areas in Carenage, Diego Martin, Glencoe and Westvale, we have not had water for two months in the pipes, because WASA has been unable to repair a pump.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. ROWLEY]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Secondly we have seen the paving of the Glencoe main road, and while we are happy for the new surface, I want to ask the Minister responsible for WASA, what is to happen now? We were discussing and expecting that the La Horquette Valley Road would have been dug up for the relaying of new pipes, because the pipeline in that road is old and substandard and cannot service the development that took place in Glencoe in recent times.

Part of the water improvement programme was a new pipeline for Glencoe. I was expecting that to happen and I still expect it to happen, because the current situation is that the pipeline breaks every 10 metres. Every single day there is a break on that road. The next thing, the road is completely paved now. I wonder if we are now going to dig up this newly paved road, or are we to expect that we will get no improvement in the water supply because the road is paved?

I do not know what the position is, because I was astounded when I saw the road being paved, because the road, while we had a few potholes, was earmarked to be dug up completely for the laying of new pipes. It is now like an airport runway paved from end to end. Beautiful for driving, but what is happening to our water?

I also want to thank the new Minister of Education and acting Prime Minister for being very co-operative on this matter of the Diego Martin Secondary School, because her predecessor was resolute that that school would not be built. The new Minister has agreed to put it back on the programme, and for that I am eternally grateful on behalf of my constituents. That school, contrary to what the Prime Minister has said that we have not built any schools in four years—

Mr. Speaker: I was just signalling to you that your time is up.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you very much, Speaker. I am winding up. When the Prime Minister said that we did not build schools, there were four secondary schools on a World Bank loan, construction to have begun in 1996. This Government, for reasons which I can explain later, and which I will explain later, built one of those schools. The Diego Martin school was one, and I am very grateful that the Minister has now agreed to put that school back on the programme.

The Government wanted to build the school next to the Boys' Industrial College. I had discussions with the Minister and have identified a site in eastern Chaguaramas. The Minister agrees and I look forward to a new secondary school for the people of the northwestern peninsula, Carenage and environs, before the end of 2001. It will be done under the next government, which will be a People's National Movement government.

Mr. Speaker, finally, the Minister's grade. What do I say? I think the Minister owes us a lot of explanation. As of now, his paper is ungraded and is, in effect, a failure. He has so much to explain and until he explains those, he will not get the "E" that I am disposed to giving him as a grade for managing the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. I cannot support this Bill, Mr. Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister for Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, I shall start where the Member for Diego Martin West ended, and I shall give him an 'A' for consistency. I shall give him an 'A' for clarity. I shall give him an 'A' for what I see as his sincerity and honesty on the matter of Tobago.

I have in my hand the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West on the debate on the Tobago Arrangements Report, Thursday, November 14, 1996. In that report, the Member for Diego Martin West spared no pain in enlightening and telling everybody and warning everybody about secession. He did mention Ms. Deborah Moore-Miggins declaring that Tobago should secede. It says:

"That Senator is on record. I draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to an article in the *Daily Express*...under a headline 'TOBAGO WANTS THE RIGHT TO SECEDE'. It states:

'Not only must Tobago's right to self-government through the House of Assembly be enshrined in the Constitution, but so too should be the right of either Trinidad or Tobago to either opt out of the present unitary state should the people decide this is in their best interest.

'We cannot get away from it...let us face facts,' declared Deborah Moore-Miggins...'"

He goes on to say:

"In 1990, when we had our difficulties, look at what was paramount in that mind of that group. The headline in the *Daily Express*...: 'Set a date, says GROWTH—TOBAGO MUST SECEDE'. I say that one of the loudest voices in that group called GROWTH was the said Senator who has just resigned"

He was referring to Mrs. Deborah Moore-Miggins. It continues:

"Tobago should seek and set a date for its independence.

That is the gist of several recommendations coming from the Group with Tobago at heart (GROWTH)."

It goes on like that.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, elsewhere in the debate of December, 1996, the hon. Member for Tobago West, I recall—I do not have that debate with me here—did spend a lot of time dealing with section 48 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, which I have with me. I shall quote the relevant section. It says here:

“Notwithstanding section 42 of the Exchequer and Audit Act, monies appropriated by Parliament to the Fund for the service of a financial year which remain unexpended at the end of that financial year shall be retained in the Fund and utilized for the purposes of capital investment.”

In his perspicacity, in his consistency, in his passionate sincerity, he spent about 10 minutes arguing and giving, like an examination, he said, “What if the Minister of Finance allocated \$100 million to the Tobago House of Assembly?” As the section states, the Chairman of the Tobago House of Assembly, the Chief Secretary, decided to suppress expenditure because he is saying that that is what this clause is there to do: to provide an incentive to suppress expenditure in one year and carry it over to the next year. When they get into the next year, they have \$30 million, and they either do not spend it and put it in the bank and it accumulates and they might end up where Tobago eventually gets an unfair amount of revenues.

On the other hand, one might not do that and instead, take the money in the next year and spend it as one likes without any reference to the Exchequer and Audit ordinance. It is all there in the *Hansard* of 1996. I did not tell him to say what he said. I am saying he is very consistent, and in all of that, this matter of Tobago has not been honestly dealt with by many of the spokesmen on the issue. I do not think it is fair.

I am in the Cabinet and I was at the meeting where Mr. Charles, the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly had a meeting with the hon. Prime Minister, and there were other Cabinet persons there whom I shall not name. In that meeting, there was a call to bring back House Paper No. 4 of 1996, which I have here in my hand. The contents of House Paper No. 4 were rejected by the PNM. In this House Paper No. 4 of 1996, there was an agreement by a joint select committee of Parliament to give a greater degree of autonomy and to change the Constitution so that a lot of problems we have, we would not have had. It is all written in this document and the PNM voted against it.

2.10 p.m.

The issue that bedevils the relationship—I do not think it had anything to do with this Government in particular; it has to do with a set of circumstances that relate to another document which I have in my hand, the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Section 75(1) of the Constitution is quite clear. I read the very speech from which the hon. Member for Diego Martin West quoted, that is, the Independence Day Address of the Chief Secretary and in that speech, reference was made to certain persons hiding behind section 75(1) of the Constitution which says:

"There shall be a Cabinet for Trinidad and Tobago which shall have the general direction and control of the government of Trinidad and Tobago and shall be collectively responsible therefor to Parliament."

Section 75(2) goes on to say:

"The Cabinet shall consist of the Prime Minister and such number of other Ministers (of whom one shall be the Attorney General), appointed in accordance with the provisions of section 76, as the Prime Minister may consider appropriate."

Mr. Speaker, this Constitution also has a section 54 that says exactly how the Constitution should be amended. Section 54—I am sure that is the section that deals with that. Just to make sure from the records, section 54 says:

- "(1) Subject to the provisions of this section, Parliament may alter any of the provisions of this Constitution or (in so far as it forms part of the law of Trinidad and Tobago) any of the provisions of the Trinidad and Tobago Independence Act of 1962.
- (2) In so far as it alters—
 - (a) sections 4 to 14, 20(b), 21, 43(1), 53, 58, 67(2), 70, 83, 101 to 108, 110, 113, 116 to 125 and 133 to 137; or
 - (b) section 3 in its application to any of the provisions of this Constitution specified in paragraph (a),"

It goes on like that. The point is that the Constitution tells you what kind of majorities are needed to change the Constitution, whether it is a two-thirds majority of both Houses or a three-quarters majority in either House. It is all written there and until you do that, section 75(1) of the Constitution remains valid, that there shall be a Cabinet here and the persons named in the Cabinet as to how they shall be there and how they shall be appointed. It is all written down there. That is how it is to be.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

The problem that the population of Trinidad and Tobago needs to come to terms with is how, in order to grapple with the problem of the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago, we have a constitutional relationship that is, I should say, conducive to harmony and the continued good government and the prosperity of the state of Trinidad and Tobago. There is no question that that is the issue.

I have in my hand here the *Daily Express* dated Saturday, March 25, 2000, an article written by Reginald Dumas on page 30.

"From day one, I have said to all who would listen and to all who have not wanted to hear that the 1996 Tobago House of Assembly Act is a grievously deficient piece of legislation. It conflicts with existing law. It conflicts with itself. It is by turns vague and impractical and those characteristics in particular have led to sharply different interpretations by Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly Executive Council alike. The core of the issue is what the Act was designed to achieve and how."

He went on to explain. He talked about the same question of section 75(1) of the Constitution.

I have the most difficult—I do not think there has ever been a Cabinet Minister who had the problem that I have. I think my job is the most difficult, even more difficult than the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has an easy job in that he knows what his rights are, what his powers are, what his prerogatives are, what he can and cannot do. I have been taunted in this House; I have been insulted in Tobago; I have been calumniated and pilloried for not doing anything for or about Tobago, but it all has to do with the Constitution and the Tobago House of Assembly Act.

At one time, about two or three years when I came in, there is a community radio station in Tobago and every morning there were people talking on Radio Tambrin—"the Act; the Act; the Act" says, and "the Act did not say." Then, we came into January, 2000 and a great event, a great scandal I must say, took place in this country. I am not taking sides. I am not saying anything pejorative or to calumny anybody, but in this country, we were reading in the newspaper and hearing on the news every day the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic fulminating and fuming at each other.

I, too, want to share with the Member for Diego Martin West my concern for the casual way that the people with the franchise in the Miss Universe Pageant could just insult the President. I think that only in Trinidad and Tobago something so silly could happen. So that I apologize for the lady from India and I share the hurt of the President. I am glad that the Member mentioned the point.

But let us get back to the matter of substance because all that happened in January had to do with this very matter of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you remember or if you were here, July 27, 1990, when Abu Bakr and others came into this House and shot people and murdered others. I called the radio station that was open and said that I wanted to make a statement and they would not let me. I kept on bothering them; I did not sleep on that Friday night. Early the following morning—I am sure some of you did hear me—I said on the radio when they eventually let me, because they were telling me, "We do not trust you. We know your mouth. You will say something and Abu Bakr and 'dem' will kill you. You do not know what is going on." I said, "This is my life. Let them kill me." In the morning, I did get a chance to say what I said which was, "This is not Africa. We are not living in Africa. We are living in a country governed by a constitution and law and people must know that this foolishness is just what it is and they should denounce the coup and whether you were in Club 88 or whether you were in the PNM or whichever side, we must all unite together to support the Constitution." I said so. I quoted Psalm 133—"How good and beautiful a thing it is for brethren to get together in unity. We must all unite in this hour of prayer behind the Constitution and the law."

In this matter of the President and the Prime Minister, I took a similar stance. When the press came to me, I said, "I have nothing to say except that I would advise you that I went up to President's House and took an oath to support the Constitution and the law" and I left it at that because I knew that in the long run, if the Constitution did not prevail, then hell and the devil take the hindmost with all of us.

Fortunately, I do not believe, as I stand here, that the President—contrary to public opinion in Tobago and large sections in Trinidad and Tobago—meant or intended from the beginning to descend into partisan politics, but I will explain what really happened in my judgment. I quote from a statement that I made on television and on radio. I am quoting here and I will publish this in the daily papers. I said:

"I will not support President Arthur N. R. Robinson, Hochoy Charles or anyone else to surreptitiously try to change our Constitution. I condemned Abu Bakr for doing so overtly. Supporting Hochoy Charles' claim to

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

control the appointment and revocation of two Senators based on the reality of brokered coalition political expedience is devious and dangerous. Our President was entrapped. His prevarication was studied. While unnecessary it was valuable. The President's delay saved the institution from being perceived as a thing useful in vulgar political bargaining, but it caused much pain to expose us to the cost of untutored political ambition."

I said that because I wanted people to understand that every time I speak in this country, there is a didactic message. There is a reason I say what I say and I used the word "studied" because my statements are all studied statements. I spend time thinking about them.

The problem with the Tobago House of Assembly and the Central Government is not one invented by this Government, and many of the reasons why we probably are not further along the road was because of our obfuscation, the dithering and the opposition of the PNM.

I say so because I have in my hand House Paper No. 4 of 1996 which recommended all the things that the Chief Secretary came in a meeting with the Prime Minister and said he wanted House Paper No. 4 of 1996 to be put back on the table. Let us go back there. Well, we are not back there and the PNM is saying that they are not going to support that kind of thing. I want to quote again because there is a mistake going through this country.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member very sincerely for giving way. I just wanted to get a point of clarification. Is the Member aware that when that House Paper was being formulated that the current Chief Secretary actually walked out of those discussions? Secondly, I wanted to ask him if he was aware of the item of independence now being put on the agenda for the task force which has been offered to solve these problems. Is he aware of that?

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware that the Chief Secretary walked out. I have heard allegations of the Chief Secretary walking out on Mr. Robinson on sundry occasions.

Dr. Rowley: Not on Mr. Robinson.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I do not involve myself in *mauvais langue* and she say, he say, they say. What I know is that the issue he is raising concerning independence was not pointed, it is not exclusive. It includes independence, federalism or whatever status or legal relationship the people of Trinidad and Tobago might want to conjure up as in the best interest of harmony and amity between Trinidad and Tobago. I do not see any reason why we should have excluded that.

Indeed, if he recalls, there are people in Tobago like Deborah Moore-Miggins—when I quoted your *Hansard* report, you said that Deborah Moore-Miggins said that it was only a matter of time, or the *Express* was quoting her or something like that. Indeed, there has always been a constituency in Tobago, Dr. Winston Murray, for example, and even people within the party which I represent in Tobago, the NAR, who are of that view. So why leave it out? Why make it exclusive? Start from independence back to whatever and let us deal with all of it and let the people decide.

Mr. Speaker, before I leave this subject—

Miss Nicholson: Yes. But repeat that last line. Let the people decide.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: All right. Let the people, all the people--Charlotteville; Buccoo; Canaan; Culloden; Zion Hill; Pembroke; Goodwood and also the people in Trinidad, because this Constitution is not a Constitution of Trinidad; it is not a Constitution of Tobago; it is a Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Miss Nicholson: But Tobago would be the important place.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Whatever. Let the people decide. So that you cannot make a decision on a constitutional relationship for a country when you have a Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and talk about the constitutional relationship of Tobago; it does not make legal sense.

I want to quote, Mr. Speaker, because it is important that I make a very didactic and serious statement on this matter of Tobago as it is raised and I am sure the Member of Parliament for Tobago West will raise it, as indeed, the Leader of the Opposition has raised it. In the Chief Secretary's Independent Day Address, he did quote former Prime Minister Robinson, the former MP for Tobago East. I will quote from his speech where he said:

Miss Nicholson: That is what Robinson said. St. Kitt's, Nevis and—

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: He is saying here what Robinson said. Well, I will get to that, but let us hear what Robinson said:

"Listen to a statement made in Parliament in 1977:

'But it is important to understand the historical basis of this psychological attitude to Tobago. You can talk about self-government for Grenada and everybody says: yes. You can talk about self-determination for St. Vincent and everybody says: okay. You can talk about self-determination for Antigua, Montserrat, name the place, and everybody says: okay. But, talk about Tobago and you notice immediately a ferocity which you never anticipated was there.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

I would like to ask, why are some Trinidadians so ferocious when you come to talk about the rights of Tobago... It is important to understand that this ferocity is in essence a colonial psychology towards Tobago. The same kind of psychology of the Portuguese to their African colonies in the past. That ferocity is an indication of the colonial psychology..."

Mr. Charles went on, after the quote, to say:

"At this stage of the game, Tobago is taking all that for granted. That is why our primary fight today is for control over our collections—our finances."

I am going to get back to that question of finances.

What I want to do now is to quote from President ANR—or I should not say that because he was not President then. I am quoting from *The Mechanics of Independence*, by A. N. R. Robinson, the chapter dealing with "The Future of the Caribbean" and the subtitle is "The Microstate and the Ministate".

2.25 p.m.

"The recent blossoming of small Caribbean States has brought under examination the concepts of nationhood, independence and self-determination after a period in which the validity of these concepts had eluded criticism. One of the major products of the anticolonial movement has been the almost universal acceptance of the right to self-government. However, as the colonial powers established the boundaries of their conquests, with little regard for cultural or ethnic considerations, some of their former possessions that have acquired independence come close to fitting H. G. Wells's somewhat cynical description of a nation as 'any assembly, mixture, or confusion of people which is either afflicted by, or wishes to be afflicted by, a foreign office of its own.'

While this is really only nationalism's negative side, negative emotions can be just as powerful as positive ones...

Lately, however, there has emerged a new kind of small nation-state whose impulse is predominantly negative. Its inhabitants, though perhaps willing, cannot find others with whom they feel they can associate. There is also the small state in which the negative and positive impulses are more or less in balance. The first can be called the microstate and the second, the ministate. An example of the former is Anguilla, and an example of the latter is Trinidad and Tobago—both in the Caribbean. These are also states that recognize that the severe limitations of smallness and separateness. They are anomalies of the international community."

He goes on to quote Roger Fisher and what those people say about Africa. He asks the question:

“How do islands like Samoa, Nauru, and Anguilla fit into the (international) picture? Can they be left to their own devices, or must someone come to their assistance, and if so, who?”

The truth is that the Anguilla issue reflects the weakness of the entire Caribbean area. The withdrawal of the colonial authority has not been succeeded by the establishment of any other effective authority, and the Caribbean has become a spectacle of tiny states floundering about in the sea. It is a volatile area with a low flash point, whose potential instability makes it susceptible to economic frustration, external intervention, and the fratricidal disputes of the kind that has recently erupted between Guyana and Venezuela.”

Mr. Speaker, the former Member for Tobago East goes on to make what he calls a case for unity. That is the subheading in the chapter.

“The single most essential requirement to bring about the transformation necessary for Caribbean progress is political union. The most compelling reason for union can be made simply by stating its alternatives: dissipation of domestic resources, domination by external interests and economic and social frustration.

These are not future alternatives to be averted at a leisurely pace over the coming years: these are the current conditions besetting the Caribbean. Anguilla and Barbuda are not anomalous curiosities; they are the predictable and inevitable results of fragmentation that can and will arise elsewhere in the absence of corrective action.”

He goes on to make the case for union. Unfortunately, the reaction to either kind of union. The unitary state for the Caribbean and he goes on like that. I cannot go on quoting the whole chapter. But it is important that I say these things because I have somewhere here a statement concerning Anguilla. It is important that we focus on Anguilla because, unless we do that, we cannot understand that—in fact, the Member for Diego Martin West has been making a positive contribution to all of us, by dealing with this question of Anguilla.

In Trinidad and Tobago we are not sufficiently aware, we do not do enough reading. We do not spend enough time with books, so we are unaware of the fact that next door in the Caribbean there is a place called Nevis with approximately 36 square miles and 12,000 people and Nevis wants independence. I am quoting from the *Hansard* of the 1989 Budget.

“Sen. Hochoy Charles: Mr. President, I am very happy to be here to make my contribution to the 1989 budget debate...”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Towards the end he makes this statement:

“I remember after 1976, it was the late Prime Minister who made this statement, ‘if you want to go, go; I would not send any battle ship, or any army to stop you.’”

He is talking there about Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams in 1976. Mr. Charles goes on:

“Nobody attacked him. So Trinidad could say so, although this is not what my Chairman is saying. Correction, Sir, the PNM was saying that. Not only that, you would remember House Paper No.6 which was the decision of Parliament to grant Tobago internal self-government in 1977, that was presented...”

That was presented on July 21, 1978.

“...that document, in order to find a model and a solution for the divisive and the separatist tendencies of these multi-island states in the Caribbean—we were trying to find one for Trinidad and Tobago that would have been used in the Caribbean. We have lost our chances to St. Kitts and Nevis, they have a workable model.”

Mr. Charles is saying St. Kitts and Nevis have a workable model.

Mr. Speaker, I am reading for you a document called: *The Case for Nevis*—Let me read this again because people need to understand. We need to deal with facts because, in Trinidad and Tobago, when you tell people the facts, they hate you. I am going to quote some facts and I am going to get screams from over there when I get on to other subjects like education. But these are the facts; I did not invent them.

Mr. Charles is saying:

“We have lost our chances to St. Kitts and Nevis, they have a workable model.”

What is this workable model, Mr. Speaker? I have in my hand here an article written by Hon. Vance Amory, in Charlestown. I presume that is in Nevis: *The Case for Nevis*—Caribbean island argues that independence is overdue. Workable model. *[Interruption]* Hold on. Nevis has an area of 36 square miles with a population of about 12,000.

“The Representative from Nevis, during the constitutional talks with the British government, requested that Nevis remain a crown colony of Britain.”

Nevis wanted to remain a crown colony of Britain. They did not want to be part of St. Kitts Nevis and, ever since then, they have been fighting for independence—12,000 people.

“As a direct result of this refusal section 113, providing that the island of Nevis might cease to be federated with St. Kitts, was added to the constitution.

In 1983, St. Christopher and Nevis were granted independence as a federated state. Almost immediately problems began to mushroom.”

He goes on to talk about the Nevis island council and all the problems that they have.

The summary of it is that the Nevis model is about independence for Nevis. We have to be very careful when we are interpreting the facts. I am not saying these things to prejudice anybody, I am just stating the facts. I want to summarize because I cannot spend all the evening on Tobago. I want to say that the Tobago case is a case where, after the debacle in January, I gave a press conference.

Remember I said I was not saying anything while the crises was going on because I have too much respect and too much admiration for the President and I am in the Prime Minister’s Cabinet. I had a certain kind of invidious location between these two contestants at that point in time. More than that, as I said, my loyalty is to the Constitution and the law that governs Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, let me say some of the few things that—as I am on Tobago, let me talk about what has been going on in Tobago with respect to my situation in the Cabinet. I did say, Mr. Speaker, that I am the only Cabinet Member, in the history of this country, who does not know what he is supposed to do. My friend over there is always taunting me and saying that I am getting a salary under false pretence, and why do I not leave the job? People who voted for me in Tobago East—I am sure that they are not silly or stupid people—have a consciousness of what their needs are, therefore, they supported me overwhelmingly. Overwhelmingly I got support. They did not vote for me to come in to the Cabinet, to dance and prance and bray and mash up the place. A lot of people in Trinidad, in the Opposition, expected I would have behaved in that way. But people who know me, including the former MP for Tobago East knows when—the Bible has a chapter, I think it is Ecclesiastes 3 which says:

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

There is a time and place for everything. If you are in Woodford Square, you behave as though you should be in Woodford Square. If you are on the hustings, you behave as though you are on the hustings. But when you are in Cabinet, you behave as though you are in Cabinet. I did say, when I ran a radio programme, if I was in Mr. Robinson's position—when some of these people who were in Opposition and in his Cabinet at the time were getting on, they were not going to walk back in my Cabinet. I said so and I mean that. I live according to my principles. I try to be as consistent as the Member for Diego Martin West, so that there is a leader in the Cabinet. He sits over there. When the Cabinet meets there is a chairman. And as I said before, "in the Cabinet room, I can argue, controvert or debate. But having walked out the door, I have as much power as the Prime Minister's puppy dog to controvert or destroy anything that he lawfully says or does." That was my statement.

The media in their profound or passionate dedication to mischief was around telling people that Job said he is Panday's puppy dog. I am puppy dog for nobody. They are making illusions. They are using the English language with words that they do not understand.

When I was at primary school, they taught me English. We did Shakespeare at primary school. I learned Shakespeare there. I learned to love poetry there. Many of these people did *Boyo and Carla* and they do not understand English. They cannot understand what a metaphor or simile is—nothing. They take every statement as though you are saying, "This is a book." They cannot understand.

Some stupid reporter was asking me about what is going to happen if there is no boat between Trinidad and Tobago. After I spent about 15 minutes explaining to them that on no account, the Government is going to allow a situation to arise where there is no transport between Trinidad and Tobago. You spend half of an hour doing that, and somebody asks you a silly, stupid question: "But Dr. Job what will happen if there is no boat?" I said the last time anybody walked on water was Christ somewhere in the Sea of Galilee, so they cannot walk again, they might have to swim. They do not understand irony—foolish people.

Mr. Speaker, in Tobago—I am consistent with my statements going back years. I have always been saying that if you are going to help poor people's children, you have to give them a better education: you have to give them the same opportunity that middle class people's children get. Because I believe that to be true, I came into this Cabinet and asked the Government to please assist me in developing a programme to teach music and fine arts in the schools of Tobago. The Government did not hesitate. They sent it to the Minister of Education who was at the time the Member for Tabaquite, and the Minister of Culture. They all

made their intervention. It came up to the Cabinet and all my Cabinet colleagues made comments on the programme and, eventually, we started a pilot project. As it is now, there are a number of schools in Tobago and, before the end of the next academic year or soon thereafter, we expect that all the schools in Tobago will be into that programme. In that programme—I have the curriculum somewhere here with me I cannot locate it, there are so many papers on my desk—the children are learning different instruments. They are learning harmony. They are learning the relation between melody and harmony, all these different things. They are doing ensembles with piano, violin, guitar, and steelpan. All these things are going on in Tobago.

2.35 p.m.

I think that it is important that we focus on little things like that, because one of the most important issues that this Government is engaged with, which many people are not understanding, is the question of education. I will move into that question now, Mr. Speaker, because the country of Trinidad and Tobago has, I think, now come to terms with what I had been saying and labouring in the vineyards for 30 years trying to explain to people and they would not understand.

When I was a little boy they used to make me read the Bible. When I had a radio programme I used to say that every home, if it is a Muslim home they should grow up the children reading the Qu'ran. If it is a Hindu home they should grow up the children reading Ramayan and the Bhagvadgita. If it is a Christian home, grow them up reading the Bible.

Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why I used to say that. Lord Shorty I sang a calypso recently, in his later phase, where he was saying that they send children to school and did not teach them about religion and culture, and, therefore, we are reaping the dragon's teeth that we sowed, and I agree with Shorty I. If people had read the Bible they would understand when I said that as many as I love I rebuke and I chasten them, so, therefore, be zealous and repent of your ways. As many as I love I rebuke, that is Revelations 3:13, and I think Revelations 3:20 or 3:22 says something like, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock and if any man may hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me. He that hath an ear let him hear."

We have people all over this country resident in their synagogues of Satan. They do not understand these things; they do not know how to deal with truth, so when you tell them the truth it sounds like an offence to them. You cannot deal with the problem of education in this country until you are willing to deal with truth.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

What is the truth, Mr. Speaker? The truth is what I have been saying, prosaically and I will quote, that the children of the lower classes, the children who through no fault of their own, born in certain locations into certain kinds of families, into certain kinds of cultures, they need more than just sending them to school. I have always been saying that. You needed a government and a concerted national programme to intervene in the ways that we all must intervene in order to save those innocent children from circumstances which were no fault of their own.

Instead of doing that, previous governments abandoned children to their fate and pretended to those same children that they were interested in them and that they loved them. They never rebuked them, or their parents I should say, never rebuked them, because they loved them, in order that they may chasten them, so they did not focus on what the problems were, which was the problem of culture at home. This is why some children are uncompetitive, not because they are black and have kinky hair, nothing of the sort.

If you go to England the evidence is there manifestly clear that the children who come from African parents who were born in Africa, these refugee children from Biafra, Ethiopia, and Somalia, their children in England are performing as well as other immigrants like from East Africa, the Asians or Hindus from East Africa who Idi Amin chased out. The children of African parents are performing at their level. Whereas, the Jamaican, Vincentian and West Indian children are in the bottom, in the scum, in the muck. So it cannot be kinky hair and black skin. If you ever wanted evidence, that is the evidence: it has to do with culture. The PNM never dealt with that. They played with me, they carried on with me, they closed down my programme, when I was trying to get people to understand that that is what you have to deal with.

Hear this, Mr. Speaker:

“Levels Of Educational Achievement In Laventille.

Increasingly low levels of educational achievement among Afro-Trinidadians nationally throughout the education system continue to be a cause for concern...”

If you do not deal with that problem you cannot be helping people. Pretending that it is not there is a way to disaster and national distress; that is what we have to deal with.

When I said a chain is no stronger than its weakest link and a rising tide lifts all boats—the Member for Diego Martin West, against all reason and logic, Mr. Speaker, you were here, everybody heard me, I said it more than once, I said that if you went to Bombay there are people down there looking like me and they were there for the past 10 millennia, but the majority of the people look like the Member for Caroni East. I pointed to him he has straight hair. Look like this one, he has straight hair.

I said notwithstanding that there are criminals down there; I said all that. I quoted Boysie Singh's name; I did not know him, but I remember as a little fellow hearing Lord Kitchener singing about "Bumper" and the killing in the gulf and "put iron round Bumper and sink him" and whatever. I remember that. Boysie Singh was not a fellow looking like me I am sure. Samuel Jacob was not looking like me, I said all that here.

I said that it is not true that all the people in Bayshore do not have criminal parents; I said all that. Yet the Member for Diego Martin West in his mephistophelean house or synagogue of Satan, says, for the press to print it and for the world to know, "Job said that all the crime in Trinidad and Tobago is black people commit it." That is their kind of politics.

I am quoting here from the *Punch*, August 3, 2000, the Bahamas' biggest selling newspapers:

"Rowley hits back at Job's racist remark

Port of Spain: Trinidad PNM MP Dr. Keith Rowley has slammed Tobago MP Morgan Job for saying that it was black people living in PNM constituencies who were committing crimes."

I never said that. The *Hansard* record is here, I have it here. If I had time and I did not have to talk about other things I would read it out, where I said, not once, not twice, not three times, throughout the speech I was so careful to make sure that I said people who are ethnically of different groups are also committing crimes. Yet that demonic nastiness goes into the international press and he said that I said that it is only black people who are committing crime. What can you do?

Mr. Speaker: I do not think I have heard you correctly. No, I want to believe that I have not heard what I heard.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I hope so. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: If that was a description that has been used of the hon. Member for—

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Not at all, Sir; not of him.

Mr. Speaker: Of whom? Let us try to clear this up, because I got the impression—

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I am not saying that he is demonic or he is nasty. I am speaking about the consequence of the action.

Hon. Members: “He could lie boy!”

Mr. Speaker: Order, order! Let me tell you how it came over to the innocent ear. You were talking about being misquoted by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West. It sounded like you were saying that you were being misquoted by him and that misquote actually found itself in the Bahamian newspaper. Then you said something about a “demonic nasty”—oh, I see, what you were doing is saying that thing that he said of you, if it were true, it would be demonic and nasty, and that found itself in the press; I see.

Well, all I want to say is that when that appears in the *Hansard* it may appear in a certain form, so I think that it would be extremely useful for us to make quite clear that you were not, by any means, referring to the Member, but you were saying that if, indeed, those words were said by you, if you said, that those things would, in fact, be demonic and nasty.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I think it is clear. I did not mean that he was nasty.

Mr. Speaker: The English Language as you know is the most imprecise of languages; you know that, so that we have to be a little more careful.

Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job: I continue to quote:

“This situation makes many unemployable, limits their occupational possibilities and ultimately ruins their life chances. It is one of the major factors responsible for the existence and perpetuation of the culture of poverty. The data on Laventille unfortunately, confirm the contemporary predicament of the Afro-Trinidadian.

When asked to state the highest examination that they have ever passed, it was found that 76 per cent of the Laventille study never passed any, while only 6.1 per cent had passed the final year examinations at primary school...”

Those who did not pass the Common Entrance Examination would take the school leaving exam, and only 6 per cent of them would have passed that.

“At the secondary level, just 4 per cent had achieved full certificates (i.e., five or more passes at the CXC...while 10 per cent had passed four subjects or less...There were very marginal differences in the rates of failure and success among males and females.”

Mr. Speaker, what this is telling you is the devastation that, indeed, these people had condoned for their own people. He was quoting some World Bank report a while ago. This is Report No. 2088-TR, June 2000, and it goes over the same ground. It is talking about education:

“Limited Access—Youths Outside the Education System”

I want the national Parliament and everybody to focus on this. When the Government focuses the budget on education as the necessary foundation for the future of this country, we have to understand what these statistics, these facts, these truths, are telling us. It says here:

“Although access is nearly universal in primary education and enrollment ratios are generally high—normally over 90%—a large absolute number of children still remain outside of the system. One survey estimated that roughly 15,000 children aged 5—11 years were not attending primary school, representing somewhat less than 10% of this age cohort...According to the 1992 Survey of Living Conditions, school enrollment was 99% for children from families in the highest...quintiles...”

Income levels; there are a whole lot of people in this country that were not getting even primary school education, far less secondary education.

2.50 p.m.

It goes on at page 12 and I am going to read the entire paragraph 35 which says:

“35 Inequity in primary and secondary school is evident both in the scores resulting from the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) and in the practice of ‘tracking’ which places students with poor scores in school of lesser quality.”

I do not agree with the implication of this statement, I am reading from the records so I have to say so. This writer is seemingly against tracking and I am for it. I make that quite clear.

“Considerable variation is evident in student performance on the exam, based on a number of variables including the management authority of the primary school, education district, county of residence, and student sex, socioeconomic status and self-declared race group. Most importantly, children from high socioeconomic status households scored significantly better than those from low socioeconomic households, especially ones in which nobody was employed (around a 20 point difference). Students of self-declared African origin have been significantly more likely to score lower (59) than those of mixed or Indian origin (64 in both groups).”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

So the average score for the children of African origin at the common entrance is 59 and those for dougla, mixed or Indian is 64.

“The latter, in turn, have normally performed more poorly than Syrian/Lebanese, Caucasian and Chinese students (all above 72).”

Then there is a table that tells you the position in the society where the junior secondary students come from, those who attend morning shift and evening shift, the whole day comprehensive and those that go to five and seven year schools.

What the picture is painting is quite clearly there is a caste system in this country that is to be explained by the politicizing of education rather than dealing with the facts.

The Member for San Fernando East brought from Washington or somewhere, Michael H. McD. Alleyne who wrote a book *Nationhood from the Schoolbag A Historical Analysis of the Development of Secondary Education in Trinidad and Tobago*. He brought this man down here to have a consultation on education after the Government said they would get serious about education and they are going to send all children to secondary schools. I intervened and said we had to focus with the culture, but Michael Alleyne came down to spread propaganda and I am quoting from his book, page 89. So let us hear what Michael Alleyne said about education under the PNM.

“As a political strategy, the Junior Secondary School program was calculated to reap a greater number of votes for the People’s National Party than any other single item in the Party’s manifesto. For the people of a society that was just emerging from colonialism, the expansion of secondary education through the creation of Junior Secondary Schools promoted the social and economic upward mobility that they were denied during the colonial era. For each child that gained admission into a secondary school, the PNM could count on at least one vote from each parent, in addition to the other adults interested in the child’s education.”

And he goes on the same line that it was all about politics. If you think Michael Alleyne is alone in that belief, there is a Carl C. Campbell and I think he is a Professor of Education at the University of the West Indies. When you keep people in ignorance they cannot read this, so they would not know what you tell them. This is what he had to say on page 82:

Hon. Member: Who is he?

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I said he was a Professor of Education at UWI. You did not hear when I said that?

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Thanks to all the hon. Members who supported my extension. Carl Campbell in his book *Endless Education* says on page 82.

“The centralisation and consolidation of government power over education was an important aspect of a multifaceted process of nation building common to Third World countries in the post-war era. The opponents of Williams, especially during his early years in office, attributed to him and the PNM a desire to gain unfair political advantage by manipulating the content of the curriculum.”

Somewhere else he makes a more clear statement saying the same thing that Michael Alleyne said, that depending on the common entrance and expanding the secondary system was relative, not focussed as much on quality as it was to deal with the political issues that come out of education. It is all in the book and I am running out of time and I have to deal with other things so I cannot find the quote to read it.

Mr. Speaker, the point I am making here is that we have had for a long time a clear indication that we have problems with education and those people who were there never dealt with it because it was not convenient.

On my radio programme I said if it is true that we have 98 per cent literacy here, then the other 2 per cent of illiterates are in the PNM Cabinet. I said that on several occasions because I could not understand how anybody living here could make that statement and I have asked in this very Parliament: where in Trou Macaque, in Laventille, Waterhole, Pinto Road, even in Chandernagore or Felicity are you finding 98 per cent of the people literate? Not so. We have to deal with the reality of the debacle that has been education in this country, making this nation unprepared to compete in the 21st Century. Except for that minority of people, the less than 20 per cent that went to high school for the last 30 years, less than 20 per cent of them got five passes and more. When you look at the quality of the passes the rest get, that is another story.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In 1999, English Language General Proficiency Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Out of 20,279 children who took the general proficiency English Language in Trinidad, only 4,000 of them got Grade 1 and 3,000 got Grade 2. In mathematics, it is even worse. You have 18,385 taking the exam and only 3,500 got a Grade 1 or a Grade 2 and if you read all the reports, they are saying the same thing. Not to talk about physics and chemistry, and that brings me to a very important issue that was raised here.

The Member for La Brea in the *Hansard* says:

“Mr. Speaker, there is a sinister plot going on in this country. I repeat it slowly for emphasis: there is a sinister plot going on in this country to keep down the people from certain areas...”

And I am sure what he means there are the people from the ethnic areas where there are predominantly Afro Trinidadians.

“...especially the young people in subjects like mathematics.

A certain teacher told my son, ‘If you study 24 hours a day from now till exams, the best you could make is an E.’ Why? His name is Hedwige Bereaux too. He made four A’s. [*Desk thumping*]”

It goes on:

“I am saying that the teacher told my son that if he studied 24 hours a day, the best he could make in maths was an E. He took the examination and he made four A’s because his name is Bereaux. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they are doing. There is a sinister plot in this country to give pressure to certain people, and I want it to be made clear. That is what they are doing.”

Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we do not need in this country, because if we translate this into behaviour and action we are not going to deal with the real problems which is what I was telling the children of Carapichaima this morning. They are taking a lot of children from the East/West Corridor and putting them at Carapichaima Junior Secondary or the school there because there are places. I did an orientation lecture for a remedial programme during the holidays and they called me back to talk to these parents.

I told them that education is about culture. It is not about how you look, it is not about who have straight hair and who have kinky hair. The persons who succeed do so because they had the privilege, they had the preference, because they were immersed in fortunate circumstances where their parents and their circumstances predisposed them to establish a relationship with books and school

and learning that is different from what many of you would have had. That is what you have to deal with. I am speaking to you parents because I want you to understand that when you go back home you have these children here. There is the model school, there are remedial classes, they are not going into Form 1, but you have to make sure they do not spend all their time watching television and learning a lot of nastiness and watching blue movies. You have to make sure that if you can read the newspapers, once in a while, buy it. Make sure that you get them in an environment where they are understanding that and getting the same advantage that the children who, when you took up the common entrance pass list last year and the year before—

I asked my colleague for the results and I got it from him. I asked the acting Prime Minister and maybe she is too busy because I wanted to do the same thing with the list this year. The list last year and the year before when you read it, 80 per cent of the names were; Ramjohn, Sookdeo, Singh, Mootoo, Ali, and all that in Trinidad and Tobago. What is that telling you? When you look at the A' Level results, same story. We had a situation that was building up accumulating a disaster year after year and they would not deal with it because they want to tell everybody that the greatest thing that ever happened to Trinidad was PNM education. When the greatest disaster that ever happened to this country was that education system that programmed poor, black people's children to self-destruct, and because I wanted to do something about it, they nearly killed me. They want to talk politics, spread propaganda and to relieve the cries and the hurts and the anguish and the need of their own people, they do nothing good.

In the *Ministry of Education Draft Strategic Plan 1992—1997* it says:

- “3. The environment in which education is to be administered has become a difficult and turbulent one, some main features of which are:
- grave dissatisfaction and industrial action on the part of teachers
 - increasing violence and indiscipline in schools
 - an increasingly demanding and assertive population in and out of schools ready to resort to legal action or to violence or to demonstrations and protest in relation to an increasing range of issues.
 - vandalism from within and without and an increasing disrespect for school property.”

Disrespect for teachers, all these things are in the report.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

When Mr. Clive Pantin was there, I used to get all these documents and look them up and there was a document listing what they call the problem schools. The amount of fights and violence and things that were going on is amazing. Those documents are there and they did nothing about them. When I come in here and say that one of their documents says that even from the primary schools you can see the children who are predisposed because of the environment from which they come they told the world that I said it is only black people committing crime.

How are you going to solve a problem if you do not deal with it? I do not have the time to deal with the economy and other things so I would switch a little bit to the statement by the hon. former Prime Minister. He spent an hour and a half and I cannot say that in that hour and a half that I was edified in any way.

Mr. Speaker, in the hour and a half, what I got was a gentleman totally out of his depth misunderstanding the facts of the matter and unable to articulate a vision for the society that would really carry us somewhere. We cannot go back to high taxation and to the philosophy and the ideas which are what caused the problem in the first place.

I have in my hand a book written by the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central *In Defence of the People's Interest*. I was listening to the Member for Diego Martin West and when he started to speak he did admit that many of the successes that we are reaping now were sown way back in the days of the NAR. I was around in those times and I was close to the seat of power so I understand what was going on.

The big argument at the time was that there was a bureaucracy and a society consisting of a set of trade union people and intellectuals who did not understand what was going on around them. They never read anything except a set of trade union, socialist and communist propaganda. When one reads the things in this book, *Towards A New People's Order, Essays by Errol McLeod and Knolly Clarke*, one wonders if these people were living on cloud cuckoo land or from where they came.

3.05 p.m.

How come in the 1990s, in the 1970s and in the 1980s people were thinking these backward thoughts? The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Long before that I had been telling people that it would have happened because I was telling people since in the late 1960s that all this foolishness about commanding the state sector and building up state enterprises is just that—a lot of foolishness. I did not know that I would have lived to be vindicated in terms of all the outcomes

internationally, in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Fortunately I am still around to see it and to feel sad—not glad—that we wasted so much opportunity. So when the Member for Diego Martin West was saying that indeed the successes on which we are building now were put in place by the NAR and all the Governments that came after, what he failed to recognize is that if we read this work written by one Kenneth Valley and Morris Marshall, every page says things like: they do not want VAT—VAT is bad; they want to control every state enterprise—that is good. Robinson was wicked, vindictive, callous, heartless and starving poor people, because he was doing what the IMF proposed.

I am going to read for you, Mr. Speaker, this document I have here called *The Imperatives Of Adjustment*. The chairman was William Demas. Other members were Eldon Warner, Patrick Alleyne—all the famous economists—Frank Rampersad, Euric Bobb, Dodderidge Alleyne, Trevor Boopsingh, Norbert Masson, Joyce Alcantara, Frank Barsotti, Patricia Robinson, Ainsworth Harewood who ended up as a Governor of the Central Bank, Eric St. Cyr and Victor Bruce. All these people put their wisdom together and outlined in 1983 what should have been done. They called it *Draft Development Plan 1983—1986* but the PNM, stuck in their emotional, philosophical and cultural prison of ignorance, refused to heed and that is why we ended up with the IMF programme.

If I might read, for example, paragraph 3:37 says:

“There is no way by which a freeze in wages and salaries in the public sector can be avoided if the recurrent budget is to be financed; and unless the budget is financed, it will not be possible to borrow on the local or the international market, on any meaningful scale. Such borrowing is the sole source of funds for capital expenditure after 1983.”

They talked about the need to cut back wages and salaries in the public sector. They talked about improvement in the collection of taxes, increasing charges on the health service and reducing subsidies. It is all here. The whole IMF programme was inside this document but they did not understand, and way past 1986—[*Mr. Valley rose*] Look, I am running out of time. [*Interruption*] Sorry. I do not have the time, okay. If I had two hours I would give you a chance.

They also set up the Summit of Peoples Organization (SOPO). The leader was Morris Marshall and at his side was Abu Bakr. Morris Marshall was representing the PNM. Knolly Clarke was there. All of them were in SOPO. That is one of the reasons we are seeing those two photographs behind there, one of President Robinson and one of Mr. Des Vignes, because of the hysteria. Those people went

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

up and down this country spreading this poison, this foolishness and this nonsense that VAT is bad, that everything NAR did was wrong and one must not want to sell state enterprises—nothing good, everything wrong. All the statements made by the Member for Diego Martin West as to the reasons we set up the foundation for economic growth and good government, reducing taxes, liberalizing the economy, selling off the state—all of those things they opposed. It is written here. I cannot go through the—what I will do is write—[*Interruption*] Hold on. The Member wants to waste my time; imagine that. You understand? They opposed everything. It is in here, Mr. Speaker. The state sector, economic strategy for private sector encroachment, again the issue of privatization—this is Kenneth Valley—and he goes on. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I will go through all this at my leisure at some other time when I have the time to deal with the Member. So I say that the hon. Member for San Fernando East and the other people on the other side do not understand what they are talking about. [*Interruption*] That is all right, that is all right. They do not understand. So the Member for Diego Martin West is quite right, 100 per cent right—as he very often is. I always support him when he speaks the truth and says the right thing, that indeed all the governments after 1986 followed the prudent modern thinking about economics—one does not intervene.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that these people never understand—and it is not their fault at all, because I did economics. I did a Ph.D. in that so I have been reading these things for many years. What has happened in Trinidad, Jamaica and Guyana was not a Guyanese or a Jamaican thing. Unfortunately, when Vidya Naipaul said that we are all a race or a nation of mimic men, he was making such a true statement in so many areas. What we were doing in the Caribbean was mimicking European socialism. We were mimicking Karl Marx. We were mimicking all this foolishness and talking about parasitic oligarchy and commanding heights and all kinds of rubbish. As with little children, one does not blame them, one sympathizes with them and says it is a pity that they did not know better. So they did all these things in good faith because that was the prevailing orthodoxy that they understood. The reason I am raising these things is because the PNM is always talking about PNM philosophy and the PNM and the PNM; yet they never say which PNM they are talking about. So we need to deal with that.

In the context of when the Member for San Fernando East was talking, Mr. Speaker, about balance of payments, he clearly does not understand and he is totally out of his depth. You know, if one is an accountant—the Minister of Finance professionally is an accountant. I am not. I am just a dilettante in accountancy. My profession is economics. That is what I got a Ph.D. in. When one understands accountancy, Mr. Speaker, one sees that there is cash, cash balance and cash accounting and there is accrual accounting. The British government, the New Zealand government, the United States government—most modern governments—have either passed legislation to make sure that the national accounts are done on an accrual basis or, if they do not have a law, they instigate measures to have it done that way.

It is important that I say these things, because when I read what the Member for San Fernando East has said, obviously he does not understand these things. He does not understand that one does not run a government like a sweetie parlour where the only accounts one is focussing one's mind on is cash that one receives today or cash that one pays out today. No, no, no, no, no, no. One does not do it that way. One focuses on flows, debts and net equity. Those are the kinds of things one does in accrual accounting so that one can better manage the economy [*Desk thumping*] and when one understands those things, together with an understanding of international trade, one will understand, Mr. Speaker, that no government is God.

That is the reason their socialist philosophies failed—because they sent many people to school—I went and learned that too but fortunately I was not like the ordinary student. I was learning and reading everything else. So when they were getting fascinated by their multiplier analyses, and that they will do a government spending multiplier, an interest rate multiplier or a tax rate multiplier, I knew it was all foolishness, because the information requirements and the way economies work, one could not do those things. They could not understand it. So in the same way he does not understand that when one is dealing with balance of payments one is dealing—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, could you—when one is dealing with balance of payments, one is dealing with a macro economy and one is dealing with flows of goods and services.

There is no way one is going to get a synchronization on one's current account inflows and outflows balancing, or on one's capital account inflows and outflows balancing in a way that one does not need what I would call discretionary or accommodating capital inflows. So therefore, every country in the world, when doing their national accounts they have the capital account, the current account and the official settlements balance or the official financing balance as they call it. One of the things that a country does as an accommodation, just like an individual, is when one's current account is imbalanced, and that will put pressure

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

on one's exchange rate, if one can borrow, one borrows. Every country does that. That is part of the standard. That is what I would call in logic tautological, Mr. Speaker. It is not something one argues about: an evident statement.

However, the gentleman gets up and these are his words, Mr. Speaker. I am quoting him here.

“The recent increase in oil prices and a US \$230 million September 1999 Euro-bond issue contributed importantly...”

I think he is quoting the Minister of Finance here. He goes on to say, and I am quoting the Member for San Fernando East now:

“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.”

He does not understand economics. He does not understand what he is talking about; that foreign borrowing is an essential part of protecting poor people from rises in the exchange rate, which will translate into inflation. He does not understand these things. The reason we could borrow is because we have a sound economy, with which the Member for Diego Martin West agreed—we have a very successful economy. Last year we grew by nearly 7 per cent, we might grow to 8 per cent this year, and all of that he is saying was as a consequence of following a set of ideas and philosophies that are totally antithetical to everything in which the PNM believed.

Mr. Speaker, I have a book here by Chinua Achebe. I remember the Member for San Fernando East some years ago, I think it was during the NAR time, saying he was quoting from a book by an African author called “*Things Fall Apart*”. Poor fellah, he does not read as much as I do, so he did not understand that “*Things Fall Apart*” was a line in a poem called *The Second Coming* by William Butler Yeats that I think goes like this:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all convictions, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

That is from William Butler Yeats' *Second Coming*. However, he does not know that so he says Achebe said so. Achebe did not say that. Achebe wrote his book because Achebe was reading Yeats too. He called the book *Things Fall Apart*.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, this little book is by Achebe and I want to quote a bit of Achebe because I want to deal with another subject presently. This book is called *The Trouble with Nigeria* and chapter 8 is about corruption. Achebe says:

“Quite recently an authoritative statement credited to President Shagari was given some publicity in Nigeria and abroad.”

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please!

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I continue:

“According to the media our President said words to the effect that there was corruption in Nigeria but that it had not yet reached alarming proportions.”

President Shagari said yes there was corruption in Nigeria but it had not reached alarming proportions. Achebe goes on, and I will skip some of the paragraphs:

“Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage; and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed.

The *Weekly Star* of 15 May 1983 has this on its front page under the title “The Nigerian and Corruption”:

“Keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam.”

Then Achebe goes on to say:

“This is a bad way of putting it, worse perhaps than the President’s denial of its severity. A goat needs yam because yam is food for goats. A Nigerian does not need corruption, neither is corruption necessary nourishment for Nigerians. It is totally false to suggest, as we are apt to do, that Nigerians are different fundamentally from any other people in the world. Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable;”

It is the culture.

“they will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and inconvenient.”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

When there is a different culture. The reason I am quoting that, Mr. Speaker, is because you know the election campaign has truly started. All along, however, there is this litany and people are entirely forgetting that in Trinidad and Tobago we have had a history that we must not forget. The saying is, “Men who do not remember their history are doomed to repeat it”; and I am glad that they are raising the issue of corruption as often as they do because we need to go back to history.

I will read next from *Going To Ground* by Jeremy Taylor and on page 177 he is talking about the situation when Williams was about to die or when he died:

“Integrity in public life was a major pillar of party programmes from the beginning; yet Williams died surrounded by corruption scandals. There is no evidence that he was personally involved, but he cannot have been ignorant of them, and he made no move to weed out the offenders.”

I could quote that calypso that Kitchener wrote about—“is meh dam business if they say Ah thief and ah gone away with the money, is meh dam business.” I can quote that but I am going to run out of time.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I remember the Member for San Fernando East making a long list and presenting this list. So, I am not saying these things in defence of wrongdoing, corruption or anything. We have to deal with ourselves; we have to deal with the truth; we have to deal with the fact that if you understand—for example, I am reading here from a book produced by the Institute of Social & Economic Research (ISER) at the University of the West Indies in 1992. The book is talking here about the Workers’ Bank or the National Commercial Bank. I am quoting, so Members please do not harass me and think that I am saying this on my own. *[Laughter]* I am quoting from the book here and it says:

“The Workers’ Bank was described by one banker...”

Mr. Speaker: I think that Members of the House, perhaps justifiably, wondered whether I have become such a low fence that just about everybody is jumping over me.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I was not trying to do that Sir.

Mr. Speaker: But it came over that way.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: The Workers’ Bank was described by its own banker—and I am quoting from the book on page 81 and it says:

“The Workers’ Bank was described by one banker as a ‘classic case of blacks screwing up other blacks’...”

I am quoting, I did not say so and it goes on to talk about corruption in the bank and it says:

“It is worth recording here that in a writ of foreclosure filed....”

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, why they do not like to listen to the facts. It went on to talk about how many millions the bank had written off for people, merely on the fact that they were of a certain ethnic origin. It is all in the book here. I did not write it. The book is talking about a particular case and it says:

“It is worth recording here that in a writ of foreclosure filed in the Port of Spain High Court, in November 1992, the Workers’ Bank claimed that Temple Court Ltd., which is owned by a former Chairman of the Bank, owed the Bank \$23,000,271.77.”

The book went on to talk about the whole case of this former chairman who loaned himself—he was working in the bank—nearly \$30 million.

Mr. Speaker, again, on the question of understanding how we need to position the question of corruption in a global context. Recently, a Bill was passed here where the Member for Diego Martin Central said that he opposed the Bill because it was dealing extensively with money laundering, and it was not locking up only drug traffickers. The Member stood up in this House and said that. It is in the *Hansard* record. He said unless the Attorney General expunged from the Bill reference to actions that are not known as drug trafficking, he is not going to support the Bill—meaning that the whole panorama of drug traffickers would have been let off the hook.

In the same sense—I will call it moral blindness—we are allowing children to forget about the Lock Joint “bobbol” case; the car loans case; the gas station racket which ultimately led Gene Miles to lose her life; and the DC 9 and L 1011 scandal. When I came back from abroad in 1983, Caroni (1975) Limited as a state enterprise had an accumulated total debt that was more than Iscott, BWIA and all of the other state enterprises put together. That is the truth, “bobbol”. The sum was something close to \$3 billion dollars which the Member for San Fernando East himself—after some of it was written off when he came to be a Prime Minister—admitted that he wrote off another \$2 billion dollars, and all of that was done under their PNM administration—billions! Billions!

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, ever since I came into the Cabinet in 1977, the Government wrote off \$120 million to clear off the books for the Caroni Racing Complex. You talk about Tesoro; Swiss Bank; Project Pride; Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex, cost overrun; Caura Hospital, cost overrun; the Hall of Justice cost overrun; and a set of scandal with ECO. They did not understand at the time that what you needed was trade liberalization in rules that were transparent. So the ECO was a whole set of racket. At that time there was a dual exchange rate, which created more confusion on foreign exchange and equal opportunities for corruption. They bought a boat called the MV Tobago that made one trip and never sailed again—\$10 million spent. Do you understand?

When this Government came into power, none of the Coast Guard boats were working. What about state enterprise transfers? Do you remember William Demas and all these people—it is mentioned in this book—they spoke about “the inefficiencies”. These men are gentlemen and I knew most of them. In fact, Dr. Eric St. Cyr used to teach me at Bishop’s High School before I did Cambridge O’Levels. They are gentlemen and they would not have said “corruption”. What they said here is that there were massive overstaffing and “inefficiencies in the state enterprises.” What that meant was corruption.

Mr. Speaker: May I just remind you that you are exactly on the last minute of your time.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Thank you, Sir. Mr. speaker, in terms of the budget—*[Laughter]* They are laughing. The Speaker before me spent one and a half hours and did not talk about the budget, but they are laughing. In terms of the budget, all the measures, especially those focused on education have my emotional, sincere and passionate support. I will support those measures that have to do with giving extra financial help to single mothers and training. Those measures are intellectual departure from the idea of tying people onto false hopes, where a woman will not have to get on television to say her son had to kill somebody because she did not get a 10 days. You want to change the whole culture; you want to make people understand that the way you earn income is by working, not by transfers from the Treasury.

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I want to say how grateful I am for the opportunity, once again, to participate in a Budget debate that focused people’s mind, especially today, on matters of substance such as education and training; the vision the country is engrossed and engaged in now; and how you could train people to become more profitable in the process of wealth creation for Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Miss Pamela Nicholson (*Tobago West*): Mr. Speaker, I am not here for any nonsensical philosophization but for the practical or pragmatic approach as far as the budget is concerned on behalf of the people of Tobago. *[Laughter][Desk thumping]* Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed to join this budgetary debate on behalf of the people of Tobago, especially when the Prime Minister stated in his contribution and I quote:

“Winston Churchill once said that democracy is the worst form of government but he is still to find a better form.”

So the Prime Minister was saying that Churchill was defining democracy as one of the worst forms of Government, but he accepted it because he could not find anything better. The Prime Minister was also sending a message to us that he is just like Churchill. *[Interruption]* When I say just like Churchill, he is accepting democracy as a form of Government that he can not do without.

Hon. Member: No.

Miss P. Nicholson: Well, therefore, the Member does not understand. The Member should hush his mouth and do not get me angry too early. *[Interruption]* So when one recognizes the significance of democracy, the Prime Minister refuses to refer to Tobago in his contribution and instead focused on the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. If Trinidad and Tobago is a democratic society and Tobagonians are responsible for him being seated here today and having the first opportunity to run the country, he should recognize that when you are running Trinidad and Tobago, you do not only place emphasis only on Trinidad, but emphasis must also be placed on Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, the careless and insensitive showing by this Government has been highlighted by the under funding of Tobago in the Budget with only \$475 million made available for recurrent and developmental works, from a national estimate of over \$13 billion. In the 1997 Budget statement, I remember the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development stressed that in developing the national Budget the Minister of Finance is required to take into consideration the physical separation of Tobago from Trinidad, the isolation of Tobago from the principal growth centres.

Mr. Speaker, that is the Minister talking in 1997. He was saying that the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development must pay attention to that and address the Tobago question from year to year. The Minister was saying, therefore, that the Tobago case is a very unique one. However, since that, the Minister has under-funded Tobago. He has refused to monitor Tobago's finances,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

as the Minister with the ultimate responsibility for finance; he has not been giving Tobago the rightful budget; and he has not been monitoring the financial systems as far as Tobago is concerned. The Minister said that you must take Tobago into consideration because of the distance away from the growth centres.

Mr. Speaker, when that Government—of which I was a part for a short while—came into power, based on the World Bank programme, a new hospital was to be constructed in Tobago. That was one of the first items to be addressed. To date, after nearly five years, there is no new hospital in Tobago.

In 1997 certain information was given to the Government about the ferry service and the urgency for a new ferry to service the route. After five years, there is no new ferry to service in Tobago. In the same World Bank programme, a new secondary school was to be constructed in Mason Hall, Tobago. After almost five years, there is no secondary school in Tobago. How many schools were built in Trinidad? Ten! Tobago was in the first batch of schools to be constructed. There are also no new primary schools in Tobago. The Scarborough Methodist Primary School was to be constructed. It is in the heart of the city with roads surrounding it and there is no space. This school should be built with a ground for the children to play on and so on. So there was no major project—except the one, which I will talk about later—that has been implemented in Tobago by these devious characters.

Mr. Speaker: The word “characters” could be used in different ways. I will prefer if you will refer to them as Members, please.

Miss P. Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, these uncaring, careless and irresponsible Members. This Government has certainly abandoned Tobago to a state similar to Haiti under “Papa Doc”. *[Interruption]* Take your seat. It is true. What is the name of the man from Grenada?

Hon. Member: Eric Gairy.

Miss P. Nicholson: There is a situation in Tobago where there are no funds to pay people for lands illegally acquired, whilst \$15 million was given away to connen in a programme called ADDA; a racket involving banks when the Organization of Economic Corporation and Development said there was mainly money laundering; and the Tobago House of Assembly spends over \$40 million or more on Ringbang without any discussion or debate in the Tobago House of Assembly.

3.30 p.m.

I raised that matter in this House to the Junior Finance Minister, Dr. Morgan Job. The questions I asked on ADDA were, “Would the Minister of Finance inform this House whether the investment by the Tobago House of Assembly of US \$2 million in ADDA Limited was passed to the Attorney General, as recommended by the Auditor General?” I came before with questions and based on the outcry of the people of Tobago, the Minister of Finance sent the Auditor General to do some work and certain decisions were taken.

The second question was, “Would the Minister of Finance please state what legal guidance and support the Attorney General has provided in this matter?” The answer by the Junior Finance Minister was that with respect to part (b) the Attorney General has indeed provided legal guidance and support to the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development which included the retention of the services of the law firm of Greenburg & Traurig to ascertain and advise on the court proceedings which were brought by the Tobago House of Assembly against certain individuals.

The law firm has recently submitted a status report on the proceedings and this report is being studied by the Solicitor General's Department and a report for the consideration of Cabinet is in the process of being finalized. Then I asked a supplementary question, whether that report will be laid in the House, and he replied, “I guess in terms of the possible libelous nature and other things, Cabinet would consider whether or not it is helpful to the public and to the country to lay the report in Parliament. A decision has not been made on this.”

Last week I was informed that the Tobago House of Assembly lost the matter in court, and I really would like to know what position the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is taking. Would they report to us who represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and should they take action on the Chief Secretary and those around him who have committed these acts?

This Government, Mr. Speaker, when we look at it, it has failed to take accountable actions of transparency on these matters, because when we listen to the Diego Martin West representative, we recognize that they are involved in the same.

Dr. Griffith: Same what.

Miss P. Nicholson: The same devious, corrupt practices. One could say “in the same” and stay there. That language is proper! Not so, Member for Tobago East? In the same devious, corrupt practices. That is why I sought the report from the Attorney General and the Junior Minister was asked to reply. I was just giving a general introduction as to what is taking place re Tobago and Trinidad under this government.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot to say on the budget. I am sorry. I think that the Member for Tobago East has done the other thing. I want to deal with issues. In the budget, the Minister, in dealing with Tobago, said that they will purchase a new boat for us. He said they are very concerned about Tobago. I think I would like to get into that.

When the Minister of Finance has the temerity and the audacity to state that the ferry service between Trinidad and Tobago is an issue of immediate concern to the Government, I am alarmed. Especially when he informs the country that the Cabinet has decided to have a new ferry—notice “new” because he is plain on those words—added to the service no later than at the end of October. He continuously plays on the term “new ferry”.

I would like him to define “new ferry”. Since he explained that a new ferry (on the television)—I heard him saying it is a difficult thing to address and one has to do a lot of investigations and so forth, that nobody sits there and waits with a new ferry for us so that we could come and buy it. I am alarmed that they can do that in three months. I am also concerned about Venezuela and a boat. If I remember some time ago, when the MV Tobago was bought, it came from that same direction, and the first day that it went on its trip to Tobago, it collapsed. We had to spend something like \$10 million to get it back on track. Since we went in there, and particularly since 1997 onward, the Government has been told by the board and they have been—I could use the word “shackled” or “pilloried” by the board for action.

Mr. Speaker, this same Minister of Finance in the budget of 1999/2000 stated that:

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

Mr. Imbert: He said that last year?

Miss P. Nicholson: Yes, last year, and we are in the year 2000 struggling still with rectification. Mr. Speaker, to order a new ferry for the essential sea route between Trinidad and Tobago is a challenge, but to build a new airport in Trinidad and Tobago is not a challenge, particularly when we have to spend \$1.3 billion for the airport.

The Prime Minister and his Cabinet have no excuse for allowing the total breakdown of this essential link between Tobago and Trinidad, particularly for the benefit of the low income passengers, or our total dependency from our cargo perspective; all our groceries, building materials, the services that the vendors, and so forth, give to Tobago. Those boats are very critical. Therefore, because of Tobago's dependence on Trinidad for these things, this service must be run as an essential one and must be subsidized by the state, because the passenger fee and freight fee could never maintain the run. That is why it has to be subsidized. It must be. It is essential. It is a special and unique case.

Also, two boats must be on the service. That has been the traditional position from colonial times. Two boats were handed over, two boats were functioning up to now. It is the first time. It is a historic position when a Government has allowed the total breakdown of the ferry service which is cutting of the umbilical cord between Trinidad and Tobago! [*Desk thumping*] That is why I agree with the Member for Diego Martin West when he says that this Prime Minister and his team are pushing the secessionist line, the independent line between Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I subscribe to that view, because when the major link is cut, when the umbilical cord is cut—particularly from the team that put them sitting there! The thing is so grievous and painful. Very grievous and painful!

3.45 p.m.

It is a monumental scandal and a shameless thing that this Government has allowed to occur. Did the Panday Government receive a report from the Port Authority Board with regard to the running of the ferry service in 1997? Did Chairman Millette send a document dated August 6, 1997 to the Minister requesting the purchase of a new ferry because of the threatened declassification of a limping *mv Tobago* by Lloyd's of London in 1997 and the possible collapse of an overworked *mf Panorama*? Then, the chairman of the board requested urgent action by the Government, some 10 times after that for a new boat, which it has failed to address.

So, when the Minister is saying in the budget that in three months we are going to get a boat and they are going to give us a new boat and double up the service, I just do not understand. I have to see the boat with my own eyes to believe. When they say they are going to double up, how are they going to double up when the *mf Panorama* is supposed to go on dry dock in Curaçao at the same time? How are they going to be doubling up the service?

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

This same government that cannot buy—the Government that Tobago put there—a boat for Tobago but they can allocate in 1997 \$211 million for Caroni (1975) Limited; then they allocated over \$300 million in the next year. How can they do that?

Mr. Ramsaran: How many people live in Tobago?

Miss P. Nicholson: A sum of \$301 million in 1999; \$200 million for Caroni (1975) Limited. In 1987, it was \$100 million and this year it is \$211 million and it will be much more than that.

What is worrying me, too, and I hope the Minister can help me, I looked through the documents and I have not seen any special allocation for the purchase—the \$100 million—of the new ferry. I recognized also and he just said so, that the *mf Panorama* has to go on dry dock. There is no allocation for the *mf Panorama* and I remember there was an \$11 million but it was an \$11 million for last year. I saw that. But there is nothing for this year and I remember when the *mf Panorama* came back, \$18 million was supposed to be paid for the work that was done on the *mf Panorama*. This Government refused to pay. The Government that should be subsidizing, that should make sure that the route is functional, refused to pay. It had the Port Authority under heavy stress. The people who did the work from Curaçao came to Trinidad with a court order to seize the *MF Panorama*, then the Port had to be hustling calling the Prime Minister and the Minister, to decide what to do and then they called on the Port Authority, which is illegal. The Port Authority is running the total port. They are just the agent for the ferry service. One would like to know how the funding will deal with that. Mr. Minister, we would like to see that.

Because the Shipping Act of 1950 states very clearly that the Government shall maintain an efficient shipping service between Trinidad and Tobago. That is the business of the Government. The port is the agent to run the service on behalf of the Government and cannot do that without subsidization.

I think I have given a general view of what is taking place so we now have the *MF Panorama* that is under stress that could collapse any day, as it did and, again, we could be without a boat as we experienced some two or three weeks ago. That is the situation with which we are confronted.

There is a situation, too, that the Government was just refusing to respond to the Port Authority's board. The Millette board, then the next board that followed, communicated with them up and down. Earlier this year, they told them they wanted a boat urgently. They set up a committee under the chairman of the board.

They decided to use the port's tendering system. After they sent the documents to Cabinet, Cabinet took another decision to put it under the Central Tenders Board system, which I agree with because it is the Government that will own the boat and so forth, and they said it would take anywhere up to six months to get a boat. It is a long drawn-out system and Tobagonians are very concerned. We are very upset and very angry that the Government we thought would have been, perhaps, one of the best run in Trinidad and Tobago, is ignoring Tobago.

The next area that I would like to deal with is education. Mr. Speaker, the implementation of the so-called universal secondary education programme in the unplanned, irrational way of this Government is another area of deep concern for us. The population must question it and be concerned and should not be angry. It is clear that the Government is not accepting—I am sure it is not accepting the views of its technocrats because the technocrats cannot be party to the system as implemented. Nothing is wrong with recognizing the weakness in the system, but the implementation is highly political.

Dr. Rowley: For elections.

Miss P. Nicholson: The problem is within the confines of the primary schools. I agree with the Member for Tobago East on that, that the attack must be in the primary schools. That is where the attack must be because it will be much cheaper to do the remediation work in the primary schools because they will be there. [*Desk thumping*] It is the same people who are there that they are moving across to the model schools. They will be there. The remediation work should be done in the primary schools and will be much cheaper than if it was not done in the secondary schools, which would be infinitely more expensive. Remember, it is basic education.

When you move the children from the primary schools to the secondary schools, you are carrying them there to do basic work. Many of them do not know their letters, they do not know the letter sounds and the point he was making about the marks made in English and the marks made in Maths is correct—numeracy and literacy problems. The problem is in the primary school and, as I said, it is much cheaper to do the remediation work there because they could repeat. They will let them repeat. This Government spoke about repeating since they are in power. The same children could repeat. Put them in the same classes in the primary schools where the remedial work is done and when they are ready, you send them off to the secondary schools. But you are fooling the population. [*Desk thumping*] You are telling lies to the population. That is what you are doing. They are not in any secondary schools. They are in primary schools that you have named secondary schools.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

From a Tobago perspective, Mr. Speaker, the interference of the good remedial teachers from the primary schools and the removal of some of the leading teachers from our secondary schools to become principals of some scattered secondary centres all over Tobago will only impact negatively on both sectors. It will clearly weaken the primary school system in Tobago and water down the secondary school system.

The political motive is so strong that it makes the Government action look totally illogical. I would like the Minister of Education—and I am really sorry she is not here because I told myself I would be happy to address her face to face—to tell us whether any serious consideration has been given to competent replacement of the teachers before transfers are made since children who have passed—I had “legitimately”, but I cannot say that. The children who have earned their places in the established schools in Tobago can now suddenly find themselves without some of their teachers.

I raise that question because she has the ultimate responsibility and we are loaded with problems there, so I wanted to find out from her if she has done the competent replacement work in the primary and secondary schools so that those who earn the top places and have been sent to the established schools, will be meeting the teachers whom they should be meeting.

Mr. Speaker, the reason for asking this question is, dealing with education—and the questions I am asking also relate to the insensitivity of the Government to Tobago's problems. There is a situation where, for almost five years—I know for three—I have been raising the question of the Signal Hill Land Development Programme in this House. A national position was taken. The people belonged to a national programme and the position was that those lots should not be for more than \$5.00 per square foot. The Cabinet took that position. I raised it, I could say 100 times with the Member for St. Augustine. He even promised us two or three months ago that after three weeks, he would take action on the Tobago House of Assembly because we told him that the Assembly was selling the lands at \$7.00 per square foot.

When he told me that in three weeks' time he would take action, I paid attention and when it was somewhere after two months, I wrote him. Here is my letter. I wrote him. I have sent a copy to the Attorney General and I have sent a copy to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I wrote him telling him about what he promised the Parliament, the unfairness of not taking action and that he was being dishonest to the population and to the people in the Signal Hill project particularly. I even sent copies of two persons' documents showing that it was really \$7.00 per square foot for the lands and so forth to point out what was taking place.

Then, I got another letter from one of the people saying that the Tobago House of Assembly was requesting—this one is saying:

"Dear Sir/Madam,"

And I wiped out the name of the person.

"The Division of Settlements in the Tobago House of Assembly requests the use of the community centre for the purpose of holding a function for the distribution of deeds to successful applicants of the Signal Hill Land Development Project on August 30, 2000 at 4.30 to 8.00 p.m.

Thanks for your co-operation."

They have sold the lands to the people for \$7.00 a square foot; their representatives have been complaining to the Government to take action. Let them know it is not \$7.00 a square foot; it is five; it must not go for more than that. If any legal action should be taken, it should be taken by the Government to correct the problem.

He said—I forgot the term he used, meaning that we were working on hearsay. He did not hear certain things so I wrote sending these documents to him. I made sure that I communicated with him and asked him to take action and I sent copies to the Prime Minister and the Attorney General.

4.00 p.m.

I am just giving you one of the examples like education—*[Interruption]* No he did not reply. I usually touch him and say: "John what is the position." He told me—I think he accepted last week—that, yes, he received the document and he has sent his to the Attorney General. I also told him I sent mine. He should not be sending anything to the Attorney General now. Now he should be telling me about the action and telling those people what action he is taking. This situation is a highly discriminatory one. You cannot charge the people in Trinidad one price for the same kind of programme and the people in Tobago another price. You cannot do that. *[Desk thumping]* It is illegal, improper and wrong. *[Interruption]* Minister, you are letting me down, you were the man I expected to act promptly and so on. Every time I have to write him about these things I feel grieved and hurt. He is not the person I thought I knew.

There is another case which is the furnishing of the technical vocational wing at Signal Hill Comprehensive School. We need training in skills urgently. We have the technical vocational wing there. It was there and you all refused. I raised questions about it week after week. The next thing I see is that you are accepting a position by the Member for Tobago East about a skills centre in Roxborough. I

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

am not against that. My argument is, the technical vocational wing is there, furnish the technical vocational wing, put in the teachers, and give Tobago skills. Recently, when they were building hotels, you could say 95 per cent of the people came from Trinidad because of lack of skills. It is there.

There is one of the places I think they are putting in this wild thing that they changed because they had a problem with the Chief Secretary. The Chief Secretary was fighting for another place and they went up. One of the names I heard today is that he owns some building—Edoo or something like that. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance went up and say they are going to put the children if they cannot find anywhere in Tobago. The Chief Secretary fought back and said: “That building was put down illegally, I am not going to take them to court, I would not entertain that kind of thing. No child is going there, I am going to send them up Signal Hill.”

The point that I am really making is Signal Hill was there. From the time we went in it was to be acted upon, and I was working on them. When I was there, and after, I made sure that month after month I raised—you all are here, you know about it—*[Interruption]* But how are they finding the money to put down Roxborough? When that building that is already there should be furnished and the teachers placed, because while the thing in Roxborough might take two or three years, they could be training people over that period. That is all I am saying. I am glad that we would have been having another one. I am talking about these people—Mr. Speaker, you have me under pressure—and their insensitivity.

Another point I want to raise is the Squatter Regularization Programme. That one is legal. I heard the Minister when he was talking. He boosted up his programme: the Land Settlement Agency and the work they are doing with the squatters: how many thousands have received their Certificates of Comfort, and this and that. Again, I have complained to him personally, and in here, that what is happening in Tobago is that the Tobago House of Assembly is in charge of that programme in Tobago. People have written to the Tobago House of Assembly and they are not responding. They said no legislative position is their business. The Minister has the ultimate responsibility to address the people’s problems, so he should have been in Tobago with his Land Settlement Agency, communicating with the Assembly. If they did not act, he should have gone with his Land Settlement Agency and address the people’s problems.

In section 75 of the Constitution—is that what you are talking about Member for Tobago East? All of you have the ultimate responsibility. That is the position that the Attorney General articulated here. That is the point I am making. It is really serious. One cannot believe that, after we linked with these people (that is the Panday Government), hoping that they would function effectively and efficiently, this is what Tobago would have been confronted with.

In addition to the loose planning of the Government at the national level, could the Minister state why Mason Hall Secondary School has not been constructed, since it was to be constructed with the first batch of secondary schools under the World Bank programme? This plant should have been completed and up and running and all the children that the Government has scattered all over Tobago, should have been placed at Mason Hall Secondary School. Could the Minister please state what are the problems in relation to this school, especially when Tobago has the lowest percentage of secondary intake in Trinidad and Tobago? But this Government only cares about itself.

Another question of concern relates to the shifting of post primary centres to secondary centres. I want to ask another Tobago question, I do not know if you are facing the same—I believe you could in Trinidad—I would like the Minister to inform us as to what will be happening to the children at the post primary centres because it is a two or three year programme that goes on there. Those schools are now renamed as the “secondary centres” and children from the 278 schools will be taken to them, that is Black Rock and Bon Accord. I want to know what will be happening to those children with respect to their second year? Have the logistics been worked out with the parents, teachers, children and the public? What is to be done with them in the second year? It is very important. Those are children who won their positions in that system.

Mr. Speaker, these are very important questions that I want to be answered. I am very pragmatic: I want action for the people. I am responding to the budget. There is the primary school system—schools that were in the first batch. This Government built something like 13 already and 19 others are under design. Scarborough Methodist School and Ebenezer Methodist School were in the first batch; they have not been constructed. I want to know if the Minister could tell us something about that.

I would also like the Minister to tell me even if she sets up this system, how would she be running it? What role will the school supervisors be playing, still sitting down in office? If you do not address the primary schools, year after year, you are going to have this problem. That is why I am saying the attack must be on the primary schools.

4.10 p.m.

The school supervisor must be in the schools assisting the teachers, helping them, retraining them, making sure that they write their forecasts, write their records, see what is happening in the infant departments and so forth. I want to know, because if you do not do that this same false secondary school business will continue and it will take more than one year for them to be ready in the model schools and so forth, to go up to the secondary schools. While I subscribe to the view by the Member for Tobago East, I disagree with how it is being implemented. It should be done in the primary schools; the attack must be laid in the primary schools. Even the training colleges and so forth need attention. I would like to hear from the Minister; I would like her to tell us how she will be addressing these areas.

Mr. Speaker, another area of my concern is tourism. What did he say about tourism? He was very excited about the Tobago Hilton. I quote the Minister:

"The 'villas' sector has taken off: Tobago now has over 70 exclusive villas, with two or three bedrooms each, catering to longer stays. And the guest-house sector in Tobago is also growing rapidly.

The Tobago Plantations resort has opened with the 200-room hotel—Hilton Tobago. Let me remind you Mr. Speaker, that Government has invested and owns 49% of the equity in the Tobago Hilton."

I am not against a five-star hotel being constructed, but I want to know who will own those villas? Who owns them? Foreigners? The big businesses in Trinidad and so forth? I would like a little answer on that. You also spoke about over 290 employees. I want to know where the 290 employees are from? What percentage are from Tobago? I am not against the development of Trinidad and Tobago, I am one who supports that, but I would like to know what percentage comes from Tobago.

Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, you stressed that the villa sector has taken off, and I am asking, with whom? May I ask Mr. Minister, Tobago Plantations, Tobago Hilton, Grafton, the foreign owners, those who will come and buy an acre or two acres? I talked about this in the House already; will those who put down the villas go back to their country? What they do is that they might spend three months in Tobago, go back to Germany and all the European countries that they have come from, and they will do business. They would have marketed their villas in their countries so that the tourists will be coming to Tobago, but none of the foreign exchange will be coming to Trinidad and Tobago. So that is why I am asking my question.

Mr. Speaker, when we articulate about the need for a villa sector, when we push for community tourism, we are talking about an indigenous complement to the four or five star hotels; that is what we are talking about. We are talking about the villagers owning the flats, owning the villas, owning the cottages, owning the small hotels, owning the guest houses; that is what we are talking about, particularly on the north-eastern corner of Tobago, the most beautiful part of Tobago. We want to keep an eco-tourism perspective in that area. We want Tobagonians to stay in Tobago and make money in Tobago, and it is the tourism industry that we see as the number one priority.

The Tourism Industrial Development Corporation and the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) division must spend, at least, three months each year in the communities to have seminars, to educate the people about what the Government has to offer for tourism, because it is taxpayers' money employing the people in TIDCO. We want them to spend that time. Guide the people how to construct, to maintain their flat, their villas and guest houses since many middle income tourists enjoy the community life.

We get many middle income tourists coming into Tobago: Castara, Palatuvier, Charlotteville and Speyside, and they also articulate to us that we must struggle to save the northeastern corner of Tobago, because of the ugly concretization of the southwestern part of Tobago. What will happen is that we will have nothing for people to see, so they would not be coming back like in 10 years' time. We want to save the ecology Mr. Minister. I support the argument.

The Tourism Industrial Development Corporation must also tell the people whether we have government tax exemptions, or the Minister should tell us, whether we have tax exemptions or government grants to make available to this kind of development, or if it is only Ish Galbaransingh and company that you are giving grants and those kinds of things. We just want to know, Sir. I do not know, because we will be very happy if we could have that. We want to know if it is just Coco Reef and these kinds of places that are getting those grants.

We do not feel that the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation—
[*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Miss P. Nicholson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and my thanks to the Members.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, ownership of these villas, bungalows and so forth by the people will result in economic spin off to the village restaurants, the farmer, the food vender, village taxi drivers, car rental owners, and village tour guides who will take the tourists to tourism sites like Mt. Dillon Tobago Rain Forest, Pigeon Hill, Little Tobago in Speyside. We have a very exciting position in Tobago right now, for example, with one of the restaurants in the northeastern corner in Speyside, Gemma's Restaurant.

What is exciting about her is that it is articulated that her restaurant is one of the best to be found in the Caribbean especially for local foods, and what happens is that many of the tourists who come from the bigger hotels, Mt. Irvin, Grafton, and the others, when they drive to the eastern corner and they taste Gemma's food, you find that every night they drive right up there, 20 odd miles, to have dinner. What we are saying, if you develop something around the people, you could see what could happen and how advantageous it would be to the people. The money will trickle down to them, it will make them independent, it will keep them away from government jobs, from Charles and his nonsensical approach in Tobago; that is what we want.

Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of industrial development that should take place. We do not want the people to be under stress by the Chief Secretary who is spending over \$49 million in overdraft, come to beg you last week Friday for some. I watched you. I sat here and watched the whole terrain. I did not even listen to half of what the Member for San Fernando East was saying, that is why I had to borrow his speech to read it, because I watched every movement right here.

Then in the evening I called home, "Anybody got paid?" They said that late in the evening they called and started to pay, so I recognize that you responded. How much "yuh" give him? You are giving him some because you are still thinking about your interests in the elections coming. [*Interruption*] Yes; "yuh" running, but you are supporting him. Instead of taking action with this man, this man "skulling" overdraft pays the worker—the public servant salary is dependent upon overdraft. That is how he is paying their salaries.

You have been giving the recurrent money to pay the worker; you have the ultimate responsibility as the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, to act. Why "yuh" not acting? That is why I say, the villa sector must take off with the indigenous people of Tobago. I hope you will listen to that and suggest it.

Mr. Sudama: There are no indigenous people. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss P. Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, they are trying to disturb me. I am stepping up my temperature. My next area of concern is that the Minister spoke about the L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville ring road, and he said the Government will supply the funds to deal with that. I still have to question \$15.5 million. I think it was the last year when the National Alliance for Reconstruction was there that we got that money. I must tell the People's National Movement that they made a little mess of it too. I "doh" like to do "meh" boys that, but it was not resolved in 1991-1995.

Then you have that same project under Lomé 4 to be addressed. The Panday Government said it would have constructed the road from the first year. But you should have seen the weakness when you communicated with the European Community body here. You should know whether you would be getting permission or what have you. The PNM documents should have guided you. However, the Panday Government was supposed to construct the road so that the area would have been opened up to agriculture and tourism, but the funds were just put in the hands of an overworked Permanent Secretary—that is what you did—who could not pursue the long overdue road development in the aggressive, consistent way with the European Commission. The way in which you should have dealt with him—he could not do that, because he had to do all the work with your Ministry. What you should have done was to have a liaison officer to address that.

Recently, one of our outstanding economists spoke about the scandalous situation as far as the European grants are concerned, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but also throughout the Caribbean. I want to know where that money is going? It should be going for a project in Tobago and it should have been implemented now. That road was urgent because it has created another problem. When you put the money in the hands of the Tobago House of Assembly and it is spent badly, you have other problems.

A part of Charlotteville that would link with the road, the Campbleton area, for anything like four years they have not been maintaining the road, so you have a total breakdown from Campbleton right into Hermitage, and the people are crying out for action, because they have always been told that this road is coming.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned and I would like to know if the money that the Minister has put in the budget this year, if the project will be implemented. If it will be implemented we want urgent action and we want the project to be well monitored. I believe it has been designed, because I think one of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

the excuses that you made was that after the design and the report by an engineering firm—I cannot remember the name—still the European Community did not respond to you. We would like to see urgent action on that. That is a road that is very important for opening up the northeastern corner of Tobago; agriculture, tourism and the whole works is very, very important for there.

Mr. Speaker, there is another area that the Minister referred to that I would like to say a few words on. He talked about sports and youth affairs, and he said that in Tobago a stadium is being built and so forth. Why do I want something? I am pleased that one of the four stadia for the under-17 World Youth Football, in April next year, is being constructed in Tobago, but I can boast that I am responsible for Tobago achieving that goal. [*Desk thumping*] I am boasting about the whole programme, even though there are other people hugging you up now; I am boasting about that.

It is the only developmental project to be implemented in Tobago over the five-year period—the only one; and it is being implemented because of Sister Pam—[*Desk thumping*—and the work that she did in the Ministry of Sport. Mr. Speaker, after Trinidad and Tobago won the bid for the football, I was responsible for that, going to Cabinet, getting the approval. When they went off and came back, the T&TFA said that they wanted three stadia, and we had to renovate somewhere else again. I agreed with them, did my research, and went back again to Cabinet. I said one must be in Tobago; must, even though there are people in Tobago who tried to give me a struggle. However, I did not take anything from that, because since it is Tobago, I have no problem.

They had agreed that it should have been in Shirvan Park, and then they said Bacolet and so forth, I have no problem with that. That is the only important project that we have because work should have been done at Crown Point—a terminal building should have been done there. One hears how much is being spent on the Piarco Airport.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they have acquired lands from a number of persons in the Crown Point area and sub-standard prices are being paid to them. The people live in an area where you are getting \$20.00 and \$25.00 per square foot and the Government wants to pay the people \$3.00 and \$4.00 saying that the lands are agricultural lands. The lands are in the heart of a highly developed area, where the value for lands has gone up tremendously. You did that already, some of the people have refused to accept and I have been calling on Lands and Surveys Department several times to ask what they are doing.

The Crown Point programme is another important project that was promised by you and should have been done under you, but you are allowing Chief Secretary Charles to borrow money from the banks. Minister, what is the basic overdraft you gave him? I do not know, but it is something like \$49 or \$50 million right now and a lot of craziness is taking place, begging the banks to increase overdrafts on the basis of the increased allocations. The little you have put on the budget for this year, he is begging for that. So when the budget comes he will have to pay back the overdraft from the little you have put to make it \$475 million this year. So when you put that now, he will not be able to implement any new programmes because when you gave that money and you approve his functioning with overdraft in this fashion this is what is taking place, so the Government is condoning that to the disadvantage of the people of Tobago.

You cannot use Charles to undermine the Tobago House of Assembly. I heard you one morning on television when somebody asked why you did not give Tobago money. What did you say about Charles? I forgot the term you used, but you meant that he wants money, more money, and more money. My question was: Why is he treating Tobago as Charles? Why is he personalizing the Tobago House of Assembly. The Tobago House of Assembly is an institution to run Tobago, he is not to personalize Tobago re Charles because that would be to the disadvantage of the people of Tobago. Public servants and teachers have to be wondering whether they are getting pay month end. Whether they will send any for him and when they are sending it.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister of Finance to answer that question for us. He is in charge of the money so he is making sure that Trinidad get theirs even though Piarco moved from \$700 million to \$1.3 billion, but he is in charge. Charles is not in charge, but the public servants, teachers, everybody wants their salaries.

Mr. Speaker: This may be a convenient point to take the tea break before you go on to a new topic.

Hon. Members the sitting is suspended for half an hour.

4.30 p.m: *Sitting suspended.*

5.09 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Miss P. Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance made certain statements on agriculture and when I looked at them I wondered if Tobago is really part of this democratic state of Trinidad and Tobago, because I did not see a

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

word on Tobago. Last year not a cent was allocated for development in agriculture. The year before—not a cent. I think it was \$240,000 in 1998, which can barely do anything, but this year the Minister has put, I think, about a million, hoping—with their hopes re the elections. So, Mr. Speaker, this is the Minister of Finance:

“We have renovated all 14 fishing centres and added two new centres on the North and South coasts.”

I want the Minister to tell me which fishing centre in Tobago was renovated. Tobago needs something like 10 fishing centres immediately. We have more fishermen in Tobago than Trinidad, but nobody pays attention to them. Two centres are needed urgently. One that we talked about is in Pigeon Point, when we were talking about the Three Chains (Tobago) Act. The most fish in Tobago comes in at Pigeon Point. We need an immediate fishing centre right there. We want one at Mount Irvine.

Hon. Member: More representation?

Miss P. Nicholson: Do you want more representation than I am giving you wicked people—you [*Word expunged*]
—in this House? When they trouble me I have to call them that. Mr. Speaker, I have to call him that.

Mr. Speaker: I would suggest to the hon. Member that if she cannot handle him otherwise, she appeal to me for protection, which I will most assuredly give her. But to refer to him as a [*Word expunged*], I do not think is nice and it would not look too good on the record. So we will have that expunged for the time being. Call him something else that is acceptable but not a [*Word expunged*]; so that is going to be expunged from the record.

Miss P. Nicholson: Yes, but, Mr. Speaker, these are devious, uncaring people and I say it all the time because when it is recognized that their presence in this House is because of Tobago, whenever I see them skinning their faces, the hurt—sometimes when you see me getting up from here, I am going to cool out, Mr. Speaker, especially when some of these characters suddenly could open their mouth and heckle people in—some of these people—expressing their irresponsibility. You know, one must feel a little upset, Mr. Speaker. When Tobago is speaking, they must be quiet. They will be coming again, and as long I am around we will be waiting patiently for them. [*Desk thumping*] That is why Chief Secretary Charles could carry his overdraft to that limit. That is why the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and their team must act in that way, because of the hopes; but we will make sure that the Chief Secretary does not return.

So, Mr. Speaker, 14 fishing centres, two new centres and, as I said, I looked right through the budget and the Minister of Finance did not say a word about Tobago from the developmental perspective. He could not say a word because no money—and I raised it last year and I re-raised it in the House, I think, when we were dealing with the supplementary Bill, and that is why Tobago could not develop anything. So there is no fishing centre for Tobago. Our fishermen cannot develop and grow. [*Interruption*] So what is he saying, they did not do anything in Trinidad?

Dr. Rowley: They paint it [*Inaudible*] It is worse.

Miss P. Nicholson: I want the others to defend you all. Give me a chance with these. So this situation is, as I said, the most fish—and the whole situation has affected fish processing in Tobago. The Minister even went on to say, Mr. Speaker, “these efforts are paying off”, so I must feel upset. Do they not want Tobago’s fishing industry to grow, to develop? It will be advantageous to the country called Trinidad and Tobago. When the fishing industry and the agricultural industry in Tobago can develop and grow, it is an important link to the tourism industry. When we can make a contribution to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago it is the most advantageous thing that we can find for the democratic society of Trinidad and Tobago. He said that it is paying off. I continue, Mr. Speaker:

“Five years ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture refused to allow Trinidad and Tobago produce into the United States. Our efforts over the past five years have been rewarded with full approval from the USDA.”

Minister of Finance, do you not want Tobago to benefit from it? There are, what is it, about three or four fishing plants in Tobago but if there is any fishing centre, it is totally run down and they know that the US Department was demanding that we have fishing centres with cold storage, proper running water and so forth. So they have done that for Trinidad but not for Tobago and Tobago has them seated there.

Dr. Rowley: Ungrateful!

Miss P. Nicholson: Very ungrateful! So, Mr. Speaker, that is all I would say on agriculture but, you know, it is such an important link.

He also spoke, I think it is in the recurrent estimates somewhere I saw last year it was there and also this year—where incentives were given in agriculture, a national incentive, but none in Tobago. There was not a cent for Tobago. We cried out and we asked—none was given, the incentive given to develop the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

agricultural grounds with their water, their drainage and that kind of thing. So, Mr. Minister, I would like, when we go to the House to deal with the Bill at committee stage, to hear something about what changes will be made here. We will be very happy.

There is another problem, the Buccoo Reef. What is needed in Buccoo Reef is implementation of the management programme, Mr. Speaker. There is a situation where we have no management at all for Buccoo Reef, so after 4 o'clock in the afternoon when all the people who really market it, that is take people to the reef and so forth, people are interfering with the reef, moving away the conchs, certain kinds of fishes and some of the corals and so forth. What is needed is 24-hour security of the reef. That is one of the demands that has been made in that project. I would have thought since last year he would have dealt with that, but he has not dealt with that situation.

There is also the sewer waste problem. In 1997, I think the Minister promised over \$200 million, or something like that, but he spoke about it, said it was absolutely necessary and urgent, the impact the waste from the hotels and the housing developments is having on the reef. If one goes to the Nylon Pool one immediately sees it, somewhere that was very clear and so forth, one sees the impact of the waste on the reef and the destruction that is taking place. This is one of the most beautiful reefs that we have in Trinidad and Tobago. As a Government, if there was one body that should really be placing emphasis to see that the reef is addressed, that everything is done to correct the weaknesses that are there, one would have thought that it would be leading that attack.

The situation that we are observing is one of total destruction. I went there about three weeks ago and I was very disappointed with the Nylon Pool. One of the fishermen stood up and complained and he said when they were doing the management project they went as a body to explain what was taking place because of the waste and all these kinds of things, but nobody is taking them on. It must be the Central Government to take this on. Funding must be supplied and the Government must also have a link.

You know, one of the disappointing things that I have with this side is that there seems to be no relationship with the Tobago House of Assembly. For everything, everybody is frightened and "everybody is Charles". The Tobago hospital should have been constructed already. The first hospital that they should have dealt with or done while they were dealing with refurbishing the Port of Spain and San Fernando hospitals was the Scarborough hospital. Recently I asked certain questions in the House, whether we will be getting a dialysis unit and

whether we will be having an intensive care unit on the project, because important people who have the project in hand complained to me and showed me none was there. The Minister—I do not know if it was after I asked the question that he went back and did some homelessons—said yes, they will be having an intensive care unit with two beds and they will be having a dialysis unit with three beds. I only hope that when it is constructed that will really happen.

The Scarborough hospital, when that is run-down, as it is, with nothing in it, our hospital ends up in Trinidad. We have to come here for everything. Sometimes when one sees the situation on the airplanes one feels depressed because, you know, the feeling is, I could be one. I could be the one coming. Kidney problems are very serious problems in Tobago. The prostate situation is another serious one—very high. There is also the HIV problem. One tends to wonder if “just now” Tobago will be facing the same situation that Kenya is facing. Those areas need very urgent attention and I am sure that they need very urgent attention also in Trinidad. But what I say is, when one is in Trinidad one could get in one’s car or on a bus and drive to a hospital to see about oneself, but we must come by airplane.

That is another situation, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry I did not refer to it under transport. The one that I have to use—well, that I use. I must not say “have to” because I could change and go to BWIA, although my problem with BWIA is that they helped to create that situation. They created that situation under NAR in 1986—1991 when they were only asking for price increases, price increases and saying that the money we are paying cannot handle it and they cannot do it, but Air Caribbean is clearly under stress. Sometimes when I go into the planes I am afraid. I ask myself, is the Government waiting for a collapse that we do not want to hear—some old planes. One could see that the air hostesses are under stress. They cannot press an electronic button and see the door come in, and those kinds of things. The girls have to be fighting to pull in the door and to fix rails. Those are the kinds of planes. Then sometimes, after every flight, they have to deal—they have to be compressing the tyres and so forth.

Last two weeks I had to be paid for tickets because, even though I had tickets, I bought BWIA tickets to go home because, when I have an 8 o’clock flight, I get there like for 7.00 p.m. What is the position? The next thing is a message in my ear—8.30; the next thing—10.30. It might be as late as 11.00 and that goes on for two weeks. So I had to buy tickets so that by 7.30 or 8.00 I could get home by the other airline. It is a frightening situation. They must be under stress from a maintenance perspective. I hear that they cannot even pay for the fuel.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Miss P. Nicholson: Air Caribbean. The bigger planes—worry too. So I am making an appeal. The Government must see air and sea transport as their—well, I would say No. 2. I am putting the hospital as the No. 1 problem. [*Interruption*] The two are at the same level because they are all important. I cannot separate them. Sea and air—sea because of all our groceries, our hardware, including our building materials and so forth, and the vendors up and down.

5.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to air transport in Tobago you heard what I have just outlined. It is frightening. So getting the hospital urgently is critical and we have been raising that issue here. I told the Government, at least, twice in this hon. House that our hospital is in Trinidad.

I am very concerned from the agricultural perspective because the Minister did not talk about what he would be doing and it is time. The Government cannot spend \$1.3 billion on the airport and not spend \$300 million on our sewer waste problem in the south west district because the reef would be destroyed and also the beaches. It is a very urgent area, which must be dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Government that is in power because of Tobago. The Government cannot be insensitive; the Government cannot be careless. It is true that the Government's time is up and it might not go back but, at least, Tobago gave them the opportunity to build their structure to struggle for a return. So the Government must care about Tobago. It must not be so irresponsible. Tobago must be seen for its uniqueness. When the umbilical cord is cut, it would mean nothing else but secession and independence by the Prime Minister. It cannot mean anything else. So it is fundamental that the Government deals with this matter.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the ferry service for Tobago—the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development—let me repeat it—must order a new boat. I am not talking about leasing a used boat. The Government can lease a used boat for the short-term purpose, but the ferry service for Tobago should get a new boat. That should have been done since 1997 when the Government got the request from Chairman Millette—1998, 1999, years—and now the Government has three months and it is coming to tell us that it is going to purchase a new boat. Which new boat! The Government is bringing a used boat.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member would wind up please because of her time.

Miss P. Nicholson: Thank you, Sir. So we are saying that the Government will not correct that service unless the new boat is ordered and then the Government can lease the short term boat. There is the situation of the L'Anse Fourmi Road. I only hope that the money will be spent on the road. Even though the Government has a programme there, to be implemented, the Government has to monitor it.

Mr. Speaker, there is a situation in tourism. As I said earlier there should be something for the indigenous people of Tobago. Tobagonians should own things like the diving centre and so on. I am sorry the Minister of Education is not here to hear me articulate what should really happen with the education problem in Tobago. The corrective action should be in the primary schools. Firstly, it is much cheaper; secondly, all the remedial work should be done there; thirdly, you need the school supervisors in the schools assisting the teachers; and the Minister must upgrade the salaries of teachers—without payment, who is the Government going to get? The Government is going to get people who are taking (10) years to get five subjects to teach in a primary school. All of that is part of the weakness.

The Government must upgrade teachers' salaries and train the A'level people and even university graduates throughout the two-month holiday period before they go into the secondary schools and so on. So I am appealing to the Government for these demands on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in general.

5.30 p.m.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development (Dr. The Hon. Vincent Lasse): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support and to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development for yet another excellent budget presentation. I had the opportunity to have been an integral part of the team that prepared the 2001 Budget. The knowledge I have gained during the course of this exercise has been invaluable.

I want to state that the civil servants who have participated in the preparation of this budget should be complimented for their professionalism. They have been engaged in the preparation of budgets for many years, spanning several administrations. Hon. Members should bear this in mind and should exercise caution and good sense when they question the figures presented by the Minister of Finance. The figures presented were not invented by the Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, hon. Members know the facts and the origin of the figures, but they refuse to admit that the Minister managed the economy very well.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. V. LASSE]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Members on the other side have been saying much about what the budget did or did not do. I believe that our discussions in this honourable House on the budget would be more focused and meaningful if we take time to reflect on what a budget really is, but unfortunately, this had not been the case.

I will now define what a budget is. As I see it, a budget is simply how a government intends to collect revenue over a fiscal period and how it intends to spend the available resources over that period for the greatest benefit of the country, but a budget is also the instrument that the Government uses to translate its development goals and objectives into reality.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the budget is the medium through which Government communicates to the population, the policies and strategies which it intends to implement over the fiscal period. Having said this, I am sure that any reasonable individual will conclude that the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development has done an excellent job. The Minister of Finance managed the economy very well indeed.

Mr. Speaker, the 2001 budget received good ratings from many quarters except, of course, from the other side. I understand this, but the publication of Price Waterhouse and Coopers at page 1 stated that, and I quote:

“Last year, Minister Kuei Tung made the presentation, making no changes to the tax regime and concentrating on the equitable distribution of expenditure. It comes as no real surprise, therefore, that this year, riding the crest of high oil prices, the Minister has made some increase in tax allowances but has resisted the temptation to reduce tax rates.”

The hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, in his budget presentation, gave an overview of the economic performance of this Government. Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to reinforce and to add to what was said. Trinidad and Tobago is expected to achieve one of the highest rates of economic growth in the world this year: 7.9 per cent. Inflation remained below 4 per cent. Unemployment went down to 12 per cent this year from 18 per cent in 1995. Some 60,000 new jobs were created since Government took office. External debt was reduced from 35.4 per cent of GDP in 1995 to an anticipated 22 per cent of GDP in the year 2000.

Exports in the year 2000 are projected to be 42 per cent higher than in 1995. The level of private foreign direct investment increased from an annual average of US \$560.4 million in the 1991—1995 period to an estimated average of US \$597.4 million in the period 1996—2000. Overall balance of payments shifted from a deficit to a surplus position. The level of gross international reserves is expected to more than double from US \$652 million in 1995 to US \$1,760 million in 2000.

Mr. Speaker, the economy is now more diversified as the petroleum sector now accounts for 21 per cent of GDP as compared with 28 per cent in 1995. Conversely, the non-oil sector now contributes 79 per cent of GDP as compared to 71 per cent in 1995.

Mr. Speaker, the vision for the future under the stewardship of this Government is clear and convincing, because the foregoing statistics tell the story of astute discipline and responsible economic management over the period 1996—2000. The development approach of this Government places equal emphasis on enhancing the general quality of human life and social well-being, strengthening political and institutional structures towards better governance and protecting the quality of the physical environment as it does on the achievement of the high economic growth momentum.

Please permit me to highlight the key principles of our clear and convincing vision. Economic justice and democracy, respect and tolerance of people's cultural and spiritual beliefs, economic choice and belief that what is of the greatest value often cannot be quantified or valued in monetary terms.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to be responsible for the Planning and Development arm of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development which deals with the Public Sector Investment Programme, therefore, I shall deal briefly with the PSIP. In this regard, the strategy adopted by Government has been to create the environment for increased levels of private investment while using the Public Sector Investment Programme as a tool for strengthening the country's social and economic infrastructure.

As a result of this decision, 47.3 per cent of the PSIP has been allocated to social infrastructure as compared to 25.2 per cent in 1995. These resources are earmarked to continue to develop the country's human resources through education and training, improve the delivery of health care, provide social and community services, alleviate poverty and provide adequate shelter.

Mr. Speaker, I shall speak briefly on the major investments in the various sectors, and I am sure that the respective hon. Ministers will elaborate on the specific sectors, as some may have already done. In education and training, over the period 1996—2000, the total of \$837 million was allocated to education and training, of which, \$514.4 million, 62 per cent, was spent.

Government understands the importance of education to the country's development and, therefore, education was given the highest priority. We have allocated over \$187 million for education and training for the fiscal year 2000/2001. This figure, Mr. Speaker, represents about 19 per cent of the overall PSIP and it is the largest share going to any one sector.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. V. LASSE]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

The vision for health care in Trinidad and Tobago has always incorporated a view that health care should be available and affordable to all. The Minister of Health, in a solid presentation earlier, dealt effectively with the health sector. The allocation of the total PSIP to the health sector over the 1996—2000 period averaged 9 per cent, totalling \$546.7 million. The health sector has been allocated \$140.56 million for fiscal year 2000—2001.

Mr. Speaker, poverty alleviation was also dealt with extensively in the planning and development arm of the Ministry of Planning and Development. Therefore, this honourable House is fully aware that this Government was responsible for Trinidad and Tobago being placed at number five in the developing world on the poverty alleviation index.

Since 1996, Government has mounted a relentless assault against poverty on several fronts, including the provision of appropriate training, job creation, financing for small scale ventures, and increases in allowances to the less fortunate and, of course, increases to old age pensioners. That is to mention a few.

Mr. Speaker, another instrument utilized by the Government in the fight against poverty has been the Community Development Fund (CDF). The main objective of the CDF programme is the provision of support for community-based projects and institutional strengthening for community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations. Since the inception of the programme, grants to more than 80 projects amounting to over \$8 million have been approved for funding through the NGOs and Community Based Organization (CBO) grants window.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 7,000 persons have benefited from the projects which were implemented in several communities. The CDF has touched communities throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago and span a range of activities. For example, the Toco Foundation received approximately \$150,000 to develop a micro-enterprise in food processing. The Garden of Eden project in Tabaquite received \$150,000 for a chicken-rearing project.

The Roxborough Police Youth Club received \$117,000 to undertake training in fruit and vegetable processing, and also baking. The St. Martin Welfare Association was awarded \$120,000 to train young persons in woodwork. This project benefited the communities of East Dry River, John John, Beetham Estate and Laventille.

Mr. Speaker, the Couva North Medical Clinic received \$150,000 to equip a mobile health clinic, and the Felicity agricultural project was awarded \$130,000 to expand the vegetable production project.

5.50 p.m.

Some of the other areas benefitting from the Community Development Fund (CDF) project are: Penal, Debe, Kernahan, La Horquetta, Picton, Dundonald Hill, Bamboo Settlement, Freeport, Chaguanas, Couva, Guaico Tamana, Sangre Grande, La Brea, Point Fortin, Granville, Erin, Buenos Ayres and Cedros.

In 1999/2000, approximately \$99 million was spent on 340 infrastructure projects involving road repairs, water and electricity. Over 800 persons benefitted from training programmes. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, 15 Youth Training Employment Partnership community-based training programmes were conducted. Over the period 2000/2001, the CDF will continue to provide grant funding to NGOs and CBOs.

With reference to roads and bridges, total expenditure for the period 1996—2000 amounted to \$751.2 million representing 17.6 per cent of total Public Sector Investment Programme. In pursuit of Government's development strategy of balanced regional growth with the establishment of growth polls throughout Trinidad and Tobago, the comprehensive National Highways Programme developed over the 1995/1996 period and structured for a six-year period estimated to cost US \$300 million, took off with full implementation beginning in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, some of the major activities undertaken under the Southern Roads Development Programme include the continued dualling of the San Fernando Bye-Pass and construction of the Cross Crossing Interchange and Connector Road. Those components are 80 per cent complete and incurred an expenditure of \$50 million.

Construction activity on phase two of the IADB-assisted National Highways Programme was brought to a closure with the completion of rehabilitation work on the SS Erin Road, Nos. 1 and 2 and the Siparia Road. In addition, an agreement was signed between Atlantic LNG and Government to repair the road from Point Fortin to Oropouche. Atlantic LNG has also been engaged in paving roads from Point Fortin to La Brea and the Ministry of Works and Transport has been engaged in paving the roadway from Oropouche to La Brea.

In summary, this administration rehabilitated approximately 790 kilometres of roads, constructed 10 new bridges and reconstructed another eight bridges.

Mr. Speaker, after a 40-year period of anticipation for a new highway, a pre-feasibility study was completed by this Government for the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin, signifying a significant element of road investment under phase two of the CDB-funded Southern Roads Development Project.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. V. LASSE]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In fiscal year 2000/2001, the IADB-funded National Highways Programme will enter its fourth year of implementation for on-going reconstruction of 10 bridges, as well as the rehabilitation of several landscapes along roads in North and Central Trinidad.

I turn briefly to drainage and flood control. During the 1996/2000 period, improvement works were undertaken at Mosquito Creek at a cost of \$4 million to stem the intrusion of tidal waters in the area, along with the programme of river clearing in several areas throughout the country. Expenditure for the period amounted to \$128.4 million and averaged 2.7 per cent of the total Public Sector Investment Programme.

Mr. Speaker, the 2001 Public Sector Investment Programme has allocated a total of \$20 million for upgrading the country's drainage infrastructure including \$4.7 million for diversion works on the Honda River to reduce flooding in affected areas; \$2.2 million for studies relating to coastal erosion and flooding in the Manzanilla/Mayaro area and rehabilitation works on the Felicity Main Drain, Chaguanas.

Now, with specific reference to water and sewerage, a total of \$431.4 million of Public Sector Investment Programme resources were allocated during the 1996/2000 period for water and sewerage development works throughout the country. The Minister of Public Utilities I am sure will elaborate on this section.

Mr. Speaker, while the Government utilized the Public Sector Investment Programme to lay the foundation for broad-based development throughout Trinidad and Tobago, I am particularly pleased to report that many of the initiatives taken had the effect of bringing about the re-industrialization of Point Fortin. One of the major developments in this regard was the agreement in 1996 to construct the Atlantic LNG plant at Point Fortin and the subsequent decision this year to construct Trains 2 and 3 of the Atlantic LNG. This decision has significantly caused the revival of economic activity in the constituency of Point Fortin.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to mention some of the key project initiatives that have been undertaken, again, in the constituency of Point Fortin over the last five years.

Roads—an agreement was reached between Atlantic LNG and the Government to repair the road from Point Fortin to Oropouche. Atlantic LNG will be paving the Main Road from Point Fortin to La Brea and the Ministry of Works and Transport will be paving the Main Road from Oropouche to La Brea. After a period of 40 years of anticipation for a new highway, this Government completed the pre-feasibility study for the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin.

Health—an allocation has been put in the 2001 Budget for the construction of a new Area Hospital in Point Fortin. Construction has begun on a new health facility for Bonasse, Cedros and work is to commence on health facilities at Erin, Icacos and Granville. [*Desk thumping*] Cedros has been declared a port of entry.

Water—the Government has implemented the South Water Project which brought relief to consumers in my constituency when on June 23, 1999, the hon. Prime Minister turned on the valve at Cedros and I had the honour of turning on the valve at Cap-de-Ville Junction. The Government has refurbished the Granville waterworks.

Now, to crime. A Police Post was completed at Cap-de-Ville Junction and a new police station was completed at Erin.

With reference to telephone services, in the conduct of its role as facilitator, this administration facilitated the improvement of telephone service in the constituency of Point Fortin. Notably, Erin and Buenos Ayres received a telephone service for the first time. The telephone service for the entire constituency of Point Fortin was improved by the construction of booster stations at Cap-de-Ville, Granville, Chatham and Fullarton.

Schools—an institute of technology has been constructed at Mahaica, Point Fortin. The Point Fortin Vocational Institute will become an integral part of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. Two new Government primary schools were constructed at Erin and Bonasse, Cedros. Funds have been allocated in the 2001 Estimates for the construction of the Point Fortin EC School.

The projects which have been implemented in Point Fortin have brought a considerable improvement to the quality of life of the residents of the constituency of Point Fortin and surroundings. The people of Point Fortin and, indeed, all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can continue to look forward to a brighter tomorrow.

The 2001 Budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development illustrates beyond any doubt that we are better off now and that performance and not promises should take our nation forward.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I trust that good sense will prevail and all Members of this honourable House will see the wisdom in supporting the 2001 Budget.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

6.05 p.m.

Mr. Eric Williams (*Port of Spain South*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for your recognition, allowing me to say a few words in what you have described as the most important debate on the parliamentary calendar, to wit, the Appropriation Bill, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, Members on this side have gone to great lengths to debunk a number of the statements that were made about this budget by the Members opposite; indeed Members of the Government. We have just been subjected to what could best be described as a phlegmatic attempt to endorse the same said budget. Mr. Speaker, we must continue on this side—obviously they have not heard us—to debunk this budget. Indeed, we will continue to speak to the man in the street about the issues which we have uncovered. We had to uncover some of them; they were not all in the budget statement. They were all hidden in the document.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, beginning with my political Leader, the Member for San Fernando East and, then particularly today, the Member for Diego Martin West [*Desk thumping*] dealt at great length, in great detail with certain issues with regard to the airport. One would have thought that having done all of that, there was nothing else to say about the airport. Indeed, this Government has engaged in practices that are as broad as they are wide, and so they continue to leave many areas for us to talk about.

When the hon. Minister of Finance spoke in his statement, he only had one paragraph about the airport. I want to quote three sentences from page 20. He said:

“Soon, the new Piarco terminal will be completed. Following this, the upgrade of the Crown Point Airport in Tobago will begin.”

I do not know that he expected us to go into such great detail on the airport issue. Mr. Speaker, this was an issue that the previous PNM government held close to its heart. There was the Project Pride issue. Earlier on in our term, we pointed out that this Government, not only dismantled Project Pride, and terminated the services of those in the Planning Unit but also those public servants who were supposed to oversee the spending that was going to take place on this airport.

We will continue to debunk their false allegation that \$100 million was spent on this project. It is not so! No amount of volume—which really amounts to a fading echo from the current Member for St. Joseph—will change that. Mr. Speaker, indeed, that project was supposed to be a BOLT project: build, own, lease and then transfer. It would have cost \$440 million using private sector funds—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramsaran: Why you did not use it?

Mr. E. Williams: and it would have been transferred—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramsaran: “Woulda, coulda, shoulda.”

Mr. Speaker: I appeal to the Minister of Labour. I appeal to the Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, please. The Minister of Labour has not yet spoken so you could hold your fire. The Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs has already spoken so you could pass on whatever you already have to somebody else. Please, it comes over as a sign of weakness: when somebody is making a contribution you are disturbing him like that. Let him have his say. *Audi alteram partem*: hear the other side. You may not agree with what he said, but you must be prepared to fight to the finish for his right to say it.

Mr. E. Williams: Thank you, for your intervention, Mr. Speaker. Do you know—I do not want to digress. Mr Speaker, what happened? What did this Government do? After scrapping that plan, I believe they sold one of our methanol plants at Point Lisas, realizing cash. The statement was that that cash was to be used to build the airport. We developed on that argument several budget statements ago; in other words, we are going to fund the airport directly from the Treasury. Again, Mr. Speaker, we have developed on the fact that we actually now have to seek loans to build the same airport and pay interest.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen a number of newspaper articles expressing outrage by the public on the Government’s handling of this project. In reality, when one sees the article of the *Express* of August 27:

“Ish gets \$29 million bonus.”

The public is beginning to cry shame on this Government. Here it is we have for all to see. Indeed, the cost overruns alone are scandalous. The familiarity between senior Government officials and some of the contractors in and of itself, is a scandal.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to find that the truth is obfuscated; that there are not enough details in these projects. Let me quote from the Draft Note for Cabinet of August 10, 2000:

“WT00

CPU 7/19/17”

It is a draft note. *[Interruption]* When I was a public servant, Mr. Speaker, draft notes tended to be—by the time they got to paper to be typed—fairly close to what eventually went forward.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

6.15 p.m.

Maybe there are some changes, under these folks I do not know. Mr. Speaker, this draft note suggests at paragraph two that the new terminal development project is going to be divided into four main components for the purpose of analyzing its cost components specifically. The first one, construction of the new passenger facility; second, supporting projects; third, consultancy fees for Northern/Yorke/Coosal, (NYC). It went on at paragraph three. What they intended to do was the filling of the site with imported off-site fill, approximately five billion cubic metres; creation of flood control systems; construction of a new terminal building; installation of water and sewer treatment; construction of a parallel taxi way; construction of new ramps; construction of carports and so forth.

Then they talked about the supporting projects, the installation/upgrade of public utilities; upgrade of the Golden Grove Road and so forth. Then we have the now infamous consultants' fees, and we total the cost. Mr. Speaker, in a previous debate in this House we discussed an issue that had to do with changing the certification of pilots. I brought to the attention of this honourable House that, indeed, nowhere in the design of the airport, to date, is there the provision—not airport, terminal, it is not an airport it is just a terminal—for a ground traffic control tower in the airport.

This same Birk Hillman with his experience, supposedly, in building airports all over the world, out of Miami—Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you have ever flown into the Miami Airport, but I see several towers all around the Miami Airport. Indeed, almost any airport that I fly into I see towers. I used to think those were for air traffic control, because that is what we see in some of the movies, but it turns out that it is partly for that.

The reason they are so high in the air is so that they could also conduct ground traffic control, because modern airports have these spines out and planes go around corners to park at the gates, and that is why they have to be high in the air so they could see around the periphery of the airport. Mr. Speaker, to date, in all their documents we have not seen the provision for such an elementary piece of equipment which is supposed, as part of this new terminal, to bring us into this millennium. Further to that, I am advised, and I said it before and I would say it again, that one of those hidden costs that is yet to show up in black and white before us—and it will—is the fact that they are estimating that the cost of such a tower would be in excess of TT \$16 million.

There was a discussion led by, among others, the Minister of Housing and Settlements, to try to put the tower up in the middle. Well, he is an architect, he claims to be an architect so he tried to redesign. They found out that the structure could not support that. There is a discussion of using the old one across on the other side, but that is not high enough to see around the airport.

Further to that, they are aware that a similar tower in the existing Tobago terminal, back in the 1980s when it was built, cost in the order of \$600,000, and all it had to do was to go a little taller. We have shown through the Member for Diego Martin West the magic they are able to work with engineers' estimates and then the final contract, particularly, when the contractors are close friends of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, we have dealt extensively with the fact that the deadline for the airport was supposed to have been August 30. Throughout the length and breadth of the land cries were heard saying no way, not possible. Any of us who flew out of that airport looking at the shed going up could see from the associated earthworks and gardening going around it that that was not going to be ready by August 30. Many calls were made in this House and in the other place, and what does the Government say, detractors, they do not know what they are saying. But there we were, Mr. Speaker, with no less than the Prime Minister and then the Minister of Works and Transport busy running about the place saying that the airport will be opening August 30. [*Interruption*] No, the previous semi-absent Minister of Works and Transport, not the new one.

Yet still we saw an article in the *Daily Express* of August 27 turning up. They sent the Chairman of the Airports Authority and some other officials, very quietly, press conference out of the way, to say that the airport would now be opening on October 14. What was instructive about all this, and I want to quote:

"Airports Authority Chairman, Tyrone Gopee said at Friday's media briefing that, based on revised estimates, the airport was poised to rope in revenues of up to \$200 million a year."

It goes on to say that the other purpose was that they were cancelling the thing.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what I did? Now, the last speaker said that the numbers in the budget were not dreamed up—I think those were his words, I am trying to quote him—they may be wrong, but they are not bogus, they are valid; fair enough, so I went into the draft estimates of revenue and expenditure of the statutory boards and similar bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). If I may draw your attention to page 404 where we see a listing of the revenue of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1998/1999 the revenue \$94.3 million; in 1999/2000 the estimates were \$167.4 million, but the revised estimates put it at \$149.2 million. Mr. Speaker, this year coming, 2001 estimates, \$213.2 million; not near the \$200 million that we saw. Indeed, that is the total revenue. When you look at fees, they are set to increase by a mere \$4 million, rent by \$5.9 million or thereabouts.

In an attempt to justify what the Member for Oropouche likes to call profligacy, to suggest that the airport would pay for itself in the shortest period of time, they have the Chairman of the Airports Authority telling the media and, by extension, the nation, that this new airport is going to generate \$200 million a year. The budget documents, however, which have been endorsed by every speaker on that side, bear absolutely no witness to such an increase expected in this coming year; especially since one would expect that a brand new airport opening in its first year would then start to attract the additional revenue, all the new airlines and so forth that the Minister and others have gone all over the world courting. Indeed, if you are saying that your figures are correct there is no reference to increased revenue from this airport.

What do we have, in effect? Had the airport been done under the programme which we left you—that is why you want to talk about "woulda" "coulda" "shoulda"—you should have done it that way. It has gone from a per capita cost of \$340.09 for every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago. If we take only the \$1.3 billion figure, the cost is \$1,004.80 per capita, spread over the almost 1.3 million people in Trinidad and Tobago, and when you consider that not all those persons are working, the actual per capita burden on the employees in this nation is higher.

If you take the \$3.6 billion figure, which we have demonstrated today, the per capita cost is \$2,782.05, for this nation. In other words—[*Crosstalk*]— the significance of all this is that this airport is going to be paid for in excess of eight times the original cost by every single citizen of this nation. [*Desk thumping*] That is the reality of it; and this from a Government which went everywhere pillorying previous PNM governments. The Member for Oropouche, famous for his statement about profligacy, profligacy, this from the Government which came into power and said that they were going to do things differently. This Government which held itself up and said we are the answer, we will change things. Mr. Speaker, failed, failed, failed.

Mr. Speaker, we have said a lot about the airport, and so I really wanted to add the fact that the revenues they are talking are nowhere in their figures. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Assam: You are detracting from the whole—

Mr. E. Williams: Just as the Member for St. Joseph will be detracted from among our presence shortly.

Mr. Assam: I do not want any seat.

Mr. E. Williams: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I will have the Member know that I did not beg my political leader for a seat. [*Desk thumping*]

In his speech on his budget statement at page 26, the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development talked about us having a new ferry. As an aside, I remember, even when I was a youngster we had two ferries. Member for Tobago West you can correct me, but it seems like we have always had two ferries. There was a reason for this: they would both start, one from Scarborough and one from Port of Spain at the same time, and they would cross each other so that we would get maximum flow between the islands; since I know myself.

Mr. Sudama: Which is how long?

Mr. E. Williams: Hear the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development; he is talking about a new ferry:

“...a new ferry added to the service no later than the end of October.”

We will deal with that shortly.

“This new ferry will replace the Panorama while that vessel is in dry dock, and will remain in the service even after the Panorama comes back.”

Here is the curious statement, unforced error:

“In this way we will double our ferry capacity.”

Double what? We have always had two; one broke down in 1997; you have failed to replace it; the other one comes and it breaks down; it is barely limping along now; you are hoping to bring one in to replace that while it goes on dry dock, and you call that doubling the ferry capacity?

I do not know how your constituents in Tobago are going to understand this, Member for Tobago West. They should be bowing and saying thank you, thank you, you are going to double our ferry capacity! But they would not do that, because they know better. They know that we are supposed to have, at least, two ferries in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Assam: Not like Narine, “fairy”. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. E. Williams: Let us examine the chronology of some of the events surrounding this ferry. The MV Tobago was removed from service about 20 months ago; in 1997, was it? At that time we knew that the Panorama needed to go into dry dock June to July 1997.

Mr. Speaker, it came to the nation's attention in an article in the *Daily Express* of Friday August 18, 2000, under the heading "Port on a ferry-go-round"; that is what we have come to: "Port on a ferry-go-round".

6.30 p.m

What were we advised in this article? We were advised that a vessel the Stena Nautica was chartered from Gothenberg, Sweden. We understand from this that the Minister, that is to say Cabinet, somehow mysteriously ordered it to return while it was on its way here. In fact, there were two officers on the vessel helping to bring it here. Coming out of all this the country was made to pay \$20 million in arbitration to Stena Line. Is that anywhere in the budget documents? Were we advised in the Parliament about that?

This occurred in 1997 and we have had to pay the arbitration sometime between then and now. Was there ever a statement advising the citizenry that this is how we had to spend our money because of a mysterious Cabinet decision?

Mr. Speaker, with all of this they are very good at trying to sweep things under the carpet. In all this, the Minister of Works and Transport, the senior one, was asked about it and do you know what his comments were? "That is in the past." Quote, unquote. That is all he had to say—\$20 million, that is all in the past. I wonder if the Minister of Health could tell me what \$20 million could have done for the hospital? I wonder what the Minister of Education, now acting Prime Minister could tell me what \$20 million would do for her educational system in Trinidad and Tobago. I wonder if the Minister for the Environment could tell me what he would do with \$20 million? *[Interruption]* He wants to buy a tape for the Member for Tunapuna. We call on you to produce such a tape, so we could hear for ourselves what the Prime Minister had to say in that meeting. Bring it! Because we know what the Member for Tunapuna said. We want to hear the Prime Minister's contribution in that meeting so bring the tape, we want to hear it. Bring it!

Mr. Speaker, do you remember the M.V. Romano II? They brought that vessel, it came here under mysterious circumstances as a replacement boat and somewhere between Trinidad and Tobago, the boat disappeared. For a while we thought the boat had sunk. International coast guards were looking for that vessel,

they could not find it. Launched, I am advised by the beautiful face of the Minister for Tobago East and the Minister of Works and Transport. This was a grand solution. The next thing we know, a lady from Laventille is crying for her husband, cannot find him. Eventually, the boat turned up in Haiti and even when it was there, they could not allow the people off the boat much less the cargo that left Trinidad on its way to Tobago. Have we ever retrieved that cargo, Member for Tobago West?

Mr. Speaker, let us examine the Government's culpability in this one. Note for Cabinet Wt(2000) 41 MSD 5/1/3 Vol. 3 August 15, 2000.

Note for Cabinet

Acquisition of vessel on short-term charter for inter-island ferry service to operate between Scarborough Tobago and Port of Spain, Trinidad.

In this document at paragraph 2, I quote:

“Cabinet will recall its decision taken in Minute 631 of April 5, 2000 wherein it agreed *inter alia*...”

The first thing was that we need to have a suitable roll-on, roll-off ferry and the estimated cost was, guess what? \$20 million. Secondly, that the tender procedures of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago be adopted for the procurement of the ferry.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is germane to that? The Port Authority is the agent of the Government in the operation of the ferry. Indeed the ferry is owned by the Government, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but yet Cabinet agreed on the advice, I presume, of the Minister of Works and Transport that Port Authority tendering should be used to acquire a new ferry.

Mr. Speaker, the last time we saw a major development project like this go to a statutory or associated body to use their tendering processes rather than the Central Tenders Board, do you know what that project was? Do you recall the revelations in the House of the tender procedures used at NIPDEC to award the contracts at the airport? He equal she, singular is plural, plural is singular, amendments, amendments, amendments. They all found themselves in the report of the committee appointed by Cabinet concerning the Piarco Development Project—the Deyalsingh Report.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Cabinet now is seeking to assist our citizens in Tobago and Trinidad because we have inter-island traffic by doing the same thing, but yet, somewhere along the line they woke up because at paragraph 3, Cabinet subsequently agreed in Minute 906 dated May 17, 2000 to rescind its decisions to use the procurement procedures of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and to be guided instead by the procurement procedures of the Central Tenders Board. Was it not around this time we started to hear that we were getting a new Minister of Works and Transport? Maybe you could remind me, Mr. Speaker. This is part of what was going on in the Cabinet.

In May, the Government realized that it could not do that. Subsequently tenders went out, they were opened on June 29, 2000 and two tenders came in. One of the two was found to satisfy the requirements initially and then by August 07, the one qualifying tender had failed because the tenderer did not have the required experience. Nothing was wrong with the vessel, nothing was wrong with the proposed maintenance programme for the vessel, nothing was wrong with the crew of the vessel. Everything was correct about the size and outfitting of the vessel, but for some reason, the person was found not to have the experience. By the way, they were in partnership with others abroad and I understand that a clause was invoked saying that they did not have the necessary experience. Could it be, Mr. Speaker, that the wrong person got the contract? Could it be? Because we know since 1997 that the Panorama was supposed to go on dry dock. We know that we put down the M.V Tobago because it cannot make again. Lloyd's would not insure it, that is the reason we did not get a new ferry.

Dr. Rowley: What month was that?

Mr. E. Williams: This was on August 7, and one week later, the Panorama was damaged—we scrambling; the port on a ferry-go-round.

Mr. Speaker, given all that, the Government came with all kinds of statements. Statement in the upper House, statement in this House and I remember the Member for Fyzabad giving his statement about how concerned the Government was and he congratulated the crew of the Panorama for their heroics and their skill and Cabinet had agreed to buy a new ferry and lease one short term and people had gone to Venezuela to look for a ferry and so forth. That was in August, so I would have thought that this is a high priority issue for the Government, but you know, I checked in the Public Sector Investment Programme of this year at page 33 Transport and Communication. There are two paragraphs listed 169 and 170.

“169. The World Bank funded Postal Sector Reform Project...

170. Grant resources will be sought from the IDB in the amount of US \$900,000 to assist in financing the Modernisation of Telecommunications Project.”

I looked under tourism thinking well, maybe, tourist flow and so forth, nothing. In fact, it was nowhere in the Public Sector Investment Programme, and I even looked at developments in Tobago, paragraph 215 at page 45.

“215 Resources totaling \$100.0 million have been allocated in the 2001 PSIP to finance investments in Tobago, spanning a range of initiatives by the Tobago House of Assembly...”

Nothing about a new boat or vessel in the Public Sector Investment Programme.

Dr. Rowley: Did you look under “B” for bobol. [*Laughter*]

Mr. E. Williams: In addition, I looked in the Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the statutory boards and similar bodies and the Tobago House of Assembly for this fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, I draw your attention to Head 50 of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Nowhere under Head 50 is there any reference to repairs, increase, or subsidy for renting a boat. Absolutely nothing!

6.45 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, I looked in the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the Financial Year 2001*. In the development programme of this nation, Head No. 43, the Ministry of Works and Transport, if we go through the correct way that these things are described but go to page 124, item H, “Sea Transport”, there are three items. The third one is “Repairs to the MF Panorama”. That is the only reference I could find anywhere to any known vessel, other than the coast guard vessels which they have given up on fixing one, and they are still trying to fix the other one in Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is even worse than that. Repairs to the MF Panorama in the 1999/2000 estimate is \$10 million and in the revised estimate of 1999/2000 it is the same \$10 million.

In this fiscal year that is coming to an end, September 30, \$10 million is budgeted for the repairs to the MF Panorama. But, Mr. Speaker, the Panorama is due for dry-docking in October of this year, which is the next fiscal year. This is what we are debating in this budget, and so I looked in the estimates for 2001. Mr. Speaker, would you believe that the grand total for repairs to the MF Panorama in this coming fiscal year, 2001, is zero. Indeed, under the column “Explanation”, there is no explanation—none. This then is the high priority that this Government places on providing a ferry or two ferries to ameliorate [*Desk thumping*] the situation that exists today.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

On top of that, there has been editorial after editorial, letter after letter—there is this one here in the *Newsday* of Tuesday August 22:

“Sea travellers between TT in for rougher times”

The hoteliers in Tobago are crying out about it. In the editorial of the *Newsday* August 24—by the way, Mr. Speaker, this particular newspaper was not identified as a public enemy of the UNC. This one seemingly has been escaping unscathed. They have in their editorial, “Shafting Tobago”. These are the kinds of editorials, the kind of opprobrium that the nation is experiencing by the Government’s treatment of the travelling public of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the insult is even worse because, in the face of all of this Cabinet activity and knowledge since 1997, the Prime Minister gets in the public arena while he is in Tobago to say something nice about it. What does he say? He wants to have resignations. He wants voluntary resignations. He does not say whom. He berates his Minister of Works, the senior one, the one who is now seeking to—
[*Interruption*]

Miss Nicholson: The one he is sending, not seeking—he is sending.

Mr. E. Williams:—he is sending to seek the franchise of the citizens of San Fernando West. He thought that because the incumbent was stepping down, retiring as it were—unlike St. Joseph. He is retiring. He is not being retired—with such a thing happening, “easy-kai”. “I could get through”. Of course, we understand he is now asking to be transferred to Pointe-a-Pierre because he feels that is a safer seat, given the choice of candidate on the PNM side. We know, however, Mr. Speaker, that the sheriff is still soldiering on. Poor chap. It reminds me, when we were opening Tent City, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva North, the Prime Minister, said, “He might be the sheriff but I am the marshal”.
[*Interruption*] The marshal is dealing with him now.

In the *Guardian* of Thursday, August 31, Independence Day, I saw a letter to the editor, headlined, “Buck stops before Panday”. It is written by one Michael J. Williams of Maracas Valley who I believe, Mr. Speaker, is not unknown to these august Chambers. He talked about the loss of the submarine in Russia, the Kursk—that unfortunate disaster. He talked about how the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, reluctantly cut short his vacation to deal with it as a national issue, and indeed there are many comments about whether it was dealt with properly or not, but in any event he cut short his vacation. At paragraph two he goes on to say in this letter:

No such ethic in T&T however. When the *Panorama* gets into trouble on the eve of elections, Prime Minister Panday tells the nation ‘the buck stops with Sadiq’...”

I suppose, Mr. Speaker, he is referring to the incumbent Minister of Works, the senior Minister.

“...port administrators should resign, he does not run the port. But Mr. Panday evidently sees his prime ministerial role as encompassing a football match in Miami...”

By the way, he would have seen the airport towers in Miami as well too:

“...and the prerogative to shut down the country in order to witness a football match on TV.

Citizens might feel a bit of disappointment at their Prime Minister picking and choosing which credits he accepts and which debits he rejects. They will now wonder where did the buck stop when T&T hosted a show costing \$80 million. When we undercut our partially-owned PowerGen to award a take or pay contract to InnCogen. When we opted to buy desalinated water without considering other cheaper sources. When we awarded the airport contract without a public tender, and contrary to law.”

I would add, that is according to the Member for Couva South, the Attorney General.

Mr. Speaker, further to all of this, which of course is clear, is that this *Panorama* formed no part of the deliberations of the Minister of Finance and his two junior Ministers, I might add. However, he is a super Minister. He is Minister and he has two junior Ministers. Apart from the fact that it formed no part of their deliberations, hear what we are going to do, Mr. Speaker. In this Cabinet Note, here is what we are going to do. Cabinet, given these circumstances—the fact of course that the vessel is damaged, the fact that the lone surviving tenderer was thrown out because he does not have the experience of running a ferry, given all of these circumstances, at paragraph 9:

“Given these circumstances, the Minister of Works and Transport proposes that immediate arrangements be made for the acquisition, through short-term charter, of a suitable alternative ferry to the PANORAMA. The acquisition should be pursued through contractual arrangements with a reputable ship broker. In making this proposal, the Minister is...”

Mr. Speaker, they are going to a shipbroker. We are not going to the Central Tenders Board any more because there is nobody to tender. We are not putting out what is called an international tender, Mr. Speaker. Again, that would be open to all and again the wrong person might win. So what do we do? We go to a broker who will be engaged to give a short list of vessels.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In this document it speaks about getting such a vessel from Europe. Mr. Speaker, do you know what they came to this House and told us? They told us that they were speaking to the Canadian government, they were speaking to European governments and so forth, because he says here:

“information available to the Minister that a suitable replacement ferry can only be sourced for charter from the European day/night ferry market.”

Yet they came here and said they were talking to the Canadians and the Europeans, but Cabinet had already decided, even in a narrower sense, “We are going to a broker for a vessel from Europe”. So we are getting very specific as to where we could get this vessel. Hopefully the right person might get the contract.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Port of Spain South has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. E. Williams: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank Members for the extension of my time. Apart from that minor confusion, merely I suppose to make sure that we get the right person and the right boat from the right place, the main reason the last person, the surviving tenderer, was turned down, was because he did not have any experience in the operation of a ferry. This Government asks, “Are we better off today than we were five years ago?” [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, if I only tell you what the public servants are saying about the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives, you would be shocked. If you only knew what they are saying about how he has turned down the DPA at promoting a public servant into a particular directorial position at his Ministry. If you hear what the public servants are saying, you would blush. I wish he would keep quiet so that I do not have to tell you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government has identified that as a national priority we need to have a vessel. We cannot have a local bringing the vessel here because they do not have any experience. However, Mr. Speaker, nowhere in any of their discussions is there any comment as to how we will develop Trinidad and Tobago in a long-term sense by building that expertise which we have now determined is a national prerogative. This was a chance to tell us about policy, a chance to tell us about how we will build, how we will uplift, yet what have we gotten from this Government in that regard? We have gotten delay and mismanagement at the

Cabinet level. We have gotten into greater expense because we ordered something and turned it back—we breached a contract, Mr. Speaker. We have developed “bad face”, as it were, in the international community in the ship business; yet, after all of this, the Government has not seized the opportunity to develop the expertise necessary for development of the nation—national growth, Mr. Speaker.

Never mind the cries from the people of Tobago that they have to pay higher prices for every single commodity, save maybe water when they could get it and electricity and telephone services; never mind, Mr. Speaker, that we are trying to develop our tourism plant in Tobago; we will move along and make sure that the right person gets the contract—the right deal for the boat. That is where we are as a nation, unfortunately. Well, so much for the ferry. I only hope that we actually do get one. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, the Member keeps talking about fairies. You know, some people have the worst things to say about his Oxbridge accent and what it may suggest.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we had to deal with the Toco ferry as well, which was also an attempt to alleviate the transportation situation between the two islands. My colleague, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, not only dealt with that issue in his contribution very adequately, but also with the purveyor of the idea in his own constituency. When the Minister of Works and Transport was literally run out of Laventille—*[Interruption]* He thought he had developed a particular link with the persons up there. As I said, when the Minister was run out of Laventille, I am told that there was an individual who has the nickname “Sadman”. *[Interruption]* Yes, apparently he had a run-in with Sadman so he decided that he would go—*[Interruption]* Yes, that is the truth. Best friends fall out. That is right, he was the godfather to Sadman’s child.

Mr. Speaker, after his run-in with Sadman he was looking for greener pastures, I am told, so he then went to Toco/Manzanilla, thinking that will be a good place to set up shop. He went on an exercise of sleeping in people’s homes in Toco/Manzanilla—

Hon. Member: Male or female?

Mr. E. Williams: Both—in an attempt to bond with the community and to show his solidarity. In fact, the Minister of Works and Transport was observed—and I had this on very good authority—riding the bus to Sangre Grande into Toco, conversing with the local folks, with his vehicle driving behind the bus. *[Laughter]* The Minister did that so in case he could not get back he had his vehicle there, but he is a man of the people.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, I understand that one night a female voice, somewhere in an area that the Minister was trying to bond with the people up there was heard shouting “Rape, rape” and that was the last we heard of the nocturnal visits to Toco by the Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know how to interpret that one as to whether it is an insinuation against the Minister of Works and Transport. I do not know. It is the English language again and that may appear in the *Hansard* as though he was—

Mr. E. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I would clarify. Lest it be construed that he had anything to do with that, the Minister felt it safer to not be in the vicinity of that kind of—

Mr. Speaker, back in 1989—

Hon. Member. Born again Christian—

Mr. E. Williams: That is why I will tell the truth.

Mr. Speaker, back in 1989 a study was done on the potential for a Toco ferry. My late father was a member of one of the study teams that came up with three potential sites. The first and preferred site was at Balandra because it is a natural harbour and it is the only sheltered bay on the northeast peninsula. The second site was at Sans Souci and the third was at Toco. In any event, the committee recommended that if there was a need to do that at all, the Balandra sight should be the only one to be considered for the reason that every single bridge and culvert along that bend would have had to be repaired and strengthened. The road network in effect could not support the envisaged activity to support such a port.

Mr. Speaker, that was in 1989, here we are 11 years later with the same proposal to put the port in Toco. At that time Lee Young & Partners—which it turns out is the preferred bidder on this current story—were a part of the study. The senior and managing partner of Lee Young & Partners, Mr. Joe Ramkissoon, was a part of that study then. This gentleman is the Chairman of Caroni (1975) Limited and now all of a sudden Lee Young & Partners are the preferred partners. I wonder how that happened? What happened to all the bridges, culverts and the road network between 1989 and now? Apart from the purely economic considerations of putting a port in Toco, we have significant infrastructural problems with putting a port there. I might add that there are lots more things to be said about the port, the ferry and so forth and as time goes on we will continue to speak about those issues.

Mr. Speaker, I will now address my attention to the road-paving programme. As we all know now, we had to get a new minister in order to pave our roads as the previous minister was being continually abused by his Prime Minister in the public domain. However, under the Road Improvement Fund—taxes we all pay when we purchase gasoline, which was brought in under the PNM regime in 1993—the minister is required to report to the Parliament every six months on how those funds are being expended.

The Minister, therefore, should have come to Parliament, nine times to date. Even so, the Minister of Finance should have somewhere in his documents an item showing how the money is coming in. It escapes me thus far, but I also know what has not happened is that the Minister of Works and Transport has not come to this House with reports except for the years 1996 and 1997, and he came late with those reports. As of today, reports for 1998, 1999 and this year 2000 remain outstanding to this Parliament. That is in direct contravention of the law.

Mr. Speaker, apart from all of this the UNC allocated 50 per cent of the road paving funds to the Ministry of Local Government. We do not have any report on how that went but we discovered that most of the money was being spent in UNC constituencies. We know that with the new minister coming in we have a budget somewhere in the order of \$200 million that is being spent on roads.

Mr. Speaker, I had a request from the new minister to submit seven roads in my constituency—as I believe other Members of Parliament were asked—which I believe require paving. I do not have the clipping, but there was a statement in the press saying that roads in every constituency will be paved and that there will be an equal distribution of all of this because they are about transparency, equality and so forth.

I suspect this may have already been brought to the attention of the House on another occasion, but I want to say to you that we have discovered that no less than 80 per cent of the funds are being expended in areas that are under the direct control of representation of Members of the other side. Twenty per cent of that money is being spent in areas that are PNM represented.

7.10 p.m.

I have here a letter from the Chief Construction Engineer of Works to his Permanent Secretary on July 4, 2000 dealing with the proposed zoning for the contracting of works greater than \$500,000. All the big ones: Diego Martin West, no such big projects; San Juan/Barataria, I notice he did not get any either; Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, none; Laventille West got one; Diego Martin Central got five; St. Joseph got none.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Those are only the roads over \$500,000 in this programme. There may be smaller projects which will be in other places, but we are talking about the big ones. Arima, three; Toco/Manzanilla, five—those are areas they are trying hard to get, but Arima will still remain PNM and Arima will also leave him out—Caroni got four; Couva North got one; Couva South got five; Caroni Central got three; Chaguanas got five; Point Fortin got five; Oropouche got six projects; Pointe-a-Pierre got two and La Brea got seven—I suppose that is part of the plan to try to win La Brea too. That is on the road to Point Fortin, after WASA was finished with the roads from “Water for All”. Fyzabad got five; Siparia got five; Naparima got six; Tabaquite got seven; Nariva got three; Ortoire/Mayaro got eight and Princes Town got nine.

Mr. Speaker, this is the transparency and equality that, as a Member of Parliament, I was promised by the new Minister of Works. Already he seems to have started off in a manner that is reminiscent of his other colleagues. So much so, Mr. Speaker, that on August 27, the *Express* was prompted in an article by a former friend of the other side, Mr. Rafeeq Shah, to ask, “Where the money gone?”

He alluded to the fact that a bunch of contractors got together with that Minister and then got together among themselves to fix the price per ton of asphalt to be used on the road at a price that is twice the going rate. That is what we are now being saddled with on our roads. Not to mention, of course, we are in the process of paving these roads in the middle of the rainy season. I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that in this country, we understand that there is a time and season for everything.

To top all this off, and I think that this kind of sums it up—they say show me your friends and you will know who you are—in the *Independent* of September 1, 2000, an article by Maurisa Findlay, “Baksh hires pageant official on million-dollar fraud charge”. The lady is in court, no judgment has been made on her, so I cannot say she is guilty or not. I am not saying that at all. All I am merely saying is that the newspaper is reporting, and this person has confirmed, that with this charge hanging over her head, she is working for the current Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Partap: What is the relevance of this?

Mr. E. Williams: The relevance is this, and it is of direct interest to those of us who have to look for foreign investment and who have to face the world in general. An article in today's *Newsday* at page 9, “World Bank official warns: Corruption one of the causes of Poverty”. Their Government has become associated with dubious activities, to say the least.

Mr. Speaker, I will say a few words about housing matters. The Minister was very good to talk about his stewardship, but I want to say that we beg to differ on some fundamental issues of policy. We know that we will continue to agree to disagree on those things.

The Minister was careful to point out that he has embarked on a process of co-operation with private sector entities to build new houses—partnership. It used to be that when the Government entered into low cost housing for the citizenry, and funded it itself, the Government placed as a priority, shelter for those who could least afford it. That was the PNM. The Minister has a different view. In fact, to qualify for an NHA property, one of the requirements was that one did not own any other property, and if one was purchasing, that this was one's first property.

Dr. Mohammed: You should tell Hinds that!

Mr. E. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I have to inform this House that I have been advised that in the case at least of the Aranguez Villas, and in other cases, individuals have now purchased several units and are, in turn, renting those units to others. In fact, they are advertised in the newspaper from time to time, I am advised.

That, Mr. Speaker, is speculation. That is use of state funds to build houses that are for those who are less privileged among us, now being put in the hands of private industry, such that persons like Tobago-born Lana King, as reported in the *Guardian* of Thursday, August 31, 2000, “Mother of six evicted from home”, in my constituency too. She is not a constituent. She merely found shelter there.

Indeed, the people at the NHA, I have come to understand—I used to wonder what was going on—work very hard trying to manage the limited number of units that exist. It is a long waiting list and every Member of Parliament here has been sending in names for people to try to get a property. “Mother of six evicted from home”. They are in a process of trying to find, of the limited units that are available, some units.

Mr. Speaker, since we will agree to disagree, I want to read into the record, the PNM's vision in this regard. Members could say what they want, but that is our vision and we intend to pursue it. At page 41 of our vision document: Housing and Public Utility Services:

“A comprehensive housing policy distinguishes the PNM from all other political parties in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Past PNM administrations effected a housing revolution throughout the country. Every socioeconomic group benefited from a housing policy which included the construction of low and middle income homes, soft loans for home construction or purchase, tax deductibility of mortgage interest...”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

We introduced that.

“fiscal concessions to developers and mortgage financial institutions.

This revenue represented a great volume of savings and provided the nation with a substantial housing stock. The PNM affirms our historic commitment to continue our policy of ensuring adequate housing to all as a basic element of citizenship in Trinidad and Tobago.”

The PNM did that. Suffice it to say, Minister, I will be sending you a letter shortly of a number of corrections that are required at the new John John towers. I have photographs and those will be coming shortly.

With regard to a few issues that affect my constituency, Mr. Speaker, I have been approached, and I have been observing with some interest, the destruction of the mangrove at Mucurapo. I hear the Minister of the Environment saying he plans to replant twice as much, but somehow, I find that those who know more about the environment than I do, do not believe that. Indeed, I believe they are camped out there at this time in protest over the destruction of the green space that is the mangrove at Mucurapo. I too remember as a boy playing in the mangrove, going down to the seashore, catching crabs and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind us of the debacle that continues to be the public library next door to us. I am advised that work has stopped on it. So I heard. Maybe it has started back by now, but it certainly is behind schedule, and pretty soon we will be looking to see what is going on with the projected cost of such a library.

I noticed that there was an allocation for refurbishment of the Red House. I could speak about this Red House because it is in my constituency, and like you, I am concerned every time I walk down the corridor, about myself, members of staff and my colleagues slipping in these halls after they are almost semi-flooded after any good shower. Indeed, in the tea room, we sometimes have to dodge rain coming through the ceiling and I want to say that I hope the Red House is brought back to its former pristine glory in the shortest possible time. [*Desk thumping*] It is an old building and it needs some refurbishment.

I want to speak a little about security in the constituency. I had a motion on the adjournment here with regard to a police post at Mango Rose. I went back to my constituents and told them what the Minister said, and in a sense, I have to thank the Minister for his particular response, because my constituents have overwhelmingly decided to support me now and in the future, if that is the kind of

response that this Government gives to security in Mango Rose. I want to thank them for ensuring an enhanced franchise for my constituents in Mango Rose. I want to say when we get back into Government, we will consider ways of rectifying the crime situation in east Port of Spain.

We still cry out for the Woodbrook police station to be returned, because the Woodbrook police station, which was built under PNM time and in PNM time was used to house the narcotics and dangerous drugs bureau pending the building of a new building; we lost that station. Indeed, near as I can tell, there is no construction activity on the new police station at the corner of Park and Richmond Streets. Absolutely nothing seems to be going on.

We have seen the completion of the Attorney General's building over here. We have seen the start and completion of the courts. We have seen the start of the library. We have seen a number of projects start, but that building remains untouched in a semi-finished state. Mr. Speaker, I am advised, I discovered that the current accommodation in the vault of the narcotics bureau, where it is located in Woodbrook, is totally inadequate. The ventilation is not what it ought to be for the handling of dangerous drugs.

While that is important, the Attorney General talks about \$100 million in drugs passing through the country. Mr. Speaker, I understand that some of the custodians there are developing medical problems because the ventilation is such that they are beginning to inhale some of the dangerous substances which are stored there as court exhibits.

I want to call on the Government to get the new police building for dangerous drugs finished in the shortest possible time. On top of that, to return the Woodbrook police station to what it was meant to be; the station for the Woodbrook area, because crime there is also on the rise. Further than that, there is the Central Police Station on Wrightson Road. It was due for refurbishment under the previous administration. It was on the list. Finally, the police officers have been removed from the central station to another venue, but as yet, no work has begun on that station on Wrightson Road which services the nation on one of the major arteries in the country.

7.25 p.m.

But beyond that, Mr. Speaker, the police officers are placed in a building on a street known as Shine Street, which is a little to the north and east of Wrightson Road, a building which really is a house with wooden floors. I understand that the condition of the building they have been put into is now worse than the station they have been removed from on Wrightson Road, which is not being repaired.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. WILLIAMS]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Finally, I have been advised that the police are paying a rent of \$29,000 a month for that building which is causing a demoralized police service—those who have to serve in that area. On top of that fact, they have discovered that the building is owned by a close friend of a former Commissioner of Police who is now a UNC activist. It is causing demoralization in the service and we need to correct these situations so that we can move forward as a nation.

As with other Members on this side, unfortunately, I am unable to endorse the figures and all the policies or lack thereof that have been put forward in this budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education and Acting Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill which is at present before this honourable House in support of the budget statement made by the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development. With your leave, I would like to repeat from page 2 of that statement where the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development stated:

"We created 60,000 new jobs

We achieved one of the highest growth rates in the world, Mr. Speaker,
and I expect it will be about 7.9 per cent this year

We reduced inflation significantly

We reduced taxes

We doubled foreign investment

We reduced the public debt; and

We more than doubled our foreign reserves."

The hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development went into the state of the economy at that point in time and gave a review of his stewardship for the past four and a half to five years. When he was done, it was very remarkable that the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, stated very clearly in his contribution that there was no doubt—and I quote his words—"that the economy was sound". We have from the horse's mouth, the hon. Leader of the Opposition himself saying very clearly that the economy is sound.

Mr. Speaker, we did all that so that today in this country, we can feel comfortable and confident as a people that we have a sound economy, but you can have a sound economy but the people of the country are not sound; where the people of the country were the ones who were made to suffer in order to show a balance of numbers and figures to show nice figures in a budget. You can say, "Look, the economy sounds good; the inflation rate is good; the unemployment figures are down; the balance of payments are good"; but, at the same time, people are seeing trouble.

I remember days when I was a student in Jamaica at the University of the West Indies, when Jamaica was going through very serious economic times in terms of an economic crisis, yet the numbers for the budgets were numbers that when you looked at them on paper, they looked like good numbers yet people were suffering.

I remember going into supermarkets and if you had to get rice or flour, the lines were so long. You would do that once or twice for the week. The Minister of Health was there at the time. He would recall. He was also a student there at university. First of all, you had to line up and cram up to get into the supermarket and when you did manage to get in, when people actually saw the goods put out, once for the week perhaps, basic necessities like rice and flour, you would see the scramble. People just started to grab the food. But the numbers; they were balancing budgets to get good numbers.

That, Mr. Speaker, in my respectful view, is not the case in Trinidad and Tobago. The Members on this side have worked together as a team. All of us here have worked together as a team to put people first. We have been very clear about that, putting people first. [*Desk thumping*]

You heard this morning the hon. Minister of Health going through the numerous reforms in the health sector that we are seeing, very clearly. Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Panday, seems to have introduced a new word in the vocabulary of Trinidad and Tobago because never before did I hear about "quality" until the hon. Prime Minister spoke about creating a "total quality nation". Do you remember when he said that, Mr. Speaker? I had never heard that word before but earlier this year, I heard the nurses talking about "quality nursing care". Do you recall that, Mr. Speaker?

Now, look at the World Bank Report. Dr. The Hon. Job quoted from it this morning. Thousands of children very clearly left out of the system over the years.

Miss Nicholson: When? That is not true.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: In this report and I can quote it, it says very clearly 15,000 in the primary system—it is not only secondary school children—left out of the system. When this Government made the effort to put children into schools—

Miss Nicholson: What?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:—for the first time, we hear about "quality education". This is why I say that a new word has been introduced by this Government into the country—"quality education"; "quality care".

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that Members have worked together as a team on health reform. Today, if you go in all parts of this country, you will see the amount of work taking place on health centres. I know the health centre in Penal right now is under refurbishment works. I know Fyzabad is under refurbishment works. Members will tell you in their own areas, all areas throughout this country, of a tremendous amount of reform in terms of just the refurbishment—upgrading of health centres.

The Minister spoke to you about the work he has done with respect to all the various district facilities, all the reform in the health sector. Then, when we listened to the Minister of Housing and Settlements, the Minister whom they like to say did not build a house; he was very clear when he stood up in this Parliament yesterday and gave us an account of the work he had done as Minister of Housing and Settlements. The same can be said when we listened to the Minister of the Environment when he stood in this Parliament and spoke about the emphasis that this Government is putting on the environment and the thrust that will be there in the coming year as put forward in the budget. Clearly, an emphasis on the environment.

There is no way that we can survive on this earth. We hear about the global warming. I myself was involved in a committee—Minister Vincent Lasse and I worked on that—on the whole business of climate change and what was happening in terms of those of us who neglect their environment to their peril. There are countries in this world—I was amazed to find out when I joined that working group—I was the rapporteur for that working group—of the ACP Caribbean states that when the research came forward, there were countries that were drowning.

Mr. Manning: The Solomon Islands.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Maldives. We live on an island, too. I remember there was an article in the newspaper asking: Is Trinidad and Tobago drowning? Then there was a big joke about some scientist talking nonsense but, we live on an island, too, and it is very important and crucial that emphasis be put on the environment. That is what the Green Fund is about.

We heard the Minister of the Environment here and what he had to say. Mr. Speaker, we have heard about health. We have heard about the environment. We have heard about housing. The hon. Minister of Tourism also spoke and, again, for us in this country, whilst it is that the oil sector has been very important and crucial, the manufacturing sector is growing and becoming bigger and greater, but tourism is something—I remember growing up, they told us Trinidad and Tobago was not for tourists. We do not want tourists. We have enough money. We have enough dollars. We have oil dollars. We do not need tourists. In fact, when tourists came here, we would treat them badly. Why? We were so big and great. We had oil dollars but, Mr. Speaker, do you remember those lean years when the price of oil dropped? What happened to us in this country? The tourism sector is so vital.

We say we do not want the very developed countries here because we do not want to be little island people and maids and helpers for tourists. I am sure, hon. Speaker, that you know because you have visited those countries. Tourism is one of the largest sectors of many of those developed countries. Think of how those people from the developed countries, at the smallest chance they get, take a trip to go. Tourism is vital.

In the area of social development, the hon. Minister of Community and Social Development—I said we have worked together as a team, the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development; the Minister of Trade and Industry. We have held—as the hon. Member for San Fernando East—the economy sound. But, I am also saying that was not at the sacrifice of the people of the country. We have continued, in my respectful view, to put people first from day one.

That is why the hon. Minister of Community and Social Development, I remember him in the Cabinet, from the time he came into the Cabinet, his concern was with old age pensions, with disability grants and with public assistance.

Mr. Manning: You are sounding better than Panday. You are sounding real good.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: For every single year we have been in Government, the hon. Minister of Community and Social Development—I remember his words in the Cabinet; his bantering to ensure that we raised that pension every single year. In every single year, that old age pension rose. I remember I kept talking about prophets of doom and gloom. I am reading and hearing some saying, "Well, it is only \$100." Mr. Speaker, it is \$100 now but from 1995 when that first budget was read to now when this sixth budget is being read, it has been an additional \$400, a 103 per cent increase. Again, as a team with the Minister of Community and Social Development.

If you go into the various parts of this country—and it does not have to be Port of Spain; it does not have to be in the environs of Port of Spain; you go anywhere, in the places that the Member for Diego Martin East—any time we talk about those places and doing things in those places, he talks about parrots and "douens". He calls every other part of this country and the people from the rural areas of this country, places for parrots and "douens".

The mind is so centred right here in Port of Spain that nobody else exists, but this Government has made it very clear and very sure, whether you are from Port of Spain, from Biche, from Toco, from Cedros, any part of the country—people first! It does not matter from where you come. So, whether it is that we go to Mason Hall in Tobago, or whether we go to Speyside and Goodwood Park and where the Minister of Public Utilities has been able to bring water to Tobago as well, at far below the cost, I am saying that anywhere you go, you can see the community centres opening; refurbishment of community centres that had been abandoned and derelict. Those are being upgraded and raised up.

Of course, this Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—and I am sorry the former Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has left. I am really sorry but I am sure she will probably hear in due course.

7.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—I am really sorry the former Minister of Sports has left. I am sure she will probably hear in due course. This Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I do not know what it is he 'bring'—yesterday the Prime Minister said when star is shining you do not have to point, but whatever it is he 'bring'—every football match under this Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has been won by this country, every match. [*Desk thumping*] I am so proud of the work that the Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is doing. Not only that he will help sports, and not only is he involved in the stadia throughout the country.

When it came to the Cabinet for those stadia to be built, he will tell you I said: “Do we really want to do this now, could we not do something else?” But Mr. Speaker, there is none of us who can deny the unifying spirit of heart and mind that sport brings, none of us. [*Desk thumping*] There is nothing like sport that brings us together. To him hats off.

Mr. Speaker, I spent a little time going to the constituency. The people of Siparia walked from Siparia to Port Spain. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because they had no water in their taps and no truck-borne water. They had no water! That was a typical kind of place that you talk about water, water everywhere—that is a statement you have heard before—but not a drop to drink. Floods yes, but no water to drink. Siparia has suffered tremendously for water. When I became MP there in 1995, the majority of the people who came to me in my office, the majority of the people who really made representation—I was going to put it another way, but I really had problems because of the water supply. Like sport, but even greater than sport, you cannot have life without water. So those people—I remember when they marched, they walked—the Councillors from the Siparia Regional Corporation, led by the then chairman, Alvin Mahabir together with Gopiechan Narine, the former MP for Siparia, walked from Siparia to Port of Spain because of water. Today,—[*Interruption*]

Mr. G. Singh: Divine intervention.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: it was only because of the work under the South Water Project and the tremendous effort by the Minister or Public Utilities. Mr. Speaker, I know others have tried, there is no question about it, because everybody wants water. There is no question about it. But this Minister of Public Utilities did not only try, he delivered. [*Desk thumping*] In my constituency, I know for a fact that water situation has totally improved.

When we looked at the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives—this Minister is really a lady’s gentleman, if you want to call him that. The Minister of Labour is one of the most decent human beings I have ever met. Do you know why? When I was in private practice I knew all this about maternity benefits. Do you remember that? Member for Arouca South do you remember that? There was no provision to allow maternity benefits for persons in the private sector, there were none. But it was this Minister of Labour and Co-operatives who ensured that women in this country would enjoy maternity benefit protection and security of employment, because that is what happened.

Hon. Member: And the Minimum Wage Bill.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: If a woman became pregnant she would be fired, and she could not get back the job. They say: “Okay take the leave.” But they would not take you back. During the time when she was gone they would take someone else. That, I think, was a major piece of work done by the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives. That was not all, as the Minister of Public Utilities is reminding us: the whole business of the minimum wage. That too was the work of the Minister of Labour. If you go through every portfolio, it is very clear—*[Interruption]* I am not finished yet. There is so much. I do not know how much time we have to say all those things. *[Interruption]* I am sure that you will be able to tell us.

The reforms we have seen, not only from the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives, but also the Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs, who is not here today, has done so much for us in terms of—I have seen bits of legislation—again, things that I have experienced personally—this has been done, together with the hon. Attorney General. The work that, for example, gives protection to common law spouses. Again, in private practice you would have so many who would come: who had lived in stable unions. I remember when I first talked about that it was said that there were approximately 40,000 persons in this country, who were in such a situation: living together for years, stable relationships, children and yet, when it is that the common law spouse passed away, they could not inherit anything. There is now that protection for common law unions: both men and women.

I would tell you, I had male clients who also suffered from that situation. Both males and females suffered from that situation. That piece of legislation, again, so crucial and important, for those who were suffering without that kind of legislative protection. There were several pieces of legislation that we saw. Member for Arouca South, I think you probably have a longer record than I do, but, numerous pieces of legislation were brought to this Parliament by the hon. Attorney General. There were numerous pieces of legislation which have seen legal reform in almost every field. Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to say that, as a team together we put people first. Whilst we did, as the Member for San Fernando East has said, we kept the economy sound.

When we come to education, Mr. Speaker—again I am sorry the Member for Tobago West is not here. If we look at the Trinidad and Tobago Youth and Social Development Report of June 2000, it becomes very clear that there is a lot of work to be done in education. While some has been done over the years—a lot has been done. The last time I spoke here on education some time ago, when I was speaking, I recall a Member of the Opposition—not the Member from San Fernando East: he is too gracious for that—who, when I was speaking on education said: “We should have left you in the cane field. I do not think you all remember that.

Hon. Members: Yes. Diego Martin West.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Did you all recall it? “We should have left you in the cane field.” I never knew that he, in any way, allowed me—

Mr. G. Singh: He said the lagoon.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: No, he said the cane field. I will tell you why I remember. I do not recall him taking any of us out of the cane field, if it is that we were in the cane field at all. Mr. Speaker, I remember that statement and I will always remember it, because that statement is a statement that has so much negativism tied up into it. That is why I say it was not the Member for San Fernando East because he has better sense than that. Mr. Speaker, he is also from the South, so I think he understands.

Mr. Speaker, I did not come from any cane field, that is I why I remember. I said I came from Siparia and Penal, which was the land of the rice field. Therefore, I have nothing to be ashamed of. If it is for the thousands of people in this country, the hundreds of thousands of us, if it is that we came from cane fields or rice fields, we had nothing then that we should be ashamed about; if it is that we were able to get an education and we were able to do other things. He cannot keep us in no cane field. He wanted to leave us in the cane field. It is the same attitude. It is not just cane field, it is just to leave those where they are: take them nowhere forward. It does not matter whether it is the slum. It does not matter whether it is Laventille, Beetham, Carenage, Penal, Oropouche or Caroni, those were the children who were being left behind all the time. [*Desk thumping*] If you read the report, it is very clear. Dr. The Hon. Job quoted some of it. I will read parts of it for you. This is from page 11 of the *World Bank Report*:

“At all levels of the education system, capacity is limited in relation to demand. Currently early childhood care and development services reach slightly less than half of children in the appropriate age range. Although access is nearly universal in primary education and enrollment ratios are generally high—normally over 90%—a large absolute number of children still remain outside of the system. One survey estimated that roughly 15,000 children aged 5—11 years...”

These are the primary school children.

“15,000 children aged 5—11 years were not attending primary school, representing somewhat less than 10 % of this age cohort...”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

7.50 p.m.

The report continued:

"According to the 1992 Survey of Living Conditions, school enrollment was 99% for children from families in the highest and second-highest expenditure quintiles in comparison to 93% for those from the lowest quintile."

Do you know what that is talking about? From the highest income levels all of them go to school, but if you are from the cane field, the rice field, or the hills of Laventille, then you are in that, and you are not going to school; no place for you! It is very clear, the Minister read it, and there are other parts you can read which say very clearly that the children who are most disadvantaged, who needed help the most, those were the ones who are being left out of the system.

When I hear all this about this Government misleading people; this Government is not providing quality education; this Government is all these things, I said it before, it is like crocodile tears running down from them, because if they really cared about the children, the first priority was to find them a place in a school. You cannot have quality education if you have no education at all. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot have it! The priority must first be, let us get you into a place where you can be educated and having got you into a place where you can be educated, we can then deal simultaneously with what you are educated for and how you are educated; that is the quality.

Whether they are now saying, "We are sorry, you are not speaking the truth, you are misleading the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister is not speaking the truth and you are saying it is 10,000, but it is not, it is 6,000," do you realize what is the argument? It is not 10,000 a year, it is really 6,000, but good God, if it is only one child, if it is only one, it should not happen—[*Desk thumping*—far less for 6,000 children. So that is the educational thrust.

Tomorrow is the start of the school term. Tomorrow is the start of the new school year. Mr. Speaker, I do not stand here as a human being to say that every single thing would be totally perfect. I have always said if we live in heaven the world would be perfect then, but we do not live in heaven, we live in the real world, and we have faced in the education sector tremendous challenges. I want to pay tribute once again to the hon. Minister, Dr. Adesh Nanan, for the work he did as Minister of Education—[*Desk thumping*—because it is work that he has done that we have carried through. So it is, Mr. Speaker, when school opens tomorrow, yes, there may be one or two, I would use the word glitches, one or two wrinkles that we need to iron out, but by far the vast majority of students would have been placed and the schools would be in place tomorrow. [*Desk thumping*]

When we talked about the lack of school places here, and as I said, they told us 6,000 well, okay, 6,000; if it is 6,000 fine. We talked about it, but when we look at the record—Mr. Speaker, you can go and pick up this. Do you see these books? This is public knowledge. Every year a budget is read; these books are public knowledge. If you pick up this and look at it—in other words, it is accessible, anyone can see it; this is not hidden anywhere.

For the past 10 years the record for school construction is very dismal for those on the other side. If you were saying that you were “going to” in your report, yes, you recognized that there was a shortage of school places and, therefore, you had to build more schools and so forth, we accept that. But the record of school construction, you would be amazed when you hear it.

Mr. Speaker, during the period of 1992 the Opposition was then in government; they came into government in December 1991, so no credit can be claimed for any school built in 1991. Even though we say that they came into office in 1991, there is no credit for them, because they came into office in December, so we must look at 1992.

When we look at 1992, to their credit, they built four primary schools. In 1993 they built three, that is seven; in 1994 another three, that is 10, and in 1995 they built one, that is 11 primary schools. Do you know what is interesting about this? Not a single one of those schools was a new school. The 11 schools they built, do you know what they were? They were replacement schools, which is fine, but do you know what that also means? Not a single extra space was created for a single child even though the population was growing. [*Desk thumping*] The population was growing, you already did not have enough places at the primary level—15,000 children estimated in the report, were outside the primary school system. Yes, we give credit where it is due: they built primary schools, but did not build a single, totally new school to create more places.

Mr. Speaker, this Government from 1997—2000 built 24 primary schools—[*Desk thumping*]—and out of those, six were replacement schools; 24 minus six is 18; 18 were totally new schools. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know what that means? When I look at the number of spaces provided, you can do some quick mathematics, Mr. Speaker, in the period that I spoke of, 1993—1996, the places provided—and I said that they were replacement places, so they were not really new, but let us still give credit for those places—were 718, 654, and 326, which gives us just over 2,000 existing places really.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Under this Government in 1999 alone 24,520, non-existent spaces, totally new spaces were created in one year alone. [*Desk thumping*] In the year 2000 I am advised that 6,140 places were created with the 12 additional schools built this year. If you look at the numbers, generally, not only did we do the replacement schools, which is vital, but we also did the totally newly constructed schools to provide more spaces.

What I have just read is only primary school construction. While it is that the White Paper was brilliant for some of its suggestions, it recognized that we needed spaces not only in the primary, but in the secondary school system. So the question is: How many secondary schools did that administration build? [*Crosstalk*] How many secondary schools? Not a single secondary school; not one!

This year this Government would have constructed 12 new secondary schools—[*Desk thumping*]—and we have the phase two to go in for an additional 12 secondary schools, and they are being built, as the Member said, for parrot and douene. The children in Blanchisseuse where Minister Griffith comes from, are parrots and douens; the children in Coryal by Minister Partap, and Biche; parrot and douene; Cunupia, parrot and douene; [*Crosstalk*] Brazil, parrot and douene Valencia, parrot and douene.

All these schools, parrot and douene.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Build some more schools in my constituency.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Malabar—[*Interruption*]—my love, what is in a name? A rose by any other name is still a rose. Shakespeare said it; what is in a name. You come with this argument, let me answer this argument once and for all. The argument is saying: you take a primary school and call it a primary school.

Mr. Speaker, tell me if you had the choice, and anyone of them, that you have a school that is constructed for 600 children, but only 200 children are there, so you have 400 spaces; a school built like Malabar for over 600 children with not a single child yet registered for primary—and if you see that Malabar school, the Member has seen it, it is a beautiful school. [*Desk thumping*] You take a school at Beetham built again for 700, a very small population; you take the school down at Carenage built, again, for 700. What do you do? Do you leave all the schools empty and, therefore, the children coming out of the Common Entrance Examination you tell them, "Sorry, no place, stay home"? No place, it is for 6,000, stay home, and you have empty school buildings. Do not come with that; that argument is so ludicrous, to say, "Yuh putting children in a primary school building."

You know, Mr. Speaker, I had started to make the point when someone stopped me, when we were in this Parliament the last time. I had said that we sometimes forget where we came from, and I wanted to make that point, because many of us sitting in this Parliament Chamber, the school building we went to was nothing more than a two by four with a shed roof. [*Desk thumping*] That is the kind of school I went to. None of the schools that we have put forward for the secondary school children now are like that. I am not saying that we are going back to that, but the point I am making is that the argument that in the primary schools you are putting in secondary school children, in my respectful view, is a ludicrous argument.

The building does not make it primary or secondary, it is what you do there, the staff and the curriculum and the students you have there. [*Desk thumping*] Perhaps, it was that kind of thinking that they could not understand, which is why year after year, if I take their numbers, over 6,000 children were left out of the secondary system.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members the sitting is suspended for 45 minutes.

8.01 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

8.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, just before we took the break I was talking about the argument that we have taken the children who have written the Common Entrance Examination 2000 and placed them in schools and the argument that is being put forward is that we are placing children in primary schools and calling them secondary schools.

Just before the break I had started to make the point that it is very clear at first that if school places are available, that is if the schools are half empty in some cases three quarters empty, and there are students where our choice is to leave them out of school or to place them in schools, then there is no choice whatsoever. In my respectful view, we must place them.

The second point is clearly that what determines the school, as the Minister of Public Utilities pointed out, is not the building. It has to do with the curriculum and the staffing put in those schools. So when we took all those considerations and we took into account the fact that if we did not place the students, that we would have failed in our duty as a Government, we made the decision and as I said, we had to bite the bullet and take it across the board.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, in every country in the world where universal secondary education is achieved and there is that transition, there is always that sort of resistance to change, and in that first year of transition there would be those students from the age cohort who have to go forward in order to clear the system for those who remain within the primary system and for those who come into the primary system. So it is not simply a matter of saying that we would phase in secondary education, that we would phase it in and each year we would place some more.

Mr. Speaker, I have quoted to you the statistics which show very clearly that if the other side ever intended when they are in government to phase in any secondary education, that had to be some time in the very distant future because they did not build a single secondary school. So to tell us in your Task Force that you are going to phase in and yet, you built not a single secondary school, all you were doing was phasing up the children and leaving them out of the system—out of the schools. That is what you were doing. If you were going to give them secondary education, then you would at least have a plan and you would have had some design to construct schools for children to be placed, but that was never the case.

Mr. Speaker, we bit the bullet, it was a hard decision, but I think it is one that this country would never forget. It will never forget when every single child who wrote that Common Entrance Examination was placed in a school. They were given the opportunity for education.

The further argument that some of those children would have repeated and they were prevented from repeating is totally false. In the first place, you cannot repeat something you never did before and next year there is no Common Entrance Examination, so how could you say, repeat. It has to be totally false. There is nothing to repeat. In the second place, the ministry has said very clearly that it has no objection to any parent who wishes to have his or her child write the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) so options remain open. What we have done very clearly is to say once you wrote Common Entrance 2000, we have provided a space.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud today. Every year there is a sun that shines when the Common Entrance Examination results come out and this year, I want to place on record and congratulate the family, the teachers and the student, Arvinda Rampersad for placing first amongst the 29,000 children who wrote the Common Entrance Examination. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, how did we do that, how did we establish universal secondary education? It is very interesting because this same World Bank Report said that this could not be done and it would take many years before Government could achieve universal secondary education and it is very clear we were able to do it. It was a hard task, we had to make hard decisions which had ended up in a way, in my respectful view, that could be for the benefit of the children and all of us in this country and I will say why. In the entire country, both in Trinidad and Tobago, it is interesting to note, apart from one school out of all the schools that we have utilized to place the common entrance students, all of them are government or government-assisted schools. That is very important because if we had to rent and buy buildings, I know my friends on the other side would tell us we would be providing more money for the pockets of our friends by renting their buildings and buying their buildings. *[Interruption]*

There was only one and it was the BH Rose Building. I do not even know who owns the building. I have never met or spoken to the owners of the BH Rose building, I want to make that very clear. Whatever negotiations were done, were done through the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education. I have never met in my life the owners, or spoken to the owners of the B.H. Rose building. I want to make that very clear.

Mr. Speaker, this is why it is so important when the Member for Diego Martin East spoke about douen and parrot it looks as though he also feels that "it had douen and parrot" living in Port of Spain, because the problem that we had in placing the common entrance children was very clear and startling in Port of Spain. The 487 students who had been accommodated at the model school, there was nowhere else to put them, not a single secondary school could we have found in Port of Spain to place them.

For the children we placed at Beetham which is now the Excel Composite, if we did not place them there, there was not a single other place in which to place them. Excel is a beautiful school, it was under capacity and there is enough room and facility for the children there.

Mr. Bereaux: And a very good principal.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: And an excellent principal, not very much like the Member for La Brea, a wonderful principal. The school at Carenage which is the St. Pierre Composite, the same thing, under capacity. Again, if we did not place those students at St. Pierre they had nowhere to go and if they say they did not want those schools for douen and parrot in Biche and Blanchisseuse, Coryal and Tableland they did not build a single secondary school here in Port of Spain and the environs.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Do you know how many students that is, Mr. Speaker? Almost 1,000 students right here in the heart of Port of Spain and environs who would not have obtained a place at all and so we created in Trinidad, this year, 24 new secondary schools and centres and out of all of those I am saying they are all neither government or government assisted facilities. We utilized, partnered and joined hands with the private sector for the private schools.

Again, I am hearing complaints about the private schools and the parents understand because when those children did not get a place in the Common Entrance Examination where did they go? Some had nowhere to go, their parents could not afford and for others, the parents had to try to find the money to pay for where? The same private school. That is why the private schools existed. The parents had to take the money out their pockets and pay the school fees. What we did, instead of those parents who could not afford to do that, we said Government would pay the fees for the children we placed in the private schools. We did the best in the circumstances so that every child would be given a chance and not one would be left behind. That is what we did with the private schools.

When we placed all those children there the comments are coming that they are not ready for secondary school. I made that point before and I repeat it because they do not understand. In the past when children wrote the Common Entrance Examination, it was not a question of passing and failing, there was this feeling that because you passed the Common Entrance Examination you got a place in a school. Nothing is further from the truth. There were children who passed the exam, but because there were no school places, they did not get to go to school. Children passed that exam, I said it the last time, and so I talk about the transition rate of 90 per cent in St. Patrick. There are bright children down there, Mr. Bereaux knows about that. Nine out of 10 who wrote the Common Entrance Examination got a place in a school.

In Port of Spain, when you look at the transition rate, six out of 10, so for four out of every 10 children there were no places and they said they failed, but there is no space. In Caroni and Central, it is the same thing. In Tobago, 50 per cent of the children did not get a school place. It is that every five out of 10, 50 out of every 100, no school place because there were no schools. So it is not a question of pass or fail, it is a question of a failure to get a place in a school because there was a failure to provide school places. That is what the issue was and so we found a way and we created, built and constructed and we are constructing all these new schools. The programme is for an additional 12 secondary schools next year under the SEMP Programme and those same schools will be located here right where you say it don't have douen and parrot, but right in Port of Spain. We would place one of those schools in Diego Martin and we are locating a site along the Beetham to build another secondary school.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, that is how we have done it. We recognize it very clearly and they have recognized it too that children cannot learn—you find the space and the desks. They are hungry and they do not have enough to eat and so there is the School Feeding Programme. I was very pleased to hear in the Budget 2000/2001 that the School Feeding Programme has been expanded so now our children can have a meal and the pilot programme for breakfast, that is there too with the School Nutrition Programme. [*Desk thumping*]

9.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of training, again we are told—you know, I heard someone say we put a set of apprentice teachers in the new schools now. Good God! I wonder if the President of TTUTA remembers his first day when he was a teacher. What was he then? Every one of us has had a first day at work. Does that make us an apprentice? So I heard the President of TTUTA saying we have put apprentice teachers in the schools. We have taken the criteria and the qualifications for persons who are eligible, as far as requirements go, and those are the people who have been appointed as teachers, and we have kept a balance. [*Interruption*]

So we have taken those people with experience and transferred some of them into the new schools. We have taken new teachers and put them into existing schools and in the new schools we have transferred teachers with experience and some new teachers, so we maintain a balance. However, one cannot say then that we have taken apprentice teachers.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the acting Prime Minister has ended.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to teachers, not only did this development provide a lot of employment within the construction sector with all the schools that were being built, but it has also provided employment for so many qualified people in this country who wanted to be teachers. So many of them have been able to come into the system; and Government has been committed to teacher training. There is no question about it. Again, if we look at the statistics very clearly, we would see the moneys that we have spent as a Government on scholarships, and these scholarships are going to teachers. Every year for the past three years we have been sending about 100 senior teachers and principals to train for the bachelor of education programme. So there are those who are graduating, those who are in their second year and now the third batch will be going into their first year.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Money is spent on scholarships. We have given scholarships to outstanding students, Mr. Speaker, and again it is a question of putting the money where the mouth is, and that is very clear from the statistics. When we came into office in 1995, the budget was read by this Government, so again I have to look at the 1994 statistics. The moneys spent on scholarships by the then government was \$7.5 million, approximately. In 1993 they spent approximately \$5 million; in 1992—\$6 million; in 1991—\$6.5 million and prior to that in 1990, \$3.8 million was spent. So there is a clear increase but it was kept between \$6 million and \$7 million. So we inherited a situation of moneys allocated for scholarships of \$7.5 million.

When we came into office in 1995 the moneys actually spent in 1995 were \$5.8 million; and let me explain. We came into office in November, so that the moneys were spent up to budget time, which is December, so again those were the moneys allocated by the then government. In 1996 this Government spent \$6.6 million approximately on scholarships. In 1997—\$8 million; in 1998—\$7.8 million; in 1999—\$10 million and in Budget 2000/2001 we have allocated \$15 million. So we inherited \$7 million spent on scholarships and we have now doubled that to \$15 million for scholarships for education. This is for teacher scholarships as well as for scholarships for students. This is again in the area of helping the student. So there are scholarships for students and for teachers.

We have helped students in a tremendous way because even now we see so many people, they meet us sometimes in the Parliament as MPs, they come to our office and say, “Look, my child is going to school and I have no books. I have no money for the books”. This Government last year spent almost \$7 million. We purchased 231,000 textbooks for primary school students and those were free textbooks to be loaned to students in the primary school. When they use the books this year they can be passed on to the students next year—from last year to this year. Why?

Do you remember, Mr. Speaker, the hue and cry when the then Minister of Education introduced standardization of textbooks? The only reason we were able to buy the books and have them lent each year is because it is the same book. So that textbook standardization was a tremendous achievement for this reason, but also for parents who then could not afford to have such a heavy load taken out of their pockets in terms of spending, and I know they are feeling the benefit in this year. This is the first year after standardization for one year and a lot of those books are going to be recycled to the younger children who are now coming in. Second-hand books as well, that will be continuing. It is our intention—we have set up a committee, Mr. Speaker, to also look into the standardization of the secondary school textbooks so that will be our thrust in 2000/2001.

I have spoken about construction, about the scholarships, about the school nutrition programme and the free textbooks, and there is a whole thrust about computers in our schools. The hon. Prime Minister has been adamant that we make sure all our children are prepared in such a way that they can live in this 21st Century and they can live in the global village—the information age and the age of technology. So he has mandated that we ensure that all our schools have computers and we have begun that. That has started and we have placed computers in many of our schools. This year again in the 2000/2001 Budget there is an innovation within this budget that is going to be of tremendous advantage.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard the Prime Minister say if one is computer literate and so forth, one will know that one can walk around with a CD-ROM, one little disk, and that could have 40,000 books on it, and if one does not want to walk around with the CD-ROM disk and one has Internet access, one can download from libraries anywhere any number of books. Any book that one wants can be downloaded and utilized. As Minister Griffith said with distance learning and having Internet facilities within the schools, there are no boundaries. The classroom size and walls no longer confine one. So \$10 million in the 2001 Budget has been allocated for free Internet access for our schools.

In terms of the curriculum, one of the problems we had, and are still having to some extent, is to find teachers in the area of music and drama. Again, that was never really a compulsory part of our education, of our core curriculum, but we have ensured that that is included in the curriculum, so we need to find teachers in the areas of music and drama. That is why, under the then Minister of Education, scholarships were introduced for drama and for music. This year, several teachers will be taking up their music scholarships at the University of the West Indies. I have to commend the hon. Minister for Tobago affairs, the Member for Tobago East, for his innovation in introducing, as a project, music in the school system in Tobago; such an integral part of learning, growing and nurturing. If one looks at the curriculum now for our secondary schools one will see clearly that music and drama are part of the core curriculum together with the language, the maths and the social studies.

Mr. Speaker, when I came into the Ministry I discovered that we have all gone to school and children are continuing to go to the secondary school yet there never was a written curriculum in the schools. There was no manual so that a teacher would know, “This is what I have to teach for language. This is what I have to teach for maths.” There was no written curriculum in the secondary schools of this country. For the first time under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme the curriculum officers have sat together and written out a curriculum so that any teacher can go into a school and know, “This is what we have to do. These are our objectives and these are the modules”.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Do you know how we taught, Mr. Speaker? This is what I discovered. In our schools we were teaching based on the exam syllabus. So in the days when we did GCE, the teachers used to get the syllabus and they taught based on the syllabus. In the CXC they got the CXC syllabus and the teaching was based on the syllabus. So all we were being trained to do was to write this exam, whether it is the CXC or the GCE, and that is why, when the results are shown, we can see how many come out not functional.

Mr. Valley: I just wanted to know, for my own information, could a second-form student also have been taught on the CXC syllabus?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I am advised that there is, up to this time, no written curriculum in the secondary schools; none whatsoever. [*Interruption*] I was surprised because when they brought me the new curriculum I said, "Let me see the old one", and I was advised by the Acting Chief Education Officer, Dr. Marcano, that there was no written syllabus. This is a very good question the Member has asked, because if one is using the exam syllabus to tell one how to teach or what to teach—first of all, it could not tell you how to teach. There were no modules. That is just the syllabus. One must cover 10 to 20 topics.

If we look at the curriculum which will be given out shortly to the schools, we would see it sets out the philosophy behind it, it sets out the objectives and then gives the modules so the teachers will have this as a manual, a blueprint, to teach the subject. [*Interruption*] Yes, it is a new curriculum. We will test-pilot it and fine-tune it, but at the moment there is none. Therefore, what about the second form student—that is what he is asking. Is the second form student still going to use the exam syllabus? Well, that is the question. Who knows what they used? There was no curriculum—none whatsoever. In the same way, Mr. Speaker, we have revised the primary school curriculum.

I spoke already in this House and in the other place, the Senate, about the literacy numbers. Minister Job has spoken about all the studies and surveys which show clearly that we are miserably failing many of our children in the primary school system. If we can have a child scoring zero—and I tell you, I did not believe it myself until I saw the scripts showing that a child at 11-plus writing the Common Entrance Examination, after seven years of primary school, could score zero on an essay. I could see that one could score zero in maths because it is a mathematical—one must get it right or wrong. I thought it was impossible. I could show the Member the scripts. He will not believe. I did not believe it. When I was advised by Dr. Marcano I said, "Bring those scripts. I want to see those scripts". I tell you, Mr. Speaker, you will be amazed that these are our children coming out of the primary school system.

So when we have taken all of that on board, we have revised that curriculum at the primary level in keeping with the Secondary Entrance Assessment in terms of the way things are taught and what is to be taught. The language curriculum has been revised and the maths curriculum for the primary school. So what do we do now? Because there are children in school, what do we do? Mr. Speaker, I made the point about the transition rates. People are saying that one has failed or passed and so forth, and they are saying, “Well, now we have taken children who are not ready and they should not be there”, and we should not have them and so forth. But, Mr. Speaker, those children were there in the system because if we took nine out of ten in St. Patrick, there must have been those in math who were not ready too, using their argument because, as I was saying, it had to do with the places being available.

So in the secondary school system there were many students who needed remedial help but none was provided. No system was set up for remediation in the schools and that is why I took to my Cabinet colleagues the recommendation, and Cabinet approved it, that we would contract and hire over 70 remedial teachers with specific skills in remediation work, in language and in maths, so these are the teachers that we can use for those students who need that kind of help in the Form One Specials throughout the country and in the model school. These are the teachers who will be utilized alongside the regular teachers.

So to say we have taken children from nowhere, put them to nowhere as well because we are still out in the bush somewhere and that we are just leaving them there in frustration—you know, again I saw a member of the TTUTA executive talking about frustration level. I wish someone would tell him—he was talking about reading levels and I explained what is frustration level. He seems to think frustration means “I am fed up and frustrated”. However, in the reading curriculum these are words of art where there are various reading levels.

Mr. Bereaux: Terms of art.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I think someone—maybe, Member for La Brea, you can tell him about the reading levels so that he will understand. So it is when we put them in the Form One Specials he is saying that we put them there for frustration level. We are bringing the remedial teachers into those places for all those students. It is the only way. Yet I am being told, leave them in the primary system. To do what? Do not place them. Let them repeat something that they cannot repeat because it no longer exists? Leave them there to do what? So they can write again? To do what? The Prime Minister was making the point. To do what? To get a secondary school place.

9.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they are telling me to leave them in the primary system. To do what? Let them repeat something that they can not repeat because it no longer exists. Leave them there to do what! So that they can write again! To do what? To get a secondary school place. So you are leaving them to write again. Why? To get a secondary school place. So, why do we not give them the secondary school place now! Why not! Give it to them now and those who need special help provide it by way of remediation teachers. That is the first thing.

Secondly, not only did we bring in the remediation teachers, but also we have given them the undertaking. There are so many children who were never dealt with within the school system and the Government is going to do the diagnostic testing. It is so important. The diagnostic testing that the Government will do in the Form I Specials in the model schools is for children who have physical learning challenges. The Government would be able to help them with those challenges.

Mr. Speaker, there may be a student who is excellent in mathematics but not so good in language. Should I leave that child in the primary system and say you do not belong? It will be done here and this is where the Government will do it. The Government will give the children the remediation. If the children are good in mathematics they can do the regular mathematics, but for the language where they have the challenge the Government will give them more remediation work and vice versa. That is how the Government will do it. You will ask me the question why did I not leave them in the primary system and do it.

First of all, all those thousands of children could not remain in the primary school system. There was not enough space. There would have been many of those thousands who would have been outside, so the Government had to find some way to give them the help they need, and so it is remediation teachers, together with the diagnostic testing that we will do.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, we already have 79 persons who are called curriculum facilitators—and I have heard Mr. Oliver saying the Minister disbanded the curriculum facilitators. That is not true. The curriculum facilitators were there. There was a period of time when we had to get certain things put into process in order to hire this batch. We have hired them. There are 114 to hire. Thus far—at my last count—we have hired 79. What do the curriculum facilitators do? They are facilitators for teachers and will help teachers to teach. They will go to the primary schools generally where the Form One Specials are and they will help the teachers to develop lesson plans in order to help the students. So curriculum facilitators will be in the system.

Mr. Bereaux: Madam Minister, while you are on that point, could you tell us why when you came into Government and you met the facilitators, you did not continue with them? Maybe it was another minister and you may not be able to tell me. *[Interruption]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: My advice from the hon. Minister is that the system was being mismanaged and more time was needed in order to rectify it. Twenty-two million dollars was put into the system and \$11 million out of it was being spent on administration fees. So that you were losing half of \$22 million which was spent on administration costs so that there had to be rationalization. You needed that money in order to get the facilitators rather than the administrators who dealt with the facilitators. In any case, there are curriculum facilitators on board and we will continue with those. I said 79 out of the 114 are there and the facilitators will help the teachers to teach. So do not think that we are just taking the children and herding them like cattle and shoving them into schools and just leaving them there and saying get out this country thank you, goodbye, that is good enough for you. That is not it at all. That is not our intention at all.

Mr. Speaker, if we are still there that is what we will continue to do. We cannot turn back. The Hon. Prime Minister asked them if they were in Government whether they would remove those children from the schools where the children were placed and they did not answer. I can bring the list of the 29,000 children who wrote the common entrance examination. The Prime Minister has asked them to tell us which names to cross out and say that child is not ready or does not belong. Tell us which ones! Will it be my child or your child? Which ones would you cross off that list? They have not answered.

Miss Nicholson: I would like to find out if the same children could not have been left in the primary schools with the same special classes, with the remediation work done there, and when they are ready then send them off. Secondly, I would like to know if the hon. Member has addressed the Tobago question and whether special care was taken before the transfer of remediation teachers from the primary schools, and principals from the secondary schools—whether preparation was done so that they would be replaced by teachers before they are transferred. What would you do for the other children who earned their places—I do not want to say legitimately—to the established schools—if when they go to school there are no teachers.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am advised that as far as possible we have kept a balance. I said that earlier, in terms of the transferred teachers and the new teachers I am advised that this is the case. The children could not stay in the primary school because there is just not enough space for them. There are children coming in at five years and there are not enough spaces. They could not stay within the system. There is no space for them. The choice was outside, or we will find a place for you. In Tobago the situation was the worst because five out of every ten *[Interruption]* I am sorry. I do not know if I will get damaged injury time.

Mr. Bereaux: You will get all the time that you need.

Mrs. James: Madam Acting Prime Minister, I just want to find out what is the position with the Post Primary Schools.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am advised that the students from last year will continue there and they will be phased out. Those facilities can be utilized for the primary system otherwise. One must remember that the Post Primary Centres were not everywhere. There were still not enough places. Those who are in the post primary system now, will continue and finish up what they are doing, but no new ones will be put into the post primary system. Please understand, like in so many other countries there is a cut off point and this is the cut off year.

Mr. Speaker, from this year onwards the system will work with the Continuous Assessment Programme to assess the children and send them on as they are ready. They will write the placement exercise. *[Cellular phone rings]* Mr. Speaker, my apologies and I think this is the first time this has ever happened and I do apologize.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of remediation which I think is very important, it is our intention to have a core curriculum which all must do. On the issue of the Tech. Voc. which has been raised so many times, whether we are phasing out Tech. Voc. and so on. Again, what is in a name? They are saying we are moving the Tech. Voc. in terms of discussion, but there has been ongoing consultation on the issue of Tech. Voc. I have made that decision and it will come out for consultation.

Mr. Speaker, in our schools we have introduced technology studies which would give us the kinds of skills. As I said before, we cannot ride into the 21st Century on the donkey carts we used in the 20th Century. You do not say to a child who is 11 years old, your only job is to pound hammer and nail. So you do not take them at 11 years old and say they do not belong in secondary school, go

to Tech. Voc and become a mason or carpenter and so on. *[Interruption]* I am not saying the hon. Member is saying that, but there is this view by some to send them to trade school and when they come out of common entrance they do not belong to secondary school. Some of us develop a little later. So you give the core curriculum, everybody needs that and from that one can move on, whether he or she wants to specialize in trade subjects or specialize academically.

Finally, on the issue of school security. We have done quite a bit on school security. The Government is spending almost \$66 million on school security at this point in time. It is phased in and we will continue to phase it in. Whilst the economy has remained sound, we have put the people first. Members have worked as a team and I did mention most of the Members, but I do want to commend the Minister of Foreign Affairs together with the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs. These two Ministers are placing Trinidad and Tobago clearly on the map of the world. *[Desk thumping]* So even in the area of tourism—and I know Minister Assam got a lot of flak about Miss Universe and so forth, but that assisted Trinidad and Tobago to be outside there on the world map and all the negotiations, and bilateral agreements with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister of Foreign Affairs with all the negotiations; all the bilateral agreements, is clearly putting Trinidad and Tobago on the map.

9.25 p.m.

As schools open tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, with your leave, may I take this opportunity to say to all those going to school tomorrow—the parents taking their children, the teachers and the students—I want to wish them all the best for the new academic year. I want to ask all of us in the society, let us protect and preserve our greatest resource, our most precious resource, our children. Let us join our hands and join our hearts to ensure that they get the best possible chance. That is all we can look for as the children enter school tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, this team, I am saying, could never have done a single thing without the vision and without the leadership and the courage of the man who is our Prime Minister, the hon. Basdeo Panday.

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

Mrs. Eulalie James (Laventille West): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity once again to enter this debate on the budget 2001. I do this, Sir, on behalf of the people of Laventille West whom I have the distinct honour to represent. This budget statement is no different from the five others presented before it; uninspiring and unimpressive.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Let me, at this juncture, congratulate the Opposition Leader, the Member for San Fernando East, on his comprehensive analysis of the budget and for exposing the less than honest approach of this Government in the way it handles this nation's business. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for Chaguanas either last night or yesterday, and he criticized the performance of the PNM government during its 1991—1995 term, but it is as a result of the policies and hard decisions of the NAR and then the PNM after, that this Government can boast of how successful it is. In addition, they also owe their success to increased oil prices, and this country would have been farther ahead if they had not mismanaged our fortunes. [*Desk thumping*]

He also talked of reduction of poverty. That is certainly the joke of the year. Why then, Mr. Speaker, are the less fortunate in Laventille unable to acquire what is necessary to send their children back to school this term? A PNM government was very mindful of the hardships faced by these parents and the PNM, in its term of office, would normally have additional jobs during the August vacation to assist those single parents, in particular. This Government, instead of adding jobs—and I am speaking particularly about the URP—stopped the programme. There was none. This Government surely has a heart of stone. They do not really care about others, only themselves and their friends.

This budget is clearly an election budget in spite of what the Minister of Finance would have us believe. As it relates to the increase of old age pension, which my colleague dealt with comprehensively last night—but I raise it again, because there are persons in my constituency who have asked me to raise it. I would like them to know that I did raise it as some of them suffer the same fate that my colleague spoke about with the NIS and only receiving the \$520 per month. They would like the Minister of Finance to consider the matter in order to give them some relief.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to public assistance, we are happy that that area has been considered and some amounts have been increased and so forth, but even now, as it stands—because it has not been increased yet—there are mothers who cannot access the funds because of the trauma and kind of process they have to go through where they have to prove whether the father is alive or dead, or the father is away, whether he is on drugs, and whether he lives at home and is not working. There are a lot of things they have to explain, and in some cases, these mothers are not able to explain it. As a result, they are unable to access those funds.

I can tell you that these parents are truly in need. Just the other day, there was a mother who lost her two children by drowning. She had six children. One was on social welfare and she could not get assistance for the other five. She was married and separated from her husband for five years and she is a lady who sometimes suffers from asthma and so forth. She is not in a position to maintain those children as she would wish. Mr. Speaker, it is impossible for that lady to get anymore funding for any of the other children. Well, the Lord has taken two back. It is not something one would wish, but He knows best, and she still has the other four to see about.

Mr. Humphrey: This budget gives it to her.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, while the Minister was addressing that particular situation about single mothers, he did not mention single fathers, and I think that single fathers should be included in this measure, because there are some very dedicated single fathers out there. They should be considered. Probably the better term that should be applied is “single parent”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Humphrey: True. I agree with that.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for St. Joseph giving an account of his stewardship on Friday and boasting of the number of roads repaired in his constituency, and so forth.

Mr. Assam: Not a boast!

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, many of us are not so lucky, but there is another area that I remember which was dealt with extensively by the Member for Port of Spain South, but I still would like to raise it. This relates to the road fund. The people need to know how their money was spent. Remember, it is every driver, whether it be taxi driver, bus driver, private car owner or whatever. Every one of us pay five per cent at the pump and we would like to know how our moneys are spent.

Mr. Speaker, it is more than fair to bring the report here when it is required. I think it is every six months, but this had only been done for two years. Up to now, we are going into the third year and we are missing reports. I would really like to see the Minister of Works and Transport, whether it be the senior or junior minister, bring these reports before this Parliament is closed so that the people would be satisfied that the money was really spent on that for which it was intended.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In the San Juan/Laventille region, except probably St. Joseph, I do not think we can boast of getting very much help from that road tax. The Local Government Ministry, as I understand it, is allotted 50 per cent of that road tax, but the PNM corporations are not assisted with that money. Instead, the Minister “does his own thing” by using the funds himself to fix whatever roads he pleases, and I can tell you that he does not come in any of the PNM controlled areas.

Mr. Sudama: That is not true. That is a blatant lie.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, they can say what they want, but I know from where I stand here, I do not know of any roads where the PNM councils are, that have been paved. Maybe he should bring a report on that to prove me wrong.

Mr. Sudama: That is so unfair.

Mrs. E. James: In last year's budget, Mr. Speaker, in relation to the paving of roads, I could remember pointing the Minister to Act Chap. 48:1, clause 6(2) where it states that “A municipal council is the highway authority for all highways in the municipality classified by Order under section 3 as streets...” That is to say that every street under the municipal corporation should be paved by those municipal corporations, not the Local Government Minister, Mr. Speaker.

He continues to do it rather than give the money to the corporations to do their work. He is not a designated highways authority, Mr. Speaker. The only institutions that are authorized to build or repair roads are the Ministry of Works and Transport for roads under its purview, the municipal corporations and the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me that the Minister is only the conduit of his Ministry for holding the road funds for the corporation. Why does he not give them the money to do the job? That, Mr. Speaker, brings me back to my experience with the Maryland road, because it is the same way he operated here by bypassing the region and bringing in the Diego Martin region to scarify the road and the Chaguanas region to pave the road.

Today, Mr. Speaker, if you visit that road and if you were to see it before it was touched, you would recognize that it is worse than it was then. Before, one could have walked down the road even though one could not drive. Now one cannot even walk down, because there is a high mountain in the road. If he would allow the corporations to do their work—because the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation is well aware of what is happening to that road—they would have done their best to make it passable.

Mr. Speaker, after waiting for almost a year, it was only two Fridays ago that the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation got some moneys to do road work. I understand they got about \$1 million. Another situation is that I understand that three pavilions were built, again without the knowledge of the corporation.

9.40 p.m.

One in Boundary Road, another in Bamboo Settlement and one in Barataria and the corporation has no knowledge of how these pavilions were set up. But, Mr. Speaker, in order for them to do their electioneering and so forth, they are asking the region to put in the electricity. The reason for that is, the region has to pick up the cost of electricity month to month. That is why they want them to put in the electricity. If it were not for that, they would go ahead, put in the electricity and make a big thing about opening and cutting ribbon, which they will still do, I believe, but they want the corporation to put in the electricity after they bypassed it in the first place.

There is another situation. The Member for St. Joseph indicated here the other night that the San Juan market would soon be built. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, whether built, repaired or whatever he said, he knows that that project would be coming on stream soon. That is another project in which the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation does not have any input.

Mr. D. Singh: That is not true.

Mrs. E. James: How is it not true when we have the notes here, one coming from the Ministry?

This is in total absence of consultation and co-operation with the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation.

Mr. Sudama: Oh, it is corporation without co-operation.

Mrs. E. James: I do not want to read the entire thing because the Minister of Local Government is well aware of what entails here. In essence, what happened is they put the market out to tender without the knowledge of the corporation and also awarded a contract without the knowledge of the corporation to Bull Fabricators from Marabella. We may want to question that.

Mr. D. Singh: Mr. Speaker, through you, would the Member please give way?

Mrs. E. James: Not yet. [*Laughter*]

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

On page 2 of this memorandum from the Ministry of Local Government from the Chief State Solicitor to the Permanent Secretary. It says:

"As the present situation shows, the Ministry of Local Government advertised for Tenders to be made on behalf of the Regional Corporation, who did not have the technical capacity to deal with the intricacy of this Project. In addition, with the implied contract between CTB and the Contractor in place, it is advisable that the execution of the contract proceed with the signatories to the contract being the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and the Contractor."

Nowhere here is the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation included. This would mean that the Permanent Secretary would be the client agency, *vis-à-vis* the contractor with the regional corporation only as the beneficiary or the end user. They totally bypassed the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation.

Mr. D. Singh: No. That is not true.

Mrs. E. James: And the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation sought an opinion, too, because they wanted to know what was their status in the matter.

Mr. D. Singh: Who did they get the opinion from? Who was their lawyer?

Mrs. E. James: Do you want to know from whom the opinion was? I suppose I can say. Maxine Williams, Attorney-at-Law.

Mr. Sudama: Who is she?

Mrs. E. James: I want to read parts of the opinion as it relates to the law.

"The Municipal Corporations Act No. 21 of 1990 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Act'), established the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation as a statutory corporation, a legal entity distinct from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The powers and duties of statutory corporations are made clear in the legislation which creates the Corporation.

Section 10(1) of the Act states that the powers of the Corporation shall be exercised by the Council with the Council acting through its Chief Officers and Staff. Section 189(1) of the Act confers on the Council the power to appoint any place within the Municipality to be a public market and to construct market houses."

That is the authority to construct market houses. Mr. Speaker, in the conclusion, it says:

"According to the law, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation is the legal entity created by statute for purposes detailed in the Act such as the construction of markets...It is therefore clear in law that the Corporation may and should be named as a party to a contract for the construction of a market in its jurisdiction."

Mr. Speaker, clearly that was not done.

Mr. D. Singh: The market is being built in San Juan.

Mrs. E. James: The market is in San Juan, yes, but the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation is not involved and that is wrong. By all standards, that is wrong.

Mr. Humphrey: Go to court and stop it.

Mrs. E. James: Well, it might reach there. Who knows? It goes on:

"It is concluded that the Corporation is the appropriate party to be named in the contract for the construction of the market in San Juan. By the Central Tenders Board Ordinance, the Board is required to act on behalf of the Corporation in considering tenders for such works as the Corporation intends to embark upon."

But that clearly was not done.

Mr. D. Singh: What was done?

Mrs. E. James: The tender went out as was stated by them between the Permanent Secretary, the Ministry of Local Government and the contractor.

Mr. D. Singh: It was advertised in the newspaper.

Mrs. E. James: Nothing here said San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. *[Mr. D. Singh rises]* You will get your chance to speak because I think you have some time allotted to you as well so you could always talk after.

Mr. D. Singh: I just want to clear it up right now, please.

Mrs. E. James: No.

Mr. D. Singh: I am begging you. *[Laughter]*

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, I would not be detracted. That is one situation that I do not think is commendable at all. They talk about devolution of authority. They talk about autonomy but they are not allowing those regional corporations to do their work.

Mr. Narine: Empowerment of the community.

Mrs. E. James: That is it. I wish he would allow the corporations to flourish.

Mr. D. Singh: I would allow them to flourish. They are eating too much food now.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, that same market was to be built long ago, you know.

Mr. D. Singh: How long ago are they building it?

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Mrs. E. James: Some time in 1998, \$3 million were allocated but the Tent City had a fire and all of us were sorry about that and we would have done whatever could be done to help and the funds were transferred to rebuild Tent City. Since that, in 2000, they allocated a million and, for this year, they allocated another million but I cannot see the reason for them allocating any moneys when they are going to do it themselves. It does not make sense to me.

Mr. Sudama: Well, how would you do it then?

Mrs. E. James: Well, if they are doing it, they should have some way to siphon the funds, not through the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation because they have no dealings with it.

Mr. Assam: What do you mean by siphon?

Mrs. E. James: Let them work that out.

I am explaining all this to demonstrate the highhandedness and the gross disrespect, particularly, to the PNM-controlled corporations.

Mr. D. Singh: The market must be built at all costs.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, is this what local government is all about? I was reading somewhere in the Medium-Term Policy Framework that there are a number of things they would like to do under local government. It is the first time I am seeing such a long list. It has almost two pages of things they want to do. But the one that struck me most is the one which says:

"To hold regular meetings with Chief Executive Officers, Mayors and Chairman to assist Municipal Corporations in solving organizational problems."

You understand, Mr. Speaker, why that Local Government Ministry always has a lot of confusion because this Minister of Local Government has not held one meeting. It is apparent to me from what they are saying here, he has not held one meeting, since he has been in office, with the Chief Executive Officers, the Mayors and the Chairman. How is he running his Ministry? You must have consultation.

Mr. D. Singh: That is not true.

Mrs. E. James: You must know what is going on in the region. You must call them to confer with you. Why is it here now as something that he hopes to achieve?

Mr. D. Singh: That is ongoing.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, that is the only thing in here that really struck me. I think this is a requisite. This is something that should be ongoing, not something they hope to achieve in 2001—2003, by which time they would not be there at all.

We all know that communication and consultation play a greater part in any organization or association. There is another sore point. Right now—[*Glass of water almost tips over*] Never mind that; accidents happen. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. E. James: You better hush. I do not want to say anything to you, please.

Dr. Griffith: Who? Me? You could tell me anything you want.

Mrs. E. James: I do not believe you would like it.

Dr. Griffith: I would love it.

Mrs. E. James: There is supposed to be an Association of Local Government Associations. After the local government election that was held recently in 1999, there has not been one meeting of that body because the Minister is interfering and would not allow the association to meet. Is it because the PNM has more councillors than the UNC so that when they meet, they are afraid that the PNM will control? I mean, it leaves a bad taste in one's mouth.

9.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would refer you to the Municipal Corporations Act, No. 21 of 1990:

“Part XIII—Association of Local Government Corporations”—clauses 233 and 234.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

“233. (1) There is hereby established for the purposes set forth in subsection (2) an Association to be known as the Association of Local Government Corporations of Trinidad and Tobago (referred to below as ‘the Association’) consisting of all members of Local Government Corporations.

(2) The objects of the Association are to promote the common interests of all local government bodies and more particularly—

- (a) to promote the effective and efficient management of Municipal Government Corporations;
- (b) to act as a medium of communication and to confer with Government Corporations;
- (c) to provide representations on Government or Public Bodies.”

Clause 234(1) states:

“The affairs of the Association shall be managed by a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, and an Executive Committee consisting of not fewer than five nor more than nine members elected by the members of the Association from among themselves.”

Nowhere in this part of the Act tells me that the Minister has any control. He was just talking something about travelling and we know why; it is because he does not want the PNM Members to travel.

I would like the Attorney General who should know about this, when he reads this, to instruct his Minister of Local Government not to interfere with the association, but to allow them to conduct their business in such a manner because the association is to the members like a union to the employees. This association speaks out for these members. They would put forward their cases and so forth; that is the time the Minister would come into play because they would have to make proposals and whatever and iron out their differences and whatever problems they would have. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I want to really advise the Minister to allow the association to conduct its affairs: allow them to hold their election. One year has gone. From tomorrow morning the Minister should give the directive that they must hold their election and run their affairs. What is he afraid of? They cannot do him anything. He is still in the driver’s seat. Allow them to do what they have to do, to get on with the business of the corporations. That is not all.

There is another association, the Caribbean Association of Local Government Bodies (CALGA). It is my understanding that that association was housed in Port of Spain. The chairman of that association at that time was the chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite Corporation and they removed the office to Couva.

Hon. Member: What is wrong with that?

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with that is that the association is not in operation, but the man still remains the chairman even though he is an ordinary council member now. He is not a chairman anymore and he, as far as I understand, accepts trips and all the trappings that go with this office. That has to be clearly illegal. That is a one-man show. How could that be? It is a Caribbean Association. Do the rest of the members of the Caribbean know what is going on here? Do they know that body is not functioning as it should, and could act to the detriment of the entire association, including those Caribbean local government bodies?

A number of wrong things are going on [*Interruption*] you cannot say he is not wrong, you know it is wrong. You are the cause of all these things because you want to be Monarch of all you survey. There is none to dispute. That is what you are all about. You are very high-handed and you want to do what you want. If you had your way, none of those regional corporations would flourish. Then they would not need you, because there would not be any local government. It is time for this Minister of Local Government to put his act together: to allow the corporations to operate as they should, and not curtail their movements.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Successive governments have worked towards moving local government closer to full devolution. This administration has not only reversed the process, but created permanent damage by usurping the authority of duly-elected councils so much so that an application for judicial review may become necessary, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The result has been a deterioration of our communities, infrastructure and relationships with public servants. As a result, hundreds of millions of dollars have been lost through wanton waste and corruption.

Local government is the cradle of democracy in which the PNM fervently believes: it is the avenue through which citizens and communities will be empowered to fashion their own social and economic development and to secure a better quality of life. In order for effective local government to be realized, policies, programmes, and systems must be implemented and will be implemented under the next PNM government. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

You must develop and improve the human resources of respective local government bodies to equip them to deliver high quality service and to be accountable for public funds and other resources at their disposal, and accountability is important. *[Interruption]*

Mr. D. Singh: I hope that is part of the manifesto.

Mrs. E. James: Ensure proper accounting and management systems to maintain those efficiencies which would allow for modern and sustained operations. Even the highest quality of representation and leadership to formulate and implement programmes. *[Interruption]* You should not study “who write it”. This is what a PNM government will do. That is why we cannot go on the way you are going. We cannot continue that way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would really like to see the Minister of Local Government do something about increasing the autonomy of these local government bodies, allowing them to flourish and to treat with the communities the way they should. I believe what the Minister and his Government is setting out to do, is to make us look inefficient and ineffective. *[Interruption]*

10.05 p.m.

We are not, but we appear to be so at this point in time, because they on that side will do nothing in our communities because they believe the people are PNM and they are represented by the People's National Movement's representatives. Mr. Deputy Speaker, every time they deny a request from a parliamentary representative on this side, it is not the representative they are harming, it is the people who are being hurt in the process. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. Speaker, the sooner they recognize that, the better.

Hon. Member: Bad representation!

Mrs. E. James: It cannot be bad representation and the Member knows that. Do you know what usually happens? I will ask a Minister to do certain things and he will tell me “okay, fine, yes”, brush me off whatever, “talk to me again; ring me, call me, write me.”

Mr. Sudama: What did you say he did?

Mrs. E. James: When a member or a group in the community goes to that same minister for the same reason I went to him, he runs into the constituency; he jumps in without the knowledge of the representative, to see what it is they want and maybe to appease them by doing it. But you have been begging on their behalf and they have not noticed you. Gross disrespect! It is time for them to get their act together, although it might be a little too late, but for the few months they remain there they could do something about it.

I am waiting eagerly to see the roads that I have submitted—I have submitted roads, you know. Because I heard the hon. Prime Minister—not the acting one—say that you have to force the representatives to do their work. Mr. Deputy Speaker, not this representative, and I am sure many more of my colleagues, if not all. I have sent roads, and not only me, the councillors under my purview have sent roads to be done and we are awaiting eagerly—

Mr. D. Singh: Would the Member give way?

Mrs. E. James:—to see how and when they would fix those roads.

The Member wants to get up and talk but his time will come. He could get up after me.

I wrote to him—I intended to walk with my last letter from August, 1999—several times about roads in my area. Mr. Deputy Speaker, he came with me one day to see the Laventille Road. Do you know how he came? He took me in the van with the glass turned up. He did not want the people of Laventille to see him. *[Laughter]* And you know, I got flack for that, because I was told, “Miss James, you should have never encouraged that.” I said “yes, I know, but I so want the road to be done.” I thought after I took him there he would do the road. Up to now that road has not been touched. And I took him to see the full length of the road, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Crosstalk]*. *[Laughter]* I put that same road back on the list of roads that I sent and I am eagerly awaiting to see how it would work out.

I really wish that this local government minister will do things differently and put a little more faith and trust in the corporations, because it is clear that he does not trust the corporations. But you must have trust. A good manager delegates, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He would sit back in his rocking chair because he has this one doing that; that one doing that; everybody doing his share and he supervises and makes sure the work is done. That is a good manager. *[Desk thumping]* But he, clearly, is not a good manager.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the Member for Laventille West has expired.

Motion made, that the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by a further 30 minutes. *[Mr. D. Singh]*

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. T. Sudama: Tell us all the other things you did, apart from winding up the glass. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Assam: I cannot believe he ain’t give you no road. *[Laughter]*

Mrs. E. James: It is not a joke, you know, Member for St. Joseph. It is a serious thing. If you were to walk in Laventille—and do not tell me anything about what PNM did and did not do, the point is, roads deteriorate quickly. When I went to Laventille, that road was not as it is today. I went there in late 1994; spent about a year before we lost power, if you want to put it that way, although we say we did not lose power. It was 17/17 and they had a negotiation.

Hon. Trevor Sudama: You lost something.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Deputy Speaker, roads deteriorate. We have one we call St. Barb's Road. That is constantly interfered with by the URP and that road, as a result of the interference—because they are trying to see what they could do to bring it up to some sort of standard but they are making it worse, and that road really needs to be looked after. The last time when I spoke about it, I told him that very soon one section of the community would be cut off from the other section because of that road. So it is really a serious situation and I hope that this Minister of Local Government will buck up.

Before I close, I want to talk about my constituency directly and some of the ills in that constituency. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I notice that there is a skills centre proposed for a building we call the rum bond. At least that is what I heard. I want to ask today whether sums of money were provided in the budget to repair that building, because I searched for it and I have not seen any allocation. So I want to know how would that building be funded to bring it to what they are supposed to bring it to.

Hon. Member: You will get it.

Mrs. E. James: I am asking the question and when he gets up maybe he can answer. Another thing, with this 60,000 jobs, I have a real problem, because I am not seeing any manifestation of that in the constituency I represent.

Hon. Member: Maybe they have no skills.

Mrs. E. James: Do not tell me they have no skills! Everybody possesses a skill. Sometimes you do not even know you possess it until somebody brings it out. So do not tell me they do not possess any skills! That is bad! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Member is winding up. Please do not provoke the Member.

Mrs. E. James: I still want to talk some more about my constituency; I am not really ready to wind up.

Hon. Member: Wind down the glass.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you cannot say that people do not possess skills. Just recently a young man came to me and he was explaining to me some type of job that he was going into—I cannot recall now—but he was asking me whether I thought that was a degrading job because he felt a kind of way to do the job. I told him that as long as it is honest labour, regardless of the job and you get honest pay, that is what it is about. And I referred him to the scavenger. I said that the scavenger is a very important person because if he does not take up the garbage in front of your house, you could get ill. So that is a very important person and they do not need any special skills to do it. So no job is degrading as long as you are getting honest pay.

Even the night soil workers, if they do not work for us we are in trouble. So I do not understand the Member about they having no skills. Everybody has a skill, so do not bring that as an excuse.

Mr. Hart: They against Laventille people.

Mrs. E. James: So I am asking tonight if they could tell me if any of these jobs were permanent or sustainable jobs, because I know in the construction some of them do not last very long. You may have many people working in construction; it may last for two or three months, sometimes maybe a year, but it is short term.

Mr. Sudama: A job is a job.

Mrs. E. James: Even in the URP, how many months a year does that operate for?

Mr. Assam: These are permanent jobs in the services sector.

Mrs. E. James: I do not know, you know, because I am saying that this Government has done very little to stimulate any kind of growth as it relates to sustainable employment. And as I said, I am speaking from the standpoint of the area I represent, because I am not seeing, except for those—because we have quite a number of persons who have good positions from Laventille.

Hon. Member: And they have migrated from Laventille.

Mrs. E. James: No, no. Many of them are still there. I have a doctor living not far from my office; I have an economist who is working in the British High Commission. [*Desk thumping*] and I could call names because I know them. But the majority are people who are not working permanently. They get something today or tomorrow, but that is how it goes.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

So this is the reason I was trying to find out. Another area, since we demitted office—and this one is for the Minister of Housing—the Ramdial Lands Housing Project, phase two, if you want to call it that, was completed and very little had to be done to it in order to hand it out to whoever. Up to this day, going on five years since they are in power, those apartments still remain closed. I understand that they are being done under the lottery system. That is in an effort to keep out the people of Laventille.

Hon. Member: Not at all.

Mrs. E. James: Because these people cannot generate \$10,000 and \$13,000 as a down-payment for any flat.

Hon. Member: Advantage! Discrimination!

Mrs. E. James: There are many of them who were hoping to be allotted an apartment.

Mr. Humphrey: To get it free.

Mrs. E. James: They are not looking for any freeness. They would have paid their money. You see, that is how they think about the people of Laventille! They do not put them in high esteem at any time! I take objection to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the people of Laventille are decent people! We have our share of problems not unlike anywhere else. And the most murders and disturbances come from Central and South Trinidad, Central moreso. So do not try to bring down my people in Laventille! I will stand up for them any day. I do not only know Laventille today, you know; I lived there, my aunt, my mother. Where I live now it is just a few yards away. I am still in the constituency. I have not moved out, even though a lot of people thought I had moved to—where they call it?

Dr. Griffith: St. Lucia.

Hon. Member: Westmoorings.

Mrs. E. James: No, not Westmoorings. Some hifalutin area. I told them, not this lady. My husband provided for me, thank God. He died, but he provided for me and I am not moving from where I am, regardless of where the area is.

10.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not like how they always want to bring down Laventille people. Stop doing it! Because there are some people on the Beetham who, every time they hear this, they are very hurt. Do you know why? They have children who have excelled; children who went to QRC, CIC, and so on. There is

one that I know, right now working with Unit Trust—a big job with Unit Trust—from the Beetham. Oh gosh, have a heart! Not everybody is in the same category. We have our problems, yes. We have people who are not up to mark and so, but they are in the very minority. Laventille is a community that you have to look up to! You have to show respect!

I want to know what they intend to do with these flats and who they are going to give them to, because I would really like to see some of my people—there are some who could afford to pay the rent or whatever, and are able to access these apartments. So I would really like to know the position with those flats.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Port of Spain East Complex; I am tired talking about that. There, again, they would want to blame the people of Laventille and say they are this and that and all sorts of things. But you had a building that was not totally complete; you had quite a number of things to do with it still and, therefore, you should [*Interruption*]. You come and open anything next week! It cannot be opened until it has been properly refurbished, because that is what they have to do now; spend a set of money all over again; plus they have to do the road; the drainage; they have to complete the Desperados thing. I see they are doing it, but they have to complete it. Everything on that centre, the landscaping, everything, must be done before they open it. Any time I know they are planning to come to open it, well, I do not want to say much here.

It would be very heartless of them to come and open the complex as it stands now. Laventille deserves more than that. We do not want any second-rate thing. What they would be putting is a second-rate thing. When they open it, they are not going to finish it, you know. They are going to leave it as it is. Right now it is not in a state that it can be opened. So I just want them to know that, and do whatever is necessary to complete it and make it the world-class building that it is supposed to be.

Water is still a problem in my area. A number of people would call me to ask me to help them get truck-borne water, but there is a problem with that. I do not know if the Minister of Public Utilities could do anything to alleviate the problem that they face. Many of them—we are not talking about living a few yards from the pipe, and so on—are not able to get truck-borne water unless they pay their WASA Bill. Many of them do not pay a WASA bill, but they want water. Water is life and they should not go without water. If they appeal to you for water, you should help them. By not giving them that drop of water they can die! Water is a serious problem in my constituency and I want them to do something about that.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

There is another thing I want to find out about. In light of the tragedy that took place a few months ago, what provision is made in the budget to restore the Clifton Hill and Mc Shine reservoirs? *[Interruption]* You think I should give way? Do not come and tell me any stupidity, you know.

Mr. G. Singh: The contract was awarded to N. H. International in order to deal with the Clifton reservoir and the other thing that the Member raised. So they would be working on that in order to complete that and to provide the security, and refurbish that in order to deal with the water problems in the area.

Mrs. E. James: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I await that and I would look on to see what is taking place there.

The sporting facility at Sogren Trace: I want to say, again, thanks to the former Minister of Sport, the Member for Tobago West, because when I went to her office—you see, there is “Minister” and “Minister”. In fact, I did not go without asking for an appointment. She saw me and gave me a date to come in. When I went, it was class arrangement, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She had all her technical people and everybody around that table sat and listened to me pleading with them to do something about the Sogren Trace grounds. She gave instructions that they must meet me on the grounds to see what is to be done. They came, and the proposals made were to put this hard surface court, to put a pavilion, to upgrade the football field and look at the possibilities of putting in, maybe, some entertainment, like the swings, and so on, for children; a children’s park, or something like that.

That was the plan. To date the hard surface court is completed and even though she is not there I want to say, thanks to the present Minister for seeing that it was completed. But what about the other parts of that proposal? Plus the fact that I saw today in the PSIP the completion of construction of hard surface court at Sogren Trace. To my mind that is already completed. Why is it here? So I could look forward to seeing the pavilion and all the other things. *[Interruption]* I could have done without bringing it up, you know, Member for Oropouche, but, you see, I am an honest person.

The acting Prime Minister has left the Chamber, but the final thing I had to bring up as a problem, it is not that the school is a problem because we are grateful for the Beetham school, but the only thing is that they changed the name of the school to Excel Composite, or something like that. It should read Excel Composite and Primary School, because the primary school is still there. My concern is for the children. They have two dangerous roads to cross. You have the

Eastern Main Road and the priority bus route and they dare not take a chance to come from the Beetham Highway. The school is here; the Beetham Highway; the bus route right here as they step out the school, and the Eastern Main Road, and they must cross those two roads to get to the school. I am very concerned about that.

Minister of Education and Acting Prime Minister arrives in Chamber.

Here comes the Minister. I am talking about the security and the safety for those children who are going to the Beetham school, because they have to cross two dangerous pieces of road to get to that school. Some mothers have complained to me even before the Excel school was there, that they did not want to send the children to the school, not because they do not like the area; nothing is wrong with the area, and they have a very good principal, but they feared for the safety of their children. They say, “Mrs. James, how could my child cross the Eastern Main Road? If you miss the Eastern Main Road you get pick up on the bus route.” That is my only concern with that school and I hope that something would be done with dispatch in relation to that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The Member has asked two questions. One is, why have we called the school a composite school, and we should call it the Excel Composite and Primary because the primary is still there. In the education Act of this country, the law of this country, a true composite school—this is why it is called a composite school—is one in which both primary children and secondary children attend the school. So a composite school takes into account the full age range of the children. So it is called Excel Composite and the Beetham Composite. There is one, I believe, in either Toco or Mayaro. But a true composite school in law, is one which caters for both age groups. That was her first question.

The second one she has raised, I was also concerned about. That school was there before, as the Member knows and as she has said, and I was very concerned about the crossings there. I have made representation to the Ministry of Works and Transport and to the Minister in the Ministry of Works and Transport, Sen. Carlos John, and he has given the undertaking that they will do works in order to put a safe crossing at that school. It is unfortunate that that school is opening tomorrow and it is not yet done, but I do share her concern. In fact, that was something that I found existing while the school was there. But I share her concern and we would take it on board.

Mrs. E. James: Thank you very much.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have tried to raise the concerns so far as they relate to Laventille. I got answers from two Ministers. I would not allow the other one to answer me because he has his time to speak and I know he is going to rub in whatever he has to say. But before I close I have a clipping here from Sunday, August 27, 2000, headlined: “Dhanraj still waiting to hear his name.” When you read it he is even purporting to have done so many good things and so on, so he is probably appealing to his leader to give him another chance. I, too, want to ask the leader to give him another chance. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hope that the next headline would be “Dhanraj is accepted.”

With these few words and the concerns that I have raised and the points that I made, I hope that they listen to me carefully and would try to rectify many of the concerns that I have raised. I look forward to that.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

10.35 p.m.

The Minister of Distance Learning (Dr. The Hon. Rupert Griffith): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I join the Members of this honourable House to make a very, very brief contribution on this budget debate. Before I go on, let me congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for yet another excellent budget, a budget that will empower the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] A number of Members raised some issues that I will address. I think the first one I would look at is the Member for Toco/Manzanilla who complained that the budget was very silent about telecommunications and he complained about the lack of bandwidth for the technology.

I really do not know what the Members on the other side do because if one looks at the *Medium-Term Policy Framework 2001—2003*, a document which was circulated to all of us, and turns to page 40, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would certainly see that it says here in the third paragraph of section xix:

“Over the medium-term, provisions of the new Telecommunications Act will be fully implemented, and will establish a new and modern legislative and regulatory framework for telecommunications and broadcasting services in Trinidad and Tobago. In so doing, it will encourage new providers to enter the domestic sector, especially for internet-based services.”

What that means simply, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that once we have opened up the industry—and the Member is well aware because he himself had applied for a cellular licence, and he is well aware of what is happening in the industry and he knows fully that this Government’s intention is to open up the telecom system to competition in Trinidad and Tobago.

He knows full well that there are many initiatives, such as expanding the broadband telecommunication technology for Trinidad and Tobago. For instance, there are companies such as Global Crossing coming in that will wire us and link us up with the rest of the world and what that broadband technology will provide is a conversion of technologies going through one system, that being video, high-speed data and telephony voice, and that will give us almost unlimited bandwidth.

As new providers come in, the Telecommunications Act will call for interconnection and that interconnection will allow all incoming providers or new providers into the market to interconnect with the current carrier, and when they build their own infrastructure they will be providing greater bandwidth for the high-speed data that he talked about; and a lot of countries want to come in. I wish he was here. He called me this morning and I told him I would explain what is happening very briefly tonight as far as opening up the telecom sector. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago will be the hub of the Caribbean when we complete all of our initiatives as far as telecommunications is concerned.

The other issue I want to address, Mr. Deputy Speaker, deals with part of the presentation of the Member for La Brea. In his presentation he talked about—and I will quote what he said here, just to show you how the Opposition comes to this House on a regular basis, Friday to Friday and all we hear is the same old story, the same old hat. They go down the same path, the overly ploughed path. It is like a cow's path all of them go down and they talk about the issues of corruption and about the airport. Every one of them today and yesterday spoke on the airport issue—the same issues over and over and over.

I want to compliment the Member for Laventille because, while her presentation was somewhat [*Desk thumping*] punctuated with some very signalled remarks such as “doing wrong things”, such as “brushing her over”, such as “winding up the glass with her and driving”, she is calling on the Minister to “buck up” and “rub in” whatever. I do not know what she is talking about so I cannot respond to it, but maybe my colleague from Pointe-a-Pierre will answer that because he is perhaps in a better position to understand what she is referring to.

However, with respect to the presentation of the Member for La Brea—and I am sorry he is not here—let me read what he says, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a *Hansard* document, page 7 and he says:

“When they came into Government they met the on-the-job training going on, it was the same thing whereby young people would come in and the state would help the employer and pay a portion of their salaries. There were several young people like that, scores of them, when I was employed at Petrotrin who came in and a number of other employers did it.”

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

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

This is what is on the *Hansard* record. Apparently it is a very confused input. I guess what he is probably trying to say is that there once was an on-the-job training programme run by that administration. He went on to say a little more by continuing:

“They so wanted to corrupt it and interfere with it, and they found that it was well organized. They went ahead and stopped it...”

It is a lot of “its”.

“...just like they did when the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), just like they try to do, and have done to some extent, with the youth camps.”

Very incoherent:

“They did it wilfully, and now they have tried to bring this in through the back door, because the Prime Minister got up in a political...”

I suppose the word “meeting” was left out:

“...got up in a political and said that the PNM will only go out and talk about how the UNC stopped the Civilian Conservation Corps, how they stopped the youth camps and how they stopped the on-the-job training. Now, they come back in and playing they are bowling political googly on the population and try to bring it in as some innovation.”

That is the quality of the presentation that came from a learned attorney, a former Petrotrin attorney, on the other side. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they misled this House and they have been able to get away with it.

Let me tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), has not stopped. The YTEPP has undertaken to provide training at not only its own designated centres but also community-based centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. They have been facilitating the various interest groups and have indicated a willingness to set up centres in all communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. From 1996 to the present, there have been nearly 30,000 graduates and 4,500 from the community-based centres. The 30,000 were from the YTEPP main centres and 4,500 from the community-based centres. So how can he come to this honourable House and say we stopped the programme?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the years 1996—1997, the 9—12 cycle—there were three cycles during that period—there were 27,414 students enrolled; 20,642 of them graduated, and that is in the main centres. In cycle 13—14 in 1998, 8,166 students were enrolled—that is one cycle—and 6,226 graduated. In cycle 15 in 1999, last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 1,909 were

registered and 1,524 in one cycle completed. In cycle 16, 1999—2000, there were 2,065 enrolled and 1,653 graduated. In cycle 2000 so far—the registration is going on—almost 2,000 people have registered, and it is not yet closed and completed.

When we look at the community-based figures between 1996 and 2000, in 1996—1997, 4,023 enrolled and 4,023 graduated. There was total graduation, yet he comes here to criticize something that is good, something at which they failed miserably because when we took over YTEPP it was nothing but a lot of confusion. We streamlined the whole thing and put them under the guise of the National Training Agency, which is the agency responsible for the accreditation and certification and regularization of training in Trinidad and Tobago. We have streamlined the training and made it very efficient so that those students graduating from YTEPP have saleable, marketable skills and their entry into the world of work is now a smooth transition. When we took it over, students graduating from the formal training programme had difficulties in getting into the world of work and making the relevant adjustment, yet they come here and criticize. Why can they not be magnanimous and give credit where it is due?

I listened to the hon. Minister of Education tonight and the revolution that is going on in training and education in Trinidad and Tobago is unprecedented. I will talk [*Desk thumping*] in a few minutes about what we inherited and the kinds of difficulties that people involved in training experienced under their administration and I will compare it to our administration. When we look in 1998, in the community-based centres there were 441 enrolled; 441 graduated. In 1999 there were 1,976 and 1,974 of them graduated; yet he comes here and makes an incoherent input about we are closing down YTEPP and CCC.

Hon. Member: Who is “he”?

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Member for La Brea—all right, the Member for La Brea. But Mr. Deputy Speaker he talked about we closed down the CCC. Under that administration, what they did with the Defence Force was they put them out into the field and they went into the communities and cleaned up and built certain sheds and different things and it was not really a targeted and directed training. It was not properly planned. They went out there and spent X number of weeks working; they were paid a stipend and at the end of it all they did not receive a certification.

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

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

In this administration, we did not stop the CCC nor the youth camps and my colleague talked about that. But in the CCC we brought the trainees in, we incorporated the community-based training into what is called the implant training, and they followed a fixed syllabus. They were exposed to a fixed body of knowledge, they were able to develop skills that were well thought out and targeted, and at the end of it all they received a certification. So they can now go to an employer and the employer can see exactly the types of training they pursued and what are their competencies, and they have a certificate to show that they had successfully pursued training. That is what we have done with the CCC. There was just a very brief period where we stopped the programme to rationalize it—integrate it into the YTEPP. I tell you that the trainees coming out of those programmes today are better off than they were before. That is what this administration put in place. So, that takes care of those two comments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, the Member for San Fernando East—the other point with which I would like to deal, in his attempt to rebut the 2000/2001 Budget presentation—as a matter of fact, all the Members on that side in their rebuttal came up woefully short this year. I do not know how in the world they could take a budget like this where we have several excellent inputs for all levels of persons, from the very young to the very aged, a budget where we increased pension by yet another \$100, we increased the social assistance, we removed VAT on things like eyeglasses and wheelchairs, and all they could say is they are disappointed because they feel the senior citizens should get more.

The Prime Minister talked about how, under their administration in 1993 when they were in power they raised the old age pension by \$23—[*Interruption*] Yes, and I left it, and brother, I thank God for the vision and the wisdom when I left it. [*Desk thumping*] I can see now, as I saw then, the kind of degradation and bondage that I was in, and I thank God for giving me the vision and the strength to leave it. [*Desk thumping*]

So all they can say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that they thought the senior citizen or the old age pensioner should get more. But they raised it by \$23 in the first instance and then they added on \$9. If we divide \$9 by 30 days we will see the kind of increase they gave those senior citizens in their time. And then they come—how many cents? It was 27 cents a day—in this House and say we should give them more, after four years of increases, you know. I listened to the radio and I heard the commentator ask Mr. Manning right after the budget presentation, the Member for San Fernando East, “What did you think about the Budget?” He said he was disappointed. He said that he is disappointed. He was then asked why he was disappointed, and he said he felt the old people should have gotten more. Can you believe that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? In his time when he had the reins in his hands what did he do? He gave them \$23 and then \$9. It is really something else.

10.50 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that one hour and 35 minutes presentation from the Member for San Fernando East is the worst I have heard in 10 years in this Parliament. The Member referred to many things which he could not substantiate; wild allegations and comments. I suppose being in opposition he feels that he can say anything and get away with it, but I remind him, if after 29 years he does not know, that there is a thing called *Hansard*. I read the *Hansard* and I take this opportunity to compliment the *Hansard* Reporters for the excellent work they are doing in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] That information is there and it is going to come back to haunt him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I said I was going to be very brief tonight, but let me refer to what the Ministry of Training and Distance Learning is all about. The Ministry has the basic functions of distance learning, training and retraining, national apprenticeship system, youth training and partnership programme, educational broadcasting and the Government Printery. I must mention that training is not something that can happen in a vaps. Training is about empowering people so that they could not only have saleable skills, but to enable them to cope in this very changing world in which we live.

Mr. Speaker, I would now tell of some of the things we experienced when we took the responsibility for training. We realized that training in Trinidad and Tobago needed some form of regulation. After 34 years of that administration a national training policy had not been developed. Since we took office we have established a national training policy which will soon go to Cabinet and form the backbone of legislation for Trinidad and Tobago.

There were a variety of concerns pertaining to technical vocational training in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker, and over the years there were the questions of relevance, ineffectiveness and lack of efficiency. The previous administration, now the Opposition, never really put any national training system for education and training in place. When this Government came into office and we took over the training system there were a number of things. There were persistent vacancies in some occupations and surpluses in others. Persons were continually being trained for jobs that no longer existed. There appeared to be insufficient training opportunities for persons in vulnerable groups.

Mr. Speaker, some of the training providers' curricula were unrelated to the requirements of the industry, therefore, there was a form of mismatched training. In other words, people were being trained but when they entered the industry they did not even have the entry level skills so, in turn, the company had to spend money to retrain those people before they could begin to perform.

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

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

There was also a lack of development of other key skills. Technology is changing and as the economy evolves there are new careers and jobs and the training system never catered to that. The previous administration continued to train people in those areas just as they go down the same cow's path with the nonsense they come here with every Friday and when new technology emerges we have to bring people from outside to occupy those jobs through the Work Permit Committee. Many trainees were not being trained for the advanced technology and equipment usage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were complaints from employers about the quality of outputs from the technical vocation educational and training system. There were complaints about the time it takes by training providers to respond to new demands. They had absolutely no guidance. Today, in the National Training Agency, we have established what we call the Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) that work hand in hand with us to develop the curricula and body of knowledge so that when people are trained in plants or institutions they can enter the world of work. There was nothing like that under the last administration. We have quickly put that in place to make training relevant and efficient to those persons who go through the system.

There were also complaints about limited portability of skills generated by trainees. We found many government agencies doing training and there were complaints about the bureaucracy within the ministries affecting public training. Some training courses were too long in duration—longer than they really should be—to give the people the skills necessary so that they can perform. There appeared to be some under-utilization of staff and training facilities within some ministries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1994, under that administration, \$50 million was spent on training and when one looks at the value for that money it is not quantifiable. We found that people were sent on training because a supervisor, perhaps, wanted to get rid of a worker. Of course, there were some skills needed and it was well pointed, but in most cases persons received training and at the end of the day when one is evaluated or assessed it is found that the training was very irrelevant and the kinds of skills that were developed were not really appropriate for their job function. There was obvious fragmentation and multiple sponsorship in public sector training and people were sent on several occasions to different types of training which was not properly planned and appropriate. There was no plan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, right now every minister of this Government must come to the Cabinet at the start of the fiscal year with their ministry's training plan which has to be approved before the Minister or the Ministry can approve training for persons in that ministry. This is something which never happened under the last administration. There was training by vaps. A \$50 million training programme comes up. They send them off on training. Now it is well-organized, well-planned and it is efficient. That is what this administration put in place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we realize individuals are most employable when they have a broad-based education and training; when they have basic and portable high levels of skills including things like teamwork, problem solving, information communication, technology, communication and language skills. People ought to learn how to learn because we are living in an information age. There is an information explosion. People have to learn how to learn and have competency to protect themselves and their colleagues against occupational hazards and diseases.

We have also looked at training special groups and the employable vulnerable. I would explain what that means. We are talking about young workers, differently abled persons, older and displaced workers and the incarcerated population. I ask the hon. Members on that side: What types of training did they do for the incarcerated persons, that is, training within the prisons? What could they show? This administration looked at the young workers and we realized that the young people should be provided with a foothold in the labour market through short-term in-plant training and which could effectively improve employment outcomes where there is a demand for low or semi-skilled workers. It is for that reason we have implemented an in-plant training and retraining programme for young people between the ages of 17 and 35. That programme is ongoing right now.

11.00 p.m.

When they come out of that programme, they will have occupational work experience, because part of the training goes on in-plant, and they would have attained the relevant skills and knowledge for the job when they come through those programmes.

When we look at the differently able, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there will be an improvement in the access of this group to mainstream education and vocational education. Many of them were left out the system and they could not get into it. In addition, special schools, training facilities and programmes such as supported employment and sheltered work will be available to cater for their particular needs.

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

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

When we look at older displaced workers, the training programme for displaced workers will be conducted through the public providers. There will also be subsidized employer training for mature workers and loans to help finance investment in their own skills training, job search and counselling programmes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a lot going on in training, the National Training Agency has been put in place to regularize training in Trinidad and Tobago. Let me spend just a few moments on distance learning. What are the specific objectives of distance learning systems for Trinidad and Tobago? As you know, our national distance learning system was launched in December 1998. What that system will seek to do is provide citizens with cost effective, equitable access to a range of training, information and educational services. That will be done both locally and abroad.

We have already established a distance learning secretariat, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that we have already entered in an understanding agreement with several institutions in the United States, Canada, India and other parts of the world so that through web-based training, our citizens can stay right here in Trinidad and Tobago and pursue higher education at these institutions. It is just as efficient, the quality is assured and it is cheaper, because the distance learning secretariat picks up lots of the registration costs.

Distance learning seeks to afford priority to residents of more geographically and socially isolated communities. It supports traditional methods of delivery by incorporating distance learning modalities. The modalities we are using are web-based training through the Internet whereby one goes through the whole registration procedure. They can now take courses, whether real time or asynchronously on courses from other institutions. We are also using television and radio and, with the assistance of the Government Printery and the Learning Resource Centre, learning activity packages which support the electronic training or the web-based training which our trainees pursue.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I want to tell you that we have already established several community-based distance learning centres today. There are 11 which we have established. We have equipped them with computers, television sets, radios and at those centres we are emphasizing computer literacy as the first stage to web-based training.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the courses that they pursue at the community based distance learning centres are hardware and software basics, Windows operating software, introduction to the Internet, word processing, Excel, presentation of graphics and PowerPoint, database access and data communication. We have trained over 4,000 persons in these centres and I want

to tell them that the enrollment list is long. They are oversubscribed. Last Saturday we opened a distance learning centre in Brazil. It is already oversubscribed. Next Friday, we will be opening one in Carenage. It is already oversubscribed, and in the 10 other centres they are completely oversubscribed.

The good news is that age is not a barrier. We have seen a person as young as six years graduating from the community based distance learning centre. A six-year-old teaching a 78-year-old. In my colleague's constituency, Couva South, I think the eldest person there was 68 years old and in the Prime Minister's constituency, there was a lady who graduated who was 78 years old. They are coming out computer literate and many of them have already established their own small businesses in their homes. One lady, just last week, was telling me that she knew nothing of computers. She is now computer literate and through e-commerce she is selling brand new cars and she is making gainful employment.

Mr. Speaker, just in closing, it is this Government's aim to empower the people of Trinidad and Tobago, so that they can fall in line with the information age and the information technology that is available to them. No longer is distance a problem, location a problem, or age barrier a problem. Access to education is what we are seeking to establish for all people. We in Trinidad and Tobago have an access rate for graduating secondary school students of seven per cent into higher education. It should be about 23 per cent. Other countries in the region are way higher than us, and through the distance learning system that we have, people will be able to become all they are capable of being and they will be able to access any level of education and training.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Martin Joseph (*St. Ann's East*): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2001. I listened with interest to what the Member for Arima was saying and giving the impression that this Government inherited a situation as it related to distance learning that was abysmal. He talks about when they came into office, what they met in terms of institutions designed to enhance the learning capabilities of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and to make citizens of Trinidad and Tobago competent and ready to deal with the current environment in which we live.

Mr. Speaker, he talked about the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP). He talked about the fact that there were no problems in YTEPP and they did not close down YTEPP, that all they were doing was trying to streamline YTEPP. He did not talk about the fact that persons who were employed with YTEPP for a number of months were unpaid and that there were problems related to YTEPP that took some time to be resolved. He glossed over the question about the Civil Conservation Corps.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

The point about it is that he gave the impression, and I think it is the same comment that was made by most Members on this side, that if we listen to Government spokespersons, we will believe that everything started with the advent of the UNC in office, and nothing could be further from the truth. Most presenters on this side gave evidence to refute that, so the question one must ask is, why is there a need to lie? Why is there a need to exaggerate the performance and the circumstances?

We have been on record, Mr. Speaker, and will continue to say that this Government has inherited what can easily be described as a windfall. If we look at the financial circumstances of this Government over the last five years, it is estimated that some \$65 billion have passed through their hands. We have been able to identify, in terms of the presentation of the Member for San Fernando East, that he referred to as “the top 10”, some \$5.4 billion that can be identified as projects that can be characterized as squandermania.

When the hon. Acting Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, makes the comparison between the Government's performance of 1991—1995 with respect to the construction of schools, whether primary or secondary, and compares her Government's 1996—2000, I am saying she is comparing apples and oranges, because if she looks at the period 1991—1995, the economic circumstances of this country did not permit it to construct the number of schools they can now construct because of the amount of revenues they have available to them.

I think it is unfortunate. I think in the attempt to politicize, we do ourselves an injustice. [*Desk thumping*] We are saying that if we were there between 1996—2000, I can assure her that our priorities would have been different, we would not have squandered \$5.4 billion and the nation would have gotten a whole lot more as a result of the performance of the PNM government. They have the moneys available to them. Mr. Speaker, I think we need to understand that.

I want to focus on just a few areas. It is 10 minutes after 11.00 and I do not intend to keep Members here unnecessarily long. Let me, first of all, focus on the area that deals with the retired public servants. I brought the public servants to the attention of this honourable House on two previous occasions. The Minister of Finance, in presenting the budget at page 45 under retired public servants, made the comment:

“Mr. Speaker, last year this Government took up the plight of retired public servants. Before that their pension levels had not been increased for 14 years.

Last year we increased the basic monthly pension by \$75 at the higher income level and by \$250 at the lower level.”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, let me quote the Minister's statement in last year's budget speech:

“Accordingly, I propose to increase the basic pension of all public officers who retired on or before thirty-first of December, 1998.

Public officers who retired between the first of January 1996 and thirty-first of December 1998 will receive an increase of \$75 per month. Approximately 4,000 retired public officers will benefit.”

Mr. Speaker, for the public officers who retired on or before thirty-first of December 1999, the increases were granted on a sliding scale as follows: Individuals in receipt of a pension of over \$3,500 per month will receive an increase of \$152 per month. Some 352 retirees were affected. For those who were receiving \$2,501 to \$3,500 per month, an increase of \$175 per month. Some 1,099 retirees were affected. For those who were receiving \$1,501 to \$2,500 per month, an increase of \$200 per month. Some 6,021 retirees were affected. For those who were receiving \$1,001 to \$1,500 per month, an increase of \$225. Some 2,775 retirees were affected. For those receiving up to \$1,000 per month, an increase of \$250 per month. Some 5,307 retirees were affected.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the \$75 increase was tied to the dates of retirement and covered all pension levels. In fact, if the 4,000 who benefited were in the same ratio salary-wise as the early retirees, they should be about \$90 at the highest income level and about \$285 at the next lower level.

11.15 p.m.

On the same page 45, he said:

"For those retired public servants who receive pensions less than \$2,500 per month, I propose a further increase of \$150 per month. Mr. Speaker, that's \$400 within two years."

That quote is a distortion and a travesty of the truth and, I hope, not deliberate on the part of the Minister. You see those public officers who retired between 1/1/96 and 31/12/1998 and are getting less than \$2,500 per month, the increase is \$75 plus \$150 which is equal to \$225 per month; not \$400 as stated by the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development.

For the earlier retirees, those at the lowest level will indeed get \$400; the next level will get \$375 and the others will get \$350. Mr. Speaker, the 352 retirees who get \$150; the 1,099 who get \$175 and the 6,021 who got \$200 and are now in receipt of pensions of \$2,500 per month and above, will get nothing. Note that

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

those retirees, in general, were senior public officers, like the dedicated servants to whom the Minister recorded his gratitude and expressed his appreciation for their work. Remember, he said it earlier in his presentation and I quote:

"In particular, I wish to express my appreciation to the senior public servants in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development who have been such competent stewards of our fiscal health."

Can the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development state what is the reason that 1,451 senior public service retirees and approximately 3,000 middle rankers who got \$200 increases and had their COLA consolidated with their pensions thereby bringing them over the \$2,500 cut off point, are being discriminated against in this manner? If all retired public servants were treated equally and all given the \$150 increase, the extra cost per year would have been approximately \$8 million. Here you have a group of persons and you would recall, Mr. Speaker, that in the last budget presentation, I expressed concerns on behalf of the Government Pensioners Association about the sliding scale approach since it penalized the officers who occupied senior positions prior to their retirement and remember, had recommended instead a flat \$250 per month.

Here we have senior retired public servants making a plea for a matter that at the end of the day would only cost \$8 million additional to the Treasury and would increase and improve their circumstances. I am hoping, in light of the financial circumstances that this Government finds itself in, that the additional \$8 million will not be too much in light of a budget of \$13.5 billion. Again, reference to the top 10 projects that my political leader, the Member for San Fernando East referred to, that cost an estimated \$4.5 billion. I am hoping in those circumstances, that an additional \$8 million will not be too much to ask on behalf of these retired persons.

Mr. Speaker, the other concern raised by the Government Pensioners Association was the fact that they still have to pay income tax on their pensions along with VAT. That is a situation that they are also asking the Government to look at in terms of paying of taxes on their pensions.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to ask, in light of the fact that we talked about retired public servants, that we spend some time looking at the situation with respect to current public servants because at some point in time, they are also going to be retirees. I must remind this honourable House that the Member for San Fernando East, the Leader of the Opposition, in his last year's budget contribution, raised the plight of public servants who have not received pay increases since 1983. When the Member for San Fernando East indicated that number two of his 10-point plan is addressing public servants' salaries, he is consistent with his call.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition made a call last year to the Government also to implement the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission Report as they related to public servants, leaving out the politicians. When he reiterated that position again this year, he was being consistent.

Let me spend a few moments on the Salaries Review Commission Report. The hon. Member for San Fernando East suggested that the recommendations as they relate to public servants be paid and those that relate to politicians be sent back to the Salaries Review Commission because of certain anomalies about which some Member spoke.

Let me address one of the anomalies as it relates to us here in this particular Parliament. As you know, Mr. Speaker, in recent years, there has been no set pattern of parliamentary recess and as a consequence, Members of Parliament go without vacation, sometimes it could be for the entire five years of Parliament. There is, therefore, in my opinion, a need to provide for either vacation leave for Members of Parliament, including your good self or whoever is the Speaker, or salary in lieu of vacation leave, when no formal recess period is enjoyed. At present, only Ministers are entitled to vacation leave or, in lieu of vacation leave, salaries.

I read an article recently that said that Ministers of Government are in for hefty sums of money because of the fact that they have not taken any vacation during their period and at the end of their term, they are entitled to whatever that is. There was a time when the Parliament was—I should not say more organized because it would give the impression that we are not organized now—but there was a time when recesses were—I should not say fixed; they were much more organized.

I have the information because I requested it from as early as 1981 where parliamentarians took a break for Christmas; there was a specific break for Easter and there was a break for what is referred to as the summer vacation. There was a pattern so that you knew during the August vacation, Parliament would have been on recess for a month or two months so that those with families could have taken their vacation with their children.

Because of the circumstances—and I am not faulting this Government. This is the first time I am in the Parliament. I am not ashamed to say I am a neophyte—first time in the Parliament—but you are not in a position to know precisely when Parliament is going to recess, perhaps because of the hectic nature of business.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

I see the hon. Attorney General watching me and I remember when we got the two weeks in August, the Attorney General, in giving us the recess said, "I know some Members have families and they may want to take their vacation." We got the two weeks and I left feeling so good, saying, "Ah ha! Here is a man who understands people who have family and stuff like that." Then I read that the Attorney General was having this big wedding and the purpose for the two-week break we got was to facilitate his wedding. I cannot fault that. I mean, he does not have many children so that pretty soon, he would be running out of marriages so chances are we are not going to get any break.

Mr. Assam: The Attorney General got married again? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Maharaj: At least that shows you think I am going to be here for a long time.

Mr. M. Joseph: The point I am making is a serious one. I believe there is a need for either one of two things. I think there is either a need for us to so organize the manner in which the Parliament sits so that people will know that vacations are going to take place at these appointed times except perhaps for some emergency where Members would need to be called back but we would realise that over the last parliamentary term, there has been a certain inconsistency in terms of the sittings and breaks, *et cetera*.

I think that if we are talking about the question of the Salaries Review Commission's Report, this is just one example of anomalies that exist there that need to be addressed. There are a whole host of others in there that I do not think I need to bore us with, so that I am endorsing the suggestion made by the Member for San Fernando East, that is, implement the aspects that deal with the public officials and send back those that deal with the politicians for us to really take a serious look at some of the anomalies that exist in the report. I am saying I just used that as one example, but there are numerous anomalies.

Let me just say something else also. The Member for Couva North, in terms of the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission, I want to endorse the statements by both the Member for San Fernando East and the Member for Diego Martin East, that the Government really got caught with its pants down, if I could borrow that term and if it is not unparliamentary. The Member for San Fernando East used the words, "in the cookie jar". They really got caught. There is no question that the intention of the Government to implement the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission was clear. As my friend from Laventille East/Morvant indicated, what is rightfully theirs, they still have to go about it in a sneaky manner.

Listen to the comments of the Member for Couva North. His first reaction was, "No. It would not be implemented until there were extensive deliberations in the Parliament." That was his first reaction when he was called upon to comment on the fact that they had discovered that these increases were factored into the budget. That was his first reaction.

When he came here yesterday or the day before, he indicated a different position. It was on Monday, September 4, in his contribution to the budget debate. He indicated that the recommendations for public servants will be implemented after negotiations have been completed with the lower levels of public servants. That does not make sense. Now, I have heard that argument put forward already in other places but it does not make sense. Let me tell you why it does not make sense.

The impression given is that if the recommendations are implemented, it will influence negotiations at the lower level. But, Mr. Speaker, the recommendations are clear for everyone to see. They have monetary value and there are other values associated, so that all that negotiators at the lower levels have to do, is to see what is the quantum of the increases that are recommended and if they want to use that as a benchmark, they could use that as a benchmark. It is up to the Chief Personnel Officer and the other persons who are negotiating for the lower ranks to exercise their capabilities as they relate to bargaining, to make sure they bargain in such a way that they come up with salary proposals that are acceptable to both parties and for which the Government can afford.

I do not understand the fact that it is now being said that the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission will not be put in place until such time as negotiations are completed for the lower level ranks. Not only that, it makes a travesty and a joke of the Salaries Review Commission. What is its job? To wait until lower levels are negotiated for, before it decides to make recommendations as they relate to salaries for senior public officers and politicians?

11.30 p.m.

Clearly, the explanation given by the Member for Couva North just does not make sense. When he said they were not going to implement it all that showed was a lack of political will. You would recall when that motion was brought to the Parliament we were being asked to accept the motion unanimously. There is nothing, as I understand, that requires unanimous support. There is legislation that requires three-fifths, two-thirds and a simple majority.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

I listened to the Member for Siparia praising the Prime Minister for his leadership capabilities and so forth. I could not help—I am saying leadership capabilities, and when there was time to exercise leadership there was a failure in exercising that leadership, because when that Motion came here in 1998, for the acceptance, that side was afraid to take the political heat associated with the implementation of the report. The Prime Minister said that he does not want us to make a political football of this issue. It is not making a political football of the issue. When the recommendations came during the Manning administration they took the heat. At the same time, you have to take the responsibility. It is now during your charge. All that does, is show that there is a certain amount of weakness and I would hate to think that the intention was to sneak this thing through. That clearly does not demonstrate the kind of leadership that this country needs to be patterned from its leaders. Mr. Speaker, I felt it necessary to make those comments as it relates to the question about the Salaries Review Commission Report.

I want to make another point to show that there is a pattern taking place with this administration. The pattern that is taking place is the heavy reliance on consultancies. During 1998—1999 the Government spent some \$60,393,808.00 on consultancies related to salaries and allowances. This is only with respect to ministries. It did not look as if it relates to statutory bodies. In 1999—2000 estimates for this same period totalled \$87,735,840.00. The revised estimates was \$74 million, or a reduction of some \$13 million but an increase of some \$14 million over 1998—1999.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the estimates for 2001 for consultancies—do you know what the budgeted figure for consultancies is? Consultancies related to salaries and allowances—\$113 million, or an increase of some \$38 million. I have made this point before, and I think it is worth saying again: the Government is using the question about consultancies as a means of making sure that it gets into the public service who it wants, and as a result not beefing up the systems that exist in terms of hiring.

I remember the Member for Oropouche in commenting on this, talked about the tedious way in which you have to go about hiring *et cetera*. Mr. Speaker, this approach undermines the public service, and it allows the ministers—because you would recall that we had brought to the attention of the Parliament a Cabinet Note No. 2868 of October 29, entitled “Procedure concerning the Employment by Ministries/Departments of Persons on a Temporary Basis”. It says:

“Ministers should be fully informed and their prior approval obtained before ministries and departments engage persons on a temporary basis to fill positions that are either established temporarily or contract.

Ministries submit for the information of Cabinet biannual reports in respect of persons engaged on a temporary basis in their respective ministries.”

There is a degree of involvement.

My colleague from Laventille West, in making her contribution, talked about good leaders and managers who delegate, and they do not try to get involved in the details. I understand in some ministries as low as cleaners, cooks, every single category of person to be employed in ministries must be signed off by the Ministers.

Miss Nicholson: That is why they cannot trouble Charles.

Mr. M. Joseph: I always wonder if a senior executive has to be involved in every level of hiring, clearly, something must be wrong, because when that leader—and in this case the Minister is supposed to be looking at the strategic direction and the viability of his or her ministry to make sure—he cannot have time to know if they are bringing in a cleaner or a maid. One does not have time for that, but they have time, and you are required to sign off. Something has to be wrong with this particular approach. All it is doing is politicizing more and more employment in these various ministries and departments, and something had to be wrong with that.

Mr. Speaker, let me move on to the other area; that is the question of increases in old age pension. I want to echo the sentiments of my colleague from Diego Martin East in his contribution in this budget debate. In light of the kinds of revenues collected by this Government over the last five years, and given the kind of performance of the economy, it is estimated that over the last five years some \$65 billion worth of revenues have passed through the hands of this Government and we would not allow them to forget the top ten projects, \$4.5 billion. It is in that light that the \$100 increase to old age pensioners is insufficient. I say it is insufficient. I am saying that they deserve a whole lot more than one hundred dollars.

The comparison was made here by the Member for Arima between increases from 1981—1995 and increases made between 1996—2000. I am saying the period that is being considered, one has to take into consideration the economic realities of the day, and the ability of the Government to make some increases. But, there is something else that we need to be aware of. While those pension increases were not as large as the ones we are seeing between 1996—2000 one needs to recognize that old age pensioners were provided with various other things. Medication was assured when they went to health centres. During this period, notwithstanding the \$100 increase, my understanding is that old age

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

pensioners in many instances cannot get the medication they need when they visit these health centres, and as a result they have to put their hands in their pockets and use the same \$100 increase to buy the medicines. *[Interruption]* I cannot even say it balances off. In some instances they are worse off than before.

What are some of the real concerns of senior citizens that need to be addressed at this time? The question about access to medical services, doctors, medicines, lab facilities, and health care are some of the areas that need to be improved.

11.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that many of our senior citizens suffer from chronic illnesses, for example, diabetes. I understand that insulin is approximately \$60 per bottle, and sometimes senior citizens who need to get insulin, need at least one and a half bottles per month. If it is \$60 per bottle, by the time they buy one and a half you see what happens to the \$100 increase, and medicine is not the only thing that has increased which they have to purchase. I understand that the tablets also, some of the insulin range from \$1.20 to as much as \$10.

I understand that the other area of high risk is high blood pressure. I understand that tablets for controlling high blood pressure—I am not a medical practitioner like the hon. Member for Caroni Central, the Minister of Health—range from as low as \$1.20 to as high as \$10.

Eye drops: Glaucoma I understand is another chronic area of illness. I understand that the cost of a bottle of eye drops for glaucoma averages about \$80. Heart disease: I understand that also is another area of concern and that tablets can be as low as 15 cents to as high as \$9 per tablet. Mr. Speaker, to beat our chest and roll drums—as my friend from Diego Martin East said—about the \$100 increase—even while our senior citizens go to these medical institutions and are unable to receive the drugs they need desperately, and for which they have to pay—negates the increase.

Mr. Speaker, another area of concern is community health care facilities which will ensure adequate medical supplies. Aged persons who visit health centres do not always get the medication, as I said, and they have to purchase their own prescription.

Another concern of senior citizens is access to affordable and suitable housing and shelter; an area that has not been addressed. Member for St. Augustine, my colleague from Laventille West raised the question about Ramdial Lands No. 2, a housing project sitting there for the last five years, and that the policy of the Ministry of Housing and Settlements is the question now about selling these

houses, well, only to people who can afford, because the cost of a unit—I saw it advertised recently—is \$150,000. Where are some of these senior citizens—and I am just focussing on them—going to get \$150,000 to pay a mortgage? So there is the question about affordable and suitable housing.

Some of them do not necessarily want to go in some geriatric facility, and there may not be enough suitable geriatric facilities to accommodate all of them, so that that is a group of persons who are literally forgotten as it relates to housing and shelter. They need specially designed facilities, including ramps, especially for the disabled persons. It may mean ensuring that public buildings are easily accessible, for example, government offices, and I saw some effort being made in terms of pavements; making sure that there could be ramps at schools, cinemas, banks, supermarkets, housing for the disabled persons. Then also in some instances, some of them have special dietary needs which, again, have an additional cost.

I am saying that just increasing the old age pension by \$100 and saying that that is suitable, does not cut mustard, if you can call it that. As I said, in light of the current circumstances that the country finds itself in, the other needs of the old age pensioners need to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn my attention to another area, the area of public service reform. Over the last two decades governments around the world have launched ambitious efforts to reform the way they manage their programmes. Citizens everywhere have demanded smaller, cheaper, more effective governments. They have asked for more programmes and better services. To resolve this paradox, governments have experimented with scores of ideas to be more productive, to improve performance and reduce cost.

The Centre for Public Service in a recent report on a survey of the global public management revolution charted the major strategies including New Zealand's new public management and the United States effort at re-inventing government and related efforts to develop in developing and developed nations around the world. Mr. Speaker, the report finds that this movement has revolved around six core ideas:

- (1) the search for greater productivity;
- (2) more public reliance on private markets;
- (3) a stronger orientation towards service;
- (4) more decentralization from national to sub-national governments;
- (5) increased capacity to devise and track public policy; and
- (6) tactics to enhance accountability for results.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, when we demitted office in 1995, we had established a Ministry of Public Administration, designed to ensure that government was in step with the current realities of the environment to make sure that governments were more efficient and effective. That was a step in the right direction, in that, we recognized that it was important to streamline and ensure that the operations of government were such that the government agencies and departments could perform more efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Speaker, when this UNC Government came into office, for the first year or so they castigated the whole question about public administration. Minister Wade Mark came to this Parliament on numerous occasions and criticized the former Minister of Public Administration about the waste of time and money the previous government spent on public administration. We are not talking about now, we are talking about when he was the Minister of Public Administration, and that he had streamlined the government and we had done various types of things that, again, it is so unfortunate that, for almost for a year, they kind of put the thing in hiatus.

It is a strange thing. What is so strange—and we saw it in all the operations—is that everything they came and met, because it was implemented by the PNM they felt that something had to be wrong with it. *[Interruption]* But you did that.

Mr. Maharaj: That is not true.

Mr. M. Joseph: In some instances it took you a whole year—Severn Trent, water and so forth—claiming to review what was in place.

Mr. G. Singh: That is why we fired them.

Mr. M. Joseph: But in some instances you reviewed because you could not get some of the benefits that you would have liked to have gotten out of some of them. We have ample examples; you keeping saying that we are beating the airport like a horse—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Humphrey: Stupidness!

Mr. M. Joseph: Not stupidity; you came and met an airport that was designed to cost \$480 million. Clearly, when you saw the gravy train from this new arrangement with the airport, one could understand why you stopped that and put something else in place, so at the end of the day it certainly did not benefit the country. Let me tell you something: the country is going to have an opportunity, very, very shortly, to adjudicate on your performance and it is going to judge you accordingly. We do not have very long to wait.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, I was making the point with respect to—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Maharaj: Do not turn your back to the Speaker.

Mr. M. Joseph: I am not turning my back. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I never turn my back to you, I always face you. [*Crosstalk*]

So the question about public administration and public service reform was treated with a kind of—I do not want to say disrespect—but notwithstanding all this Government's talk about public service reform, I want to quote somebody on that side early in their contribution which talked about the fact that they are putting their money where their mouth is. I looked at the development programme for fiscal year 2000—[*Interruption*] [*Laughter*—to look at some of the areas in which Government decided to spend moneys as it relates to reform of the public service.

In terms of the Judiciary, we are looking at the computerization and I just want to identify some areas, in respect of that. When you look at the amount of moneys allocated for these particular items and the amount of moneys actually spent or revised, Mr. Speaker, the trend is all down. I will just identify some, I am not going to read all the specifics.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Ann's East has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank Members of both sides for giving me the opportunity to continue.

I was indicating that I would just identify some areas: computerization of the Judiciary, implementation of a human resource information system in the Judiciary, institutional strengthening of the Judiciary. In 1998/1999 \$5 million was budgeted for this area: institutional strengthening of the Judiciary; \$5 million; actually spent in 1988/1999, \$309,000, okay? In the 1999/2000 estimate they put \$1 million. In the revised estimate, nothing; for 2001 estimate, nothing. Does that mean that the institutional strengthening of the Judiciary has been completed? I am sure the answer is no.

Mr. Speaker, concerning the development of an automated human resource information system, this is for the Service Commission, in 1998/1999, \$1.8 million; actually spent, in 1998/1999, \$1.9 million; 1999/2000 estimate, \$18.1 million; the revised estimate for the same period 1999/2000, \$100,170,000. How much was the estimate for 2001, \$4 million. Do you see the pattern? That is the development of automated human resource information, and you could go down the areas.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

These are areas associated with public service reform in some way. I am not dealing with building and so forth, I only pulled out that information that deals with institutional strengthening, things like the review of the classification and compensation, conduct of job evaluation, development of a computer system, for example, for the police service, computerization of the Ministry of National Security, training of police personnel; in terms of the Ministry of Health, human resources strategies, in terms of the Ministry of Labour and Cooperatives, re-engineering of the manpower division, computerization of the Ministry of Labour and Cooperatives; a lot of money is budgeted, but in terms of actual expenditure, *nada!*

11.55 p.m.

Somebody over there said they are putting their money where their mouth is. Where is the money? So that they are only talking about the importance of public service reform; they have all these fancy categories and large amounts of moneys allocated, but in terms of money actually spent, no such thing.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, I want to come right home. I mean, we talk about democracy and the whole purpose of government is to ensure democracy and governance. There is a relationship between democracy and governance. This is where the democracy and the governance take place—start out—right here in these hallowed halls, Mr. Speaker, and look at this Parliament. Look at the condition of this Parliament! I put that in the context of the \$65 billion that has passed through over the last five years [*Desk thumping*] and the five-point-something billion is squandermania in the top 10. You mean to say, Mr. Speaker, the \$80 million excess that Dr. Rowley alluded to—I am sure it is not going to take \$80 million to refurbish here. I do not even want to talk about that elaborate building, that beautiful edifice across there, that houses the office of the Attorney General.

Look here, Mr. Speaker, I understand, because I did some checking—because I say charity begins at home and part of the whole question about public service reform, institutional strengthening, increasing and improving the performance of governance, we have to start here, you know. When rain falls, we still keep ducking in and out of here. I mean, not just we parliamentarians, but what about the workers? Forget us. We come here periodically. What about the people who work here? Is that the kind of respect that we have for the persons who are responsible for ensuring that this Parliament runs properly? [*Desk thumping*] No, man! Now is the time. They have the money. [*Interruption*]

Tarpaulin? There is a yellow tarpaulin to cover the roof, when I understand, Mr. Speaker, that there was a commitment by the House Committee—I remember we had a report laid here where the House Committee had indicated that at least they were going to fix the roof. They had estimated it was going to cost \$10 million. When we demitted office there was an elaborate, comprehensive plan for the whole refurbishing. It was going to cost \$100 million. The whole place was going to be converted purely for the use of Parliament. You know, the two Chambers would be on both ends, there would be rooms, *et cetera*, for parliamentarians—\$100 million. Mr. Speaker, they could find the money. They could take the money from some of those other lucrative areas and apply it to the Parliament to ensure that they fix the Parliament. That deals with the question about the structure.

Let me just bring another matter to the attention of this honourable House. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, when Parliament dissolves, Members are required to vacate their seat. This has traditionally been interpreted to mean that, with effect from the date of the dissolution, all remuneration to ordinary Members of Parliament ceases. Do you know that? There will be no more salaries. All of the people who are employed in our offices, our office staff, *et cetera*, they are out of jobs.

Miss Nicholson: I did not know that.

Mr. M. Joseph: Well, I found out because, like I said, I am a neophyte. This is my first experience of this. Mr. Speaker, in most other Parliaments that does not happen. In most other Parliaments, especially Members who are reappointed, they continue to receive the benefits until such time as the election results are made known. If they lose, everything stops immediately on that day. I have suggested, as part of the whole question about our reform, that we need to look at that. Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Get a job.

Mr. M. Joseph: Hear the comment, “Get a job”. You know, we cannot be serious. *[Interruption]* So, Mr. Speaker, I believe—*[Interruption]* Exactly; all those things are related and I think we really need to look—why do they treat—and I am not speaking in my own cause. Mr. Speaker, why must elected representatives be treated as if it is some favour we are doing? No, man. Mr. Speaker, that has to be reviewed.

In those circumstances, I have to join with the other Members on this side and cannot support this budget because of the fact that the budget does not address some of the serious needs and concerns of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. No, no, no, I am not finished, Mr. Speaker; my God, sorry.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, you know, I hear these guys on the other side make some comments. [*Interruption*] Yes, I am going back. I hear the gentlemen on the other side, especially the Member for Nariva and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, talking about, “You ain't properly represent the people when you have not been able to get your road surfaced, notwithstanding all the representation that you make”. One does not get certain things done notwithstanding the representation made. I want to put on record my experience in terms of trying to adequately represent the people of St. Ann's East, who I have the pleasure of representing in this Parliament, who elected me, and some of the problems that one has to face in terms of doing that.

Something has to be wrong with the way in which elected representatives have to seek the interest of the people who they represent. If they state that it used to happen in the past, well we are in the present and the future and we really need to review it. We have to go cap in hand to Ministers of Government and beg favours. Do you hear what I am saying? During the last five years, one of the persons to whom I have had to go cap in hand to ask for favours was the Member for Princes Town who was then the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I must put on record that every effort was made on his part to make sure—because he was not doing me a favour. He was not doing Martin Joseph, the Member for St. Ann's East, a favour. I was able to bring circumstances to his attention and where he could have assisted, he assisted, and I put on record my appreciation for that.

The Member for St. Joseph, Mr. Speaker, on the occasions when I had to go to him on behalf of residents—not on my behalf. I did not go to ask anything for myself, he was also most co-operative. The Member for Caroni Central, the Minister of Health—really a gentleman. I am not saying they are not gentlemen, you know, but he is really a gentleman. Those are the only three. Mr. Speaker, I have attempted to get the help of the Minister of Works and Transport. He has never come in this honourable House—you know, he always sends his response through his Parliamentary Secretary—the worst, Mr. Speaker the worst. Drainage and roads are the infrastructure where there are problems, flooding, *et cetera* and one goes cap in hand and begs and nothing happens.

Well, do not talk about the Minister of Local Government, “the Sheriff”. Do not talk about him. Do you understand what I am saying? Nothing happened. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities has attempted to assist with respect to the problems with water in our—no, no, no, no, sorry, let me back up a bit, sorry. When the Member for Tabaquite was the Minister of Education and we had

a problem with respect to a school burnt in Acono, he was most helpful so, sorry about that. I almost forgot that when he was Minister of Education. [*Interruption*] So it was unfortunate. The Member for Caroni East attempted to help with respect to water and there is still a problem with water in Santa Cruz. We saw where some moneys were allocated last time, \$1.5 million to alleviate the water problem in Santa Cruz and nothing happened. I have seen allocation made of \$3.5 million and I hope when the Minister replies he is going to make some comment. So, Mr. Speaker, we do have some challenges.

I saw some allocations made with respect to improving fisheries, a small allocation, and I saw where Maracas and Las Cuevas have been identified. I do not know how \$7 million is doing all that. I do not know what they intend to do as it relates to improvement. I notice, Mr. Speaker—I have been raising the point about the Santa Cruz River—that there is serious work that needs to be done to that river and I am seeing an allocation of about \$7 million for drainage. That is not for drainage in north, you know, that is drainage for the whole country. So I wonder when they put those kinds of allocations and one goes to the drainage division, they tell you they really cannot provide any assistance because, even though the money is in the budget, you know, many a time, Mr. Speaker, the moneys are not even allocated.

So I hope again, given the country's fortunes, that these issues can be adequately addressed so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago—you know, the Member for Couva North is on record as saying that the intention is—I cannot quote him verbatim but he is on record as saying that the intention is to make life hard for MPs for constituencies that are represented by the PNM—he said that—so that they can drive us into the gulf. [*Interruption*] He is on record as saying that—so that constituencies will get vexed with us, mad with us, and vote us out. However, Mr. Speaker, that strategy “ain't go work” at all. On the contrary, it is going to work against them. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, I have raised the question about the Maracas Road and that is the—I have two Maracases. I am not talking about Maracas, St. Joseph, I am talking about Maracas in Maracas Bay. When this Government spent a lot of moneys refurbishing the roads there, I thought it was money being badly spent, because the roads themselves were not that bad, and I raised the question about land slippage that needed to be addressed, and also the question about the rails. There was a time when there were railings, especially in the dangerous areas. Mr. Speaker, on too many occasions—two occasions are too much—there have been accidents on that Maracas Road that cost lives. I think that also needs to be addressed.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. JOSEPH]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me an opportunity to participate in this debate. It is going to be my final debate on this side. I am sure of that. I know that is the final debate on this side. [*Desk thumping*] As a result, Mr. Speaker, I thank you. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives (Hon. Harry Partap): Mr. Speaker, I join the debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2001 in support of the fiscal measures announced by the hon. Minister of Finance which provide for the services of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2001. I also join with my colleagues on this side of the House in congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance for presenting a fiscal package that further demonstrates this Government's commitment to improving the quality of life of all people, but particularly of those who straddle the poverty line.

Mr. Speaker, there is a characteristic thread of social responsibility running through this 2001 Budget, as there was in the budgets of 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999/2000. That characteristic is, no increase in taxes, only increases in benefits for the small man. [*Desk thumping*] When the performance of this UNC Government, headed by the distinguished Member for Couva North, is dispassionately analyzed, we will go down in history as the only Government that, throughout its five-year term, did not finance its fiscal measures by imposing increases in taxes on the small man. This UNC Government has not raised taxes. Instead, we provided a steady flow of financial benefits and support to the elderly, the pensioners, parents, single mothers, schoolchildren, farmers and the unemployed—in fact, the whole range in the low-income group.

12.10 a.m.

There has not been a single government since 1956 that could equal, far less surpass this record.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt in my mind, as night follows day, that if, God forbid, those opposite were to return to this side the gains made to the people of this country over the last five years would be eroded, if not removed. You only have to listen to the contributions of the Members opposite to this Budget debate to realize that they are anxious to unleash punishment on the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, you heard the reply to the Budget Speech by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Did he tell this country how he would finance his 10-point plan for implementation in 90 days? He did not say, but I think I know how he will finance it. It will be raise taxes here, raise taxes there, raise this price, and raise

that price; make them pay this, make them pay that; reduce spending on social services; reduce spending on educational; and reduce spending on national security. That is what they did and what they will do again so this country had better watch.

Those on the opposite side criticized every step we have taken to give the elderly and pensioners more money or to put every child of secondary school age in a secondary school, or make the police mobile or reduce the cost of school books to parents by the standardization of textbooks.

I have a clipping here from the *Daily Express* newspaper dated March 28, 1992. When Members opposite were in Government they spoke on standardization of schoolbooks. It was left to this Government and to the Minister of Education to standardize textbooks. They did nothing. I also have a clipping dated February 10, 1991 from the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper. The Opposition Leader spoke about removing the Common Entrance Examination and putting every child in a secondary school. That was in 1991. They spent four years and a few months in office and did absolutely nothing. It was left to us on this side to put that into operation. As for their ten-point plan; I cannot see how they will implement it. Again they will unleash on the electorate of this country another set of promises that they will not be able to keep. I really empathize with them. They have no answers really to the long list of UNC achievements. These achievements stare them in the face and all they can do is nit-pick and nit-pick, and they will continue to be singing that same tune of gloom and doom for thy kingdom come.

The Opposition Leader in his contribution accused this Government of wastage and squandermania. I simply want to look at just three projects under the Opposition. The Hall of Justice was budgeted at a cost of \$98 million and the final cost was \$291 million. It was an overrun of 196 per cent. The Eric Williams Financial Complex was budgeted at a cost of \$79 million. The final cost was \$497 million, an overrun of \$418 million or 529 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, one will remember that the PNM government spent \$120 million on the Caroni Racing complex and abandoned it. The Member for San Fernando East, as Prime Minister of this country at that time, spent \$120 million on the La Brea site for the LNG plant and that site was abandoned because of faulty geological data. The Member is a geologist. He spent \$120 million and abandoned the site. That is \$1.3 billion in wastage and squandermania. That is only a small portion.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. H. PARTAP]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

I want to reply to the Member for Arouca North. The Member in his contribution told this House and the national community that there was a developer on a certain portion of land in Manzanilla. He said that the developer was doing this without a plan. Mr. Speaker, that development was approved under the PNM when they were in Government. The developer was the chairman of the PNM St. Augustine constituency. I do not know why the Member for Arouca North wants to palm that off on us on this side. They are the ones because it was one of their friends. The Member also indicated to the national community, and it was read into the records, that lands designated for the Manatee Conservatory were used for growing watermelons. I want to tell him that is not true at all. The land belonging to the manatee conservatory is protected land and no watermelon is grown on that land. I want to disabuse the House on that matter.

Mr. Boynes: Mr. Speaker, I want to know whether the Member knows about the lands that are opposite the Manzanilla beach. Those are the lands that the Member was referring to. It is close to the cemetery. I do not believe there is any approval for that.

Hon. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, mention was made about the land on the left which was developed by one Rasheed Mohammed who was the chairman—I do not know if he still is—of the PNM St. Augustine constituency.

The Member for La Brea indicated that he sent me a letter in relation to the minimum wage. I want to tell him that matter is under investigation. The Government has also amended the Minimum Wages Act so that any aggrieved worker can access the court individually, or through a recognized trade union or through a trade union of which he is a member. I thought that I should indicate this to the House because the insinuation is that we are dragging our feet on that matter.

On the question of secondary schools, I want to indicate here that the people of Nariva feel really aggrieved that the Member for Diego Martin East should say that schools should not be built in the bush and if you build them, they are for parrots and douens. I am proud to say under the UNC Government that three secondary schools are being built in Nariva at the moment. [*Desk thumping*] I say again that under the PNM, which was in power up to 1995, no effort was made to construct a secondary school in Nariva. Perhaps they felt it was too bushy. The children from Four Roads, Tamana leave at 3 o'clock in the morning to attend the Toco Composite School as well as Arima and Mayaro—3 o'clock in the morning—and they return at around 8.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m.

12.20 a.m.

Dr. Rowley: That is not true.

Hon. R. Partap: It is not true? It is true! We have parents who feel so happy that this UNC Government has brought the schools within even walking distance. [*Desk thumping*] I know that when the campaign starts in Nariva every single word that the Member for Diego Martin West said will be repeated in Nariva so the people will know who they are dealing with. The Member for St. Ann's East made an attempt this evening to say that they could not build a secondary school during their term, 1991--1995 because they did not have money. He put it this way. He said it was like comparing apples and oranges.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell him something. You know that in 1998 and 1999, the oil prices went down to \$9.00 a barrel, so we did not have money, but we were able to manage what we had and in being able to manage what we had, we were able to build secondary schools. But Members on that side could not manage the money that they had and, therefore, they could not build secondary schools, not even in the urban areas, much less the rural areas. So they did not care how these children got to school at all and they are saying now that they could not build a single secondary school because they had no money. There is no truth in that. We would not buy that. That is not a good reason for not building secondary schools.

Dr. Rowley: We raised money to build four secondary schools and you stopped the projects.

Hon. H. Partap: They tried also to say that they did not have money and that is why their increase to pensioners was \$41.00 in four years. They could not manage the money they had. We did not have money too, but we were able to manage it and every year we gave the pensioners an increase. I do not know, but God forbid, if they should come back into office, if they do, perhaps the pensioners might lose the little pension that we gave them. We are quite sure that we will be there and we will be there for many, many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, in January, 1991 the Member for San Fernando East was at that time the Leader of the Opposition—and this will be my last point. We were facing an election and he went to Princes Town. He told the people in Princes Town, “here, I have a plan for unemployment in the country.” I remember it very clearly. [*Interruption*] Yes, I had covered the meeting. But, Mr. Speaker, do you know what was his plan? They won the election in 1991; in 1992 he convened a national symposium on Employment and Job Creation in Chaguaramas. Mr. Speaker, that was his plan, a symposium. It was a national symposium and certain

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. H. PARTAP]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

decisions were taken and one of those decisions was to establish a National Human Resource Management Information System which we call NHRMIS. That was a major recommendation coming out. It was a good idea. In fact, I thought it was an important recommendation, because NHRMIS is essentially a labour market information system. It provides for entries, storage, retrieval of labour force information, education and training data. It provides the labour market statistics and skills data bank necessary, or at least to assist in forward planning, both for the public and the private sectors. It was a good recommendation but nothing was done in 1992, and so, it was left to us in the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives, in the UNC Government, to implement the NHRMIS project. We have done it.

Dr. Rowley: What did you do for a normal day's work?

Hon. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, now the system is providing the information that is necessary for forward planning. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, what we are doing as well is to establish a website in the Ministry. All the information in relation to the Ministry will be there. All queries will be there, and so, people will be able to access them now. They said they were going to do it, and they did not do it.

Mr. Speaker, now people who reside in Toco or Toronto, will be able to access and manipulate on-line labour-market information on Trinidad and Tobago. It is instructive to note that the Ministry of Labour and Cooperatives in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been asked to provide technical assistance to other states in the Caribbean on labour-market information systems. That is the competence which has been developed at the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives here in Port of Spain.

The Ministry's website will revolutionize our National Employment Service, what they used to call the Labour Exchanges. The National Employment Service is now automated. Mr. Speaker, a person seeking employment will now be able to do so electronically. A job seeker will be able to register on-line with the Ministry, submit a resume and update it electronically from any computer terminal so equipped. He or she will be able to search for jobs on-line in this automated system. Employers too, will be able to register on-line, post vacancies and search for potential employees. I wish to assure both job seekers and employers that appropriate security safeguards are being put into the system to preclude tampering with information and personal data submitted by users.

Additionally, computers will be strategically placed in the Ministry's regional offices with personnel to assist the technologically reluctant customers. Subsequently, the same will be done at other public institutions. In fact, even Members of Parliament can access the National Employment Service from their constituency office once there is a computer installed. Information on the website will be circulated in due course.

Our manpower officers are now relieved from doing this manually, and so now they will be able to spend more time on interfacing with employers so that the response time to people who are seeking employment will be shorter. We will shortly be doing test runs on the programme.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also inform this honourable House that we have sought to extend the coverage with respect to employment services that the Ministry provide. In 1996 we opened an employment exchange office in Point Fortin and we hope to do so in a few other areas in the country including Sangre Grande.

We have made many strides in trying to reduce unemployment by encouraging foreign investment into the country. The PNM's response had been—a big zero. They have done very little. They left in 1995 an unemployment rate of 19 per cent. Today, we are at 11.9 per cent. In our second term, we hope to come down to single digits. [*Desk thumping*]

The promise from that side fell flat and I am sure that the electorate in this country will never allow them to come back in again.

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

Mr. Edward Hart (*Tunapuna*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to participate in this budget debate 2000—2001. I, as an ambassador of this land, have grown accustomed to performing before packed audiences in China, in India, in the UK, and in the USA.

Mr. Sudama: Doing what?

Mr. E. Hart: But unfortunately, at this unholy hour, this Wednesday morning, there is not one single person in the gallery; however, I will not be deterred. I will proceed. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker, let me hasten to congratulate my political leader, the Member for San Fernando East and all the other Members on this side, including the Member for Tobago West, for their well-researched presentations. I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Member for Siparia, the Minister of Education who is now acting as Prime Minister.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, I took quite a lot of notes, but after giving it some serious thought, I think I will leave these rebuttals for another time and so I will go straight into the meat of my presentation.

The budget was read by the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development superficially and excellent, but those who have studied it thoroughly will realize like previous budgets, very little attention has been paid to some of the very acute areas in Trinidad and Tobago. I have been saying repeatedly, the *Hansard* will bear me out, that no development programme could be done without the development of physical education and sport, and the development of the physical infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote from the journal of the official magazine of the International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance, Volume 36, Spring 2000. This is the journal. There were reports from three different commissions, and I quote:

“Contribution of physical education and sport to sustainable economic development.”

This is from commission one. I quote again, Mr. Speaker.

“Having made several considerations of the importance of physical education and sport for improved health, reduced diseases linked to obesity, heart disease, hypertension, certain forms of cancer and depression, having also consideration that there is need for investment in physical education and sport for job creation, particularly in the developing countries, therefore, helping to combat unemployment and noting that job creation contributes to the economic integration of vulnerable sections of the community.”

12.35 a.m.

"It has been recommended that the Director General of UNESCO should draw the attention of heads of government to studies and data that highlight contributions of physical education and sports to the overall development of the country."

There are several other recommendations coming from the commission. The commission, too, has made similar recommendations. For example:

"Considering the importance of physical education and sport as a fundamental right for every child and youngster around the world and their roles in encouraging people to remain active and healthy throughout

life, and reaffirming that physical education and sport as an integral part of life long education is an essential means of enhancing the quality of life, health and well-being of all persons regardless of ability, disability, sex, age, cultural, ethnic, religious or social backgrounds..."

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that Government pay attention to ensure that children in particular would receive their just due with respect to physical education where motor skills are acquired so that they will continue later on in becoming good sportsmen and sportswomen. I have made similar statements in this honourable House.

I suggest that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs refers to *Hansard* where I continue to say that the framing of a sport policy is good; proper implementation is better. It is imperative that we have the necessary infrastructure to which the Minister is not paying attention.

We have seen clearly emphasis placed on cricket and football. Now, those are my fields because I am a professional coach in both disciplines so I do not want anyone to get the distinct impression that I am knocking cricket or football, as the case may be. But, in the case of football, because of our country hosting the Under 17 World Tournament in the year 2001, four stadia will be built and it is interesting to note that these stadia started off at a cost of \$124 million and have now gone to \$300 million. Other Members who spoke before pointed out they had evidence of corruption. Let me speak a little about corruption.

Corruption has become a way of life with this UNC Government. Unfortunately, the ones who suffer most from corruption and the economic devastation it spawns, are the poor, the ones who are really not in a position to bribe anyone.

Mr. Speaker, Exodus 23:8—and the last speaker I think is a pastor—says:

You are not to accept a bribe for the bribe blinds clear-sighted men and can distort the words of righteous men.

I am sure that by now, there is a perception out there that is going around about politicians, how they are dishonest and how they succumb to bribery. I thought I would mention that fact because there are many young bright hearts out there who would want to come into the political arena but because of the stigma and because of what is being said in this country today, they would have second thoughts and that would be unfortunate.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

The hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, an ardent sportsman, had the audacity to state that 258 schools would benefit from the building of these stadia after the tournament. Let me reiterate that these tournaments would be held on large playing fields, full size fields, in accordance with FIFA's regulations. We have our primary schools boys and girls who have to play on smaller size fields. I have made that point here already over and over because it is very important. Moreover, if you look at the athletic track, a paediatrician would tell you that it is only nearing the competitive season that people should be allowed to use that track. It is not a practice track; it is not made up of football and track and field. Even so, if thousands of children from those 258 schools use those facilities, are they going to take their equipment? I know that schools do not have their equipment to do their activities on the grass area.

That brings me to the point of our model school. Why should we have a model school in the heart of Port of Spain without any facility for physical education? Why? [*Desk thumping*] I understand the model school will be housed at the BH Rose building which was a former warehouse on which they did some remedial work but nobody was sure, not even the Minister of Education who was paying for it. My concern is about this programme on which I keep belabouring the point year after year.

I understand that no provision was made for additional physical education equipment for these schools. In this day and age, are you telling me that the Members opposite consider physical education as the playing of football and cricket? It is very appalling. We are enlightened people. We are gradually becoming a developed country but we are becoming more and more backward in understanding and appreciating the meaning and the true value of sport.

In another area, we have seen assistance to national organizations totalling \$1,999,900. It is unfortunate and most regrettable that many of the several national sporting organizations would not benefit from this allocation. In this small country with a population of 1.5 million people, we have about 48 or 49 disciplines of sport. Sport is not just confined to cricket and football. We have many other disciplines and we must take care of them. We must take care of everyone, not just a certain sector because of influences from other people.

I do not wish to quote but it is unfortunate that in the present scenario, several of the indoor sports would have to generate funds on their own to assist even the juniors to participate in tournaments in the Caribbean, not to mention other tournaments.

Mr. Speaker, the Boxing Board of Control has been allocated \$75,700 and I am elated. Boxing is a sport I love. I spent many days in the St. Mary's Children's Home, not participating in boxing, but looking at the guys go through their paces. The St. Mary's Children's Home has produced many, many champions, namely, Johnny De Peeza, David Beckles, Ulric Regis. All these guys came through the home. From the Belmont Orphanage, we had Baba Adams, Gentle Daniel, Boswell St. Louis and so forth. I always say if you want to get boxers, you do not go to St. Mary's College or Queen's Royal College. Those boys do not want anybody to cuff them in their faces but you go to these institutions, like the Youth Training Centre and the Boys' Industrial School where Claude Noel grew up. I am glad and I hope we will see a revival in boxing. Surely, there are other disciplines of sport to which consideration should be given.

I want to talk about some of the disciplines. What about swimming? We heard the hon. Minister—he is not here because he is not interested in what I am saying—speak about building new swimming pools. Laudable effort. That is nice, but I want to ask him: What about the situation with the swimming pool that was constructed about three years ago at La Horquetta? It is in shambles now, overgrown with bushes—

Hon. Member: Breeding “crapauds”.

Mr. E. Hart: Yes. All sorts of nonsense and nobody is addressing that. Why? Because their children do not have to go to those swimming pools. The Attorney General, Member for Couva South, what is the position with the swimming pool in Couva South? I read from the *Weekend Independent* of Friday, May 25, 1999—we are in 2000 now—“Auditor General Slams \$4M Couva Pool”. This pool has been down for years. This is a pool that, while we were at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, while I was there as a games coach, we had buses transporting children to the Couva swimming pool and I want to tell you that there are some champions who started in the Couva swimming pool. It is down now and the same effort the Attorney General made to get his nice posh office over there, I think something should be done about the swimming pool. I do not want to read because I know time is limited but the article said:

“Over \$4.27 million is being spent to refurbish and upgrade the Couva swimming pool, invoking criticism of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. This was revealed in the recent Auditor General's Report on the Public Accounts for 1998.

Addressing local government expenditure, Auditor general, Joycelyn Thompson, stated, ‘Accumulated expenditure at 1998/09/30 was approximately \$2.3 million including \$1,089,176 spent from January to September 1998.’”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

It goes on. That is 1998 we are talking about and the swimming pool is still down.

Mr. Ramsaran: Who was the Minister?

Mr. E. Hart: But we hear the Minister talking about new swimming pools and so forth. Nonsensical. He is only studying cricket and football.

Miss Nicholson: Everybody asks me about sports and says you are a disgrace for sport.

Mr. E. Hart: They are coaching the Trinidad and Tobago football team now. I talked about swimming. What about netball? After being world champions, we have plummeted to rock bottom. What are the reasons for that? What are we doing about netball? What is the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs doing about it? While I was employed as a games coach there, we had six netball coaches: Althea Luces—

Mr. Ramsaran: We still have them.

Mr. E. Hart: What are they doing? Something is wrong. We have plummeted to rock bottom. You just rock back in your chair saying, "We still have them." Doing what? We could not attend the Caribbean championships this year because we could not field a netball team. That is a disgrace. What are we doing about it? I said I wanted to be brief. [*Interruption*] He lacks intelligence.

The Member for Couva North alluded to it. He said some of his Cabinet Ministers are hard-headed and I single him out as one—sour grapes. It is a fact. Netball has gone down. They are doing nothing. Karate is another sport. We have a Sport and Culture Fund. Up to now, they cannot account for it. Did karate receive any money from the Sport and Culture Fund? We have the boy from Cumana—Member for Toco/Manzanilla? Is Samuel Stafford from Cumana?

Mr. Boynes: Cumana.

Mr. E. Hart: He went to Japan and beat the world. It is the first time in over 30 years that anybody came from outside Japan and won that tournament and this Government has not given him any sort of recognition. Why? Because he is a Cumana boy? What are they doing for karate? Nothing. Everything is just football and cricket. That is not so. You are there to see that all the disciplines are handled properly.

12.50 a.m.

Then we talked about lawn tennis. When we demitted office we had the plans up at Tacarigua. We already had the national hockey court and the indoor gymnasium put down and we demitted office. The plan was that there should be eight courts. After five years, what do they have? They scrambled three courts, no pavilion and lighting facility, but they say that they did everything. *[Interruption]* I do not want to get into any crosstalk; I said that earlier on.

Mr. Speaker, we reach to football. The Acting Prime Minister spoke about football in glowing terms. She said that she does not know what the Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs did, but we have won every football match. I applaud the team, yes, they have won. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is claiming credit for the National Team scoring victory. Football is a team game: it does not happen just like that. What about the great work done by Bertile St. Claire, the coach from Tobago? He was booted out unceremoniously! *[Desk thumping]* Does the Acting Prime Minister know who Bertile St. Claire is? But she is talking about the Ministry of Sport. What about the technical staff with Mr. Neville Chance and Jimmy Blanc?

Miss Nicholson: Who gave them the vibrance?

Mr. E. Hart: What about these people? It is not just about the Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs who went about shaking hands and claiming credit. The Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs just started attending football. I have been playing football all my life. I have never seen him at any football match. He has now started to go to the stadium. *[Desk thumping]* Does he know when Stern John started on the Eddie Hart grounds? Does he know where Rougier started? Does he know the amount of work Bertille St. Claire did with Dwight Yorke? The Minister must be careful. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

In 1989, on the platform, when I was campaigning, I warned the then Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in the NAR administration, because they hijacked the football. At every match you would see all the VIPs in front, seated in all the prestigious seats. The same thing is happening now.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs said that the happiest moment in his life—listen to this statement—was when Trinidad scored the goal against Mexico. That was the happiest moment in his life, and he never knew that the Prime Minister could have jumped so high. The Prime Minister jumped and he waited and

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

jumped with them. There is nothing wrong with that. But what about Buggy Haynes, who represented this country with blood sweat and tears and was not given an invitation? He was not given a ticket. What about Neil Caesar? What about these boys who represented the country? What about Ken Hodge? They cannot get in the stadium. But these “fellas” took up all the seats. Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go on and on with that.

Where football is concerned, it is not only played in the National Stadium, you have to go on all the village greens. Right now, a stone’s throw from where you live, Mr. Speaker, at Moosai ground, the grass is very high. Every time I call the Ministry of Social and Community Development and Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, they say that they have no money. They have money to pay a man from Africa who is coaching the under-17 team, and they have lost every warm-up match they played. Is he getting credit for that? Yes. *[Interruption]* He is on the payroll. You do not know that? You do not know that the African coach is being paid by the Ministry of Social and Community Development and Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs? Oh Lord Father! Boy you are very clueless as a Minister. Mr. Speaker, I am making the point that we have several disciplines of sport in this country and we are supposed to look after them.

Mr. Humphrey: Take it easy Eddie.

Mr. Hart: In another area—*[Interruption]* the sportsmen? I have a lot of respect for you sir, so I will take it easy because you were a national champion in swimming, you know about it. I am sure it hurts your heart to know about the swimming pools that are down.

Mr. Speaker, in another area, I have seen that the *Medium Term Policy Framework* states that the national sports policy will earn significant prominence because of some of its objectives; namely the development and improvement in knowledge and practice in the interest of holistic development of the person, and the enjoyment of the public.

Surely this is an excellent objective, but unfortunately would not be achieved, because this UNC Government has been paying lip service to the importance of physical education and physical recreation.

Mr. Speaker, I was listening to a programme not so long ago, with another knowledgeable sportsman Mr. Alvin Corneal, and a question was asked about the women footballers in Trinidad. We are not talking about the men, they are doing well. In one month the women from Trinidad received 79 goals without reply—licks like peas from the foreign side. I am not elated about that: it is a sad state of

affairs. What is the reason? Is it the coaching? Mr. Alvin Corneal made the point about physical education. Because when you look at the women from Canada and Brazil, they have a good physical education programme in place. From small, their motor skills come into focus. *[Interruption]* If you notice when you were speaking, I did not disturb you. I do not want to have anything to do with you. Do you understand?

Mr. Speaker, I am not belabouring the point but, it is unfortunate that everything is just centred around cricket and football. There is little concern for the infrastructure. In the *Development Programme* there are plans to develop some of the regional and sub-regional grounds. I could well imagine in what areas. But, unfortunately, there is no allocation to assist in the fixing of the leaking roof of the Jean Pierre Complex. Last year I complained about that in my budget presentation. It was embarrassing that a Caribbean indoor table tennis tournament had to be stopped because of the leaking roof and nobody has paid attention to that.

If we are talking about development, we must not choose selected areas: that is not good enough. We need the facilities in the regional areas. We should make sure that those grounds are properly prepared.

When you drive through the village green—again my friend from Toco/Manzanilla keeps complaining all the time about the state of the ground. A team from Sangre Grande came down during the cricket season to use the said Moosai ground. Right now athletes from Arima are training on the Eddie Hart grounds in Tacarigua. Why? Arima has produced so many talented athletes such as Ainsley Armstrong, Charlie Joseph, Cliff Bertrand, and the little young sensation: the brown boy. If one should go on the Arima track right now, it is like a piece of cardboard. One can pick it up just like that. Nobody is paying attention to that. They are just paying lip service. We are not really serious, but we are expecting, once every twenty years, to win a gold medal. After Hasley it would be Ato and then what?

Mr. Speaker, we must take care of our playing fields. I have asked over and over if there is any allocation for fixing the track at Arima, but no answer is forthcoming and I know one will not come. There is no proper place to train. In the allocation under the development programme, I hope the Minister of Finance would take note, but he is not here. Today is Wednesday morning. Monday and Tuesday he left at 6.30 p.m. He just walked away. He does not have anybody to study. That is the whole approach of the UNC Government: anything goes, anybody can do what they feel.

Mr. Valley: Where is the Prime Minister?

Mr. E. Hart: He came and now has gone flying again. We must remember that we are servants of the people and we have to ensure that the facilities are for all the people and not just a chosen few.

Again, in the *Medium Term Policy Framework* it talks about achieving goals of universal, primary and secondary education. That is laudable. Hear how it sounds. Government will continue to implement the four basic education projects and the Secondary Education Modification Programme which is referred to as SEMP. That means that Government will increase the number of available school places.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago would appreciate the availability of students, but that is surely not the answer. The answer is availability of school places providing quality education.

1.00 a.m.

By that I mean—and to quote what is in the budget, "a holistic development". We must ensure that those facilities are properly designed to ensure that at the primary and secondary schools, in accordance with the journal from which I have quoted, every child would be exposed to physical education, for by so doing holistic development may be achieved. You do not understand that. You will never understand that.

Then too, Mr. Speaker, mention has been made of the question of the importance of health care. You should be interested in this. Yes, we were at Mount Hope together; I heard you bad-talking Mount Hope just now. "Yuh" cry before the operation. You were frightened, "yuh" cry like a baby. "I feel sorry for yuh and all, but yuh eh want to hear about health care." "How allyuh so?" [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. E. Hart: Quite rightly, may I reiterate, much money in our health care programme can be saved if from the infant stage we have a physical and a health education programme in the school system. Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to help the adult to change those poor health habits; it is from the very early age that children should be made fully aware of some of the basic health rules; that is important.

Long ago in school the teachers would tell you to stretch out your hand and they looked at your nails. They looked at your hair; they had a big iron comb and if you did not comb your hair, they would run it through, that sort of thing, and we have to resort to that. Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote from the journal:

"Several studies undertaken at international levels indicated that one dollar invested in physical activity leads to a saving of \$3.20 in medical costs."

I just want to repeat that:

"One dollar invested in physical activity leads to a savings of three dollars and 20 cents in medical costs."

That is on page 15:

"Excerpts from the said conference of ministers and senior officials responsible for physical education and sport."

That is a conference I would recommend to anyone in Trinidad and Tobago who is interested to attend; not going to football matches, cricket matches and drink and have a good time. These conferences are important, and here is where we should invest money so that we could get something from it.

I hate to know that "anytime somebody fly away—like the Prime Minister, he fly out again, and when he come back, you eh reporting to nobody; we eh know what yuh went for, what yuh do, at our expense." The air hostesses could tell you about them when they are flying. I would not say anymore. "When dey in that first class thing and they pull the curtains", you know—because I have friends working there.

Mr. Speaker, once again I want to appeal to the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—even though he would be bidding us farewell—to read the *Hansard*, let him become a student and let those who follow appreciate and understand, so that in this country which abounds with raw talent we can develop them, because there is need for a scientific and technological approach to all disciplines of sports.

After the Member for Tobago West left—nobody put her out of that Government, she decided to leave. After she left, the reports coming out of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs would tell you that things have just gone down. Mr. Speaker, there is the decline of the West Indies cricket team. Did you go up there? "If West Indies was winning the test series, you know dey woulda fly up, but West Indies under now, not one comment from you"; nothing, a stony silence, you have nothing to say. Mr. Speaker, but all is not lost, because there is talent. Brian Lara still is and would continue to be one of the best batsmen in the world. We have young Sarwan, we have Hinds and we have other young people.

Mr. Speaker, we were victorious when talent was the answer. We still have the talent, but the other countries are using the talent as well as scientific and technological principles, for example, kinesiology, bio-mechanics and sport psychology, and we have to follow quickly. The best way to do so is to start in the school system; we have got to catch them young.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

I would appreciate if greater consideration could be given to these principles in the school system. Provide simple facilities and ask people to respect those regional facilities. I have spoken already about the prohibitive cost. Mr. Speaker, how many people “up home” use the indoor facilities that are in the savannah? The cost is prohibitive. The people who use it are groups whose sponsors pay. We must put a mechanism in place so other people can have access.

Mr. Ramsaran: You sound like a cry-baby.

Mr. E. Hart: We must also give some more money to the local government authorities so that they can take care of the grounds; tractors always break down, one tractor and all this sort of thing. This is very serious. Those on the other side could talk, they could jeer, they could mock, but what I want to say is—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Griffith: It is time to go home; bye.

Mr. E. Hart: —there is repeated evidence to demonstrate the benefits to be derived from sport and culture. They assist in bringing our people—in spite of colour, class, creed and race—together. They serve as an opiate as we bask in glory when our teams perform well and when we participate directly and indirectly in our greatest show on earth, carnival. They provide employment, reduce the health bill; they assist in putting us on the world map thereby improving our tourism thrust and our economy.

Mr. Speaker, it is pointless asking questions, but what has happened to our sport school? I could probably discuss that with the Minister for Tobago—
[*Interruption*—you do not know about the sport school. It is a residential programme we had every year where children converge from all parts of the country and we take them through their paces, because there are tremendous benefits to be accrued from it. "You doh understand it; hear you: “sports what”, and yuh is a big Minister."

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. E. Hart: The benefits are immeasurable; people from Moruga and Toco coming, and they improve their communication skills, they learn to live in harmony, they watch videos, that is what the sport school was all about. Do you know what it has been reduced to, Mr. Speaker? It is non-residential now, but each child has to pay \$100. So if a child is coming from Toco, he or she has to pay \$16 a day to Sangre Grande, then a bus will bring them to the indoor facility and take them back home, on a daily basis. They have destroyed everything.

Last but not least with sport, this is a circular memorandum here, the Minister spoke about six scholarships to Cuba, where people were awarded scholarships for physical education. Take note of it, it says six for physical education; I do not know if he is aware of what is going on. This is a circular memorandum:

“From: the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development.

To: All Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments, Chief Administrator, Tobago House of Assembly and Heads of Statutory Authorities subject to the Statutory Authorities Act; dated, 21 June,”

But the ministry stamped it here June 26. Mr. Speaker, it says:

"I should be grateful if you were to bring the attached notice to the attention of all eligible officers in your Ministry/Department, Statutory Authority."

What they were saying is that they were going to award scholarships and these scholarships are for studies in the following areas: agrarian mechanization, agronomy, architecture, art, literature, dentistry and so forth. Then they had in order of priority: energy, petroleum, agriculture, agro-industry, and so forth. No mention was made of sport in this document, but they have a surreptitious way: they brought the document to show me where the scholarships were awarded and who were awarded these scholarships, because in nine days' time—the least time you should get is six weeks—[*Crosstalk*—]nine days, and whenever these circulars come they keep it very surreptitiously. It happened to me in Tunapuna: just a little two-week computer course, and you know nothing about it; keep it a secret so people cannot get an opportunity to participate.

Hon. Member: Wrong circular; wrap up!

Mr. E. Hart: Despite what the Member for Arima said, I stayed and listened to him, he spoke about YTEPP and the Civilian Conservation Corps, but I am not convinced. I do not have the time to deal with you concerning that. “Yuh started off with numbers, 8,000, yuh end up with about 2,000 or 1,000 people.” I have friends who teach at YTEPP. I know people who attend YTEPP; one of my secretaries is a graduate of the YTEPP, but time does not permit.

The Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs is not here, but in the budget statement the Minister alluded to the fact, which is true—we have steelpan, tassa, calypso, chutney and we have carnival. These are the unique expressions of harmony in diversity in all our arts. Long ago steelpan was a novelty, not so today. We have some real serious musicians abroad who are involved. Pan is a billion-dollar industry in the United States.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Mr. Speaker, the cost of a tenor pan in the United States is US \$2,500. [*Crosstalk*].

Mr. Ramsaran: “Allyuh kill everything allyuh touch.”

Mr. E. Hart: I said it early in my life in this Parliament that those Members really do not care about pan. Barbados has put Bds \$20 million for the development of pan in the education system. Carnival and pan could be the basis of our economic thrust. In Switzerland there are 263 steelbands; I am not talking about school bands, senior bands, 263. There is a factory using modern technologies producing optimum steel for the different instruments. For instance, for the tenor pan they have a particular type of steel, and for the bass they would use other quality steel and so forth. The drums we are getting here have a lot of lead so you cannot get the proper tonal quality of the instruments.

Mr. Speaker, do you know who is carrying out the research for the raw material? Mercedes Benz, these are the people who are involved, so our university has to play catch up, but at the same time I would like to pay tribute to Dr. Gay, Dr. Copeland and Dr. Imbert. They are working at the faculty of engineering at the University of the West Indies. They are experimenting on amplification and acoustical properties, and there is a need for an injection of funds in this sort of exercise.

Right now this Government has it nice: US \$30 a barrel, they have the money. The money must be pumped into these sorts of projects. Also, Mr. Speaker, I think praise should go out to Harry Headley, Sat Sharma and Dr. Marion Osborne because they had a two-year certificate course in music literacy. Now they are offering a degree course which will take about three years. I am still suggesting that for the average pannist, they could expand on the programmes so that the average pannist could be part and parcel and benefit from it all.

I raised the point about the chrome factory. This newspaper of Friday May 5, 2000 has the Prime Minister's face on it. Mustapha decided that they are going to pack up, and they have the chrome factory so they want to get rid of it. Pan Trinbago had an audience with the Prime Minister and Mr. Duprey in November, and they asked to put forward proposals, which they did before Christmas. The going price was \$1.7 million; last year, up to now—

Do you know what the headline says, Mr. Speaker?

"Pan chroming plant to move to Grenada."

A businessman from Grenada wants to buy the plant. Mr. Speaker, right now we have to pay \$700 to chrome a tenor pan. If it has to go to Grenada and you have to pay shipping and insurance costs, then you have to get somebody to oversee what is being done there, what is our position? This Government did not see it fit to purchase that plant.

This Government did not see it fit to purchase that, you know, but they could give a man \$100 million to accelerate work on the airport, give money to Maritime Life, bring a mill from India, all these sorts of things, fritter away dollars, but the steelbandmen, they did not see it fit, after promising them—what a shame, Mr. Speaker.

1.15 a.m.

A great son of the soil who is resident in the United States for a very long time now, Ellie Mannette, Cliff Alexis and the presidents of the leading steel companies in the US including physicists and metallurgists, they met to discuss the production of steel, especially for steelband instruments. Do you hear what is happening, Mr. Speaker? There is a factory responsible for exporting pan in central and eastern Europe, including places like Finland and Poland.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. E. Hart: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my hon. colleagues. I am seeing anguish and hearing mutterings because people feel I should just pack up, wind up, not speak about the steelbandmen, not speak about the plight, you know. Fortunately, I am sure the Member for Point Fortin wants to hear what I am saying because he plays the instrument. That Member does not care. He could not care less. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Mr. E. Hart: Mr. Speaker, there is a village in Finland with a population of 8,000 people and every child there plays the instrument and they are the said people who would be coming to Trinidad to take part in the world festival later on this year. What has happened? The Ministry of Culture has hijacked the world festival from Pan Trinbago making a mess of it. At the launching they had a banner with the sitar, the rising sun and all kinds of nonsense—no pan at all. [*Interruption*] I say it was not pertaining to the world steelband festival so the Member could interpret what he wants.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

They started off with one chairman, Mr. Alvin Daniel, then moved to another chairman, Mr. Amral Khan, then moved to Mr. Keith Byer and now it has gone to Patrick Arnold. We are talking about a world festival and they are advertising it as being for the top steelbands in the world but, you know, All Stars and Desperadoes are not there, yet the Government is not saying one thing. This is what is going on here, and we have visitors coming to take part in this festival. There were also errors on the score sheet, Mr. Speaker, embarrassing because overseas we talking about real musicians, you know. There are bands practising eight hours a day because they are taking it very seriously.

Up to now there are offices going up for the respective Ministers, yet no home for the steelbandmen. They were promised the land at Chaguaramas where they pay the water rates but up to now the Prime Minister told them to forget that, so they do not have a home. It is the same thing with the national steelband. They ran hurriedly in 1998—we warned them about that. Now they want to put them in a warehouse—it is as though they like this warehouse thing—in Nelson Street to call it a home. This is unfortunate—just prostituting the pan. The NCC, Mr. Speaker, National Carnival Commission, three times—not once, not twice but three times—a substantial sum of money has disappeared. It is alleged that it is an inside job, but there has been no arrest. Nothing is happening. It is business as usual at the NCC. Our taxpayers' money is going down the drain again.

The Best Village—well, of course, under this Minister here it has died a natural death after we produced so many great people—Ella Andall, Carol Addison, The United Sisters and so forth. Mr. Speaker, this Minister stood up sometime yesterday and said that this regime or this—when we were in office, the administration did not build one community centre and then he said, “Well probably Jarrette Narine built a few with the URP”. Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry, with the Urban Redevelopment Programme, centres were built at Wharf Trace; Lopinot; Radix, Mayaro; Bagatelle, Diego Martin; and extensive refurbishment was done to centres at Campo; Mt. Plaisir Road, Cunupia; Brazil; Valencia; Naparima; Lucky Street and Bamboo.

Mr. Speaker, the point I want to make is that he said the Ministry did not build a centre. I want to place it on record; during our administration, 14 community centres were built. [*Desk thumping*] He said not a single—and it is not once he said that, you know. This wicked, mischievous Minister, telling lies—and the Member for St. Augustine said it in the interview with Clewon Raphael in the *Independent*, you know. He said, “Ministers telling lies and the party not working”. He said it, not me. He stood here telling this honourable House that 14

centres—they changed the names. They were so beautiful that they called them regional complexes and put their own boards in place. So they chased out the village council people and the residents cannot get to use the centres. [Interruption] Yes, it is the same thing in St. John’s Road. Yes, we have one. They have their boards, you understand. We built these centres and I will tell you where too. St. John’s Road; St. Madeleine; Vistabella; Plaisance Park; La Horquetta; Carenage; Barataria; Esperanza and so forth. Even the Desperadoes pan complex, we built it, but all the things that we built—

Miss Nicholson: You run?

Mr. E. Hart: “If I run”? Yes, all the things that we built, they found them too good for the people, just like the John John Towers. They want to give a football man a football hotel. Which part of the world has a football hotel?

Hon. Member: All over.

Mr. E. Hart: A football hotel? The Member says all over the world there are football hotels. What is a football hotel? [Interruption] The Member will tell me outside? He is an embarrassment to me. [Interruption] Yes, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying I just wanted to place it on the record that these guys get up there and say anything they feel to say.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to the beautiful constituency of Tunapuna, the constituency from which the Speaker came. [Desk thumping] [Interruption] It is not, “Oh God”. I want to talk about Tunapuna. I am representing them up to now. I am the representative. For the past five years there has been no sort of activity on the part of this Government, other than the little link road I spoke about in Macoya with the set of lights like a Christmas tree. Nothing was done. The hon. Minister of Works came home by me with his jeep, with his public relations and cameramen and we went touring. I showed them everything, you know, and I thought something was going to happen. Up to now he has not delivered.

I have written to several Ministers. I got some help from the Member for Caroni Central because he is the essence of decency. [Interruption] Yes, that is the thing. It is the same thing the Minister of Local Government did for the local government elections. He came to Tunapuna; did not ask us to even prioritize. He does not know what needs fixing. He just started to “pave road like mad”. It is the same thing now with Carlos John. [Interruption] We are glad to get the roads paved but they should prioritize. They cannot just go—we wrote to him. I wrote to him in order of priority. I put 53 in order of priority. He did not have the decency to consult. We just saw trucks move in and they started paving roads.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. HART]

Tuesday, September 05, 2000

There is a way to do it, you know. Some of the roads are not paved properly, you know. The Minister would know what I am speaking about. At times they need to scrape the road. A road has a shape and so forth, you know, a contour. Many times when we see vehicles run off the road, people say, “Like it have jumbie here boy”. It is not so. It is because of the way the road is shaped and the way it was done, the suspension and so forth. Yes, it is important. We should not just put pitch on top of pitch. Sometimes it is higher than the pavement, the drains and so forth. That is what they are doing. This is a whole election ploy, but that is not going to help. The people in the year 2000 are aware of these things.
[*Interruption*]

The Member stayed for four and a half years—[*Interruption*] It is because I feel to talk about it. When the Member gets his chance he will talk. [*Interruption*] I am representing Tunapuna so I am speaking. I will talk about it. Some of the roads are not paved properly. [*Interruption*] I said I am glad that we are getting our roads paved but there is a way to do things. There must be consultation with the Member of Parliament. We are the representatives. They just walk into the constituency, do not tell anyone anything; that is a habit. That is a ploy. Then they call that good politics, you understand. [*Interruption*] Okay, I am sorry if I am shouting but because of the crosstalk I did not want to get myself wrapped up in it.

So I say, Mr. Speaker, the people in Tunapuna have stood up well to the pressure for the past four and a half going on five years. I am glad that the election is approaching so they could continue paving roads. I do not know what else they have to offer. I know it is going to be cash for votes again, you understand, but God is great and I am saying that I will continue to try to be a good Member of Parliament to represent my people. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I have to laugh, you know, when I hear that voice coming from Nariva. I used to read his articles and now he has been given a Ministry. I am really glad for you, you know, Harry. [*Interruption*] Ah, I might suffer the same fate as him.

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please.

Mr. E. Hart: Yes Mr. Speaker, all in all, when we sum it up, I feel that we were treated badly in Tunapuna. I did not get the support of some of the Ministers but, so be it, because they feel that if they do something in Tunapuna or in any of the constituencies represented by members of the People’s National Movement, that makes them look good. That is a silly thing. They have to see about the people. [*Interruption*] What about what he told the farmers in Caura?

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please.

Mr. E. Hart: What about the other things? [*Interruption*] Well, I was still going to bring it for the Member but then they demoted him. They could not deal with him. They moved him and put the—the Minister who was expecting to be the Minister of Finance, he has now gone to agriculture and so the thing goes—around and around.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I say thanks for giving me the opportunity of taking part in this debate. As I said, we in Tunapuna spoke about the crime, we spoke about the police station now under renovation and the hazardous conditions under which the policemen have to stay under this little tent with the mosquitoes and the heat. We talked about the fire station—no ambulance. We have been asking for a police post for the longest while; crime is going on and on. Up to yesterday in the *Guardian*, an old man raped a 15-year-old girl, so nobody can fool me. I live in the real world yet they tell me that crime is going down.

Listen to the *Express*, I think it is this morning—yesterday because we are into Wednesday now—the front page, and they do not like them to put things on the front page. In four years there were so many murders, domestic violence and so many children killed. We have to take time to look at those things. We have to take cognizance of the fact too—look at the amount of road deaths and these kinds of things, and we are just taking these things for granted where some of the highways and other roads should be properly lit and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to participate in this debate. I know I am not going to get much support from most of the Ministers on that side, but some have been good to me. So, Mr. Speaker, with that I say thanks very much and I take my seat. I cannot support the budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Wednesday, September 6, 2000 at 1.00 p.m. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.28 a.m.