

*Leave of Absence*

*Friday, September 22, 2000*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Friday, September 22, 2000*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wish to advise that the Member for La Brea has been granted leave to be absent from today's sitting.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. The Seventh Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the Boundaries of the Electoral Districts in the Electoral Area of Tobago. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh L. Maharaj)*]
2. The Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) (Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2000. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. Report of the Dispute Resolution Commission appointed under Section 56 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, 1996. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development and Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job)*]

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

**(Presentation)**

**The Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development and Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to present the following report:

The Fourth Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on proposals for the expenditure from the public revenue which were not included in the annual estimates 1999/2000.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL**

Bill to provide for the Supplementary Appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2000, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

*Finance Bill*

*Friday, September 22, 2000*

*Motion made*, That the next stage of the Bill be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**REGISTRAR GENERAL (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Registrar General Act, Chap.19:03, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**REAL PROPERTY (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Real Property Ordinance Ch. 27 No.11, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**CONVEYANCING AND LAW OF PROPERTY (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Conveyancing and Law of Property Ordinance Ch. 27 No.12, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**LAND ACQUISITION (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Land Acquisition Act, 1994, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**STATE LANDS (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the State Lands (Amdt.) Act, Chap. 57:01, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**REGISTRATION OF DEEDS (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Registration of Deeds Act, Chap. 19:06, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**LEGAL PROFESSION (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Legal Profession Act, 1986, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

**(Adoption)**

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

*Be it resolved* that this House adopt the Fourth Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on proposals for the expenditure from the public revenue which were not included in the annual estimates 1999/2000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Wednesday, September 20 and agreed to an increase in the 1999/2000 appropriation by the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$415.272 million. Given the increase of \$415.272 million, the 1999/2000 appropriation will now be \$15,388,975,216. The increase—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Valley:** Could you just repeat that figure for me please, I just want to note it. I am sorry.

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, given the increase of \$415.272 million, the 1999/2000 appropriation will now be \$15,388,975,216. The increase is in respect of one Head of Expenditure, which is Head 18: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development, \$415.272 million, provision of supplementary funds, \$415.272 million. The supplementary funding in the sum of \$415.272 million, is required under Head 18: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development to facilitate the transfer of funds to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund.

On May 10, 2000, the Cabinet had agreed to the establishment of an Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund to address the inherent volatility in international oil prices, and the impact on the fiscal position of this country. It was intended that this fund would be established by statute and that the necessary administrative arrangements would be put in place to govern the deposits into the fund and withdrawals therefrom.

In addition, the legislation would address the procedure and criteria for investing the assets of the fund and the framework for its accountability. Therefore, the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs was mandated by Cabinet to prepare for the approval of Parliament the necessary legislation that would govern the fund. This legislation is in the process of being drafted. Honourable Members need to appreciate the complexities involved in preparing such a piece of legislation. The legislation is not yet completed and ready to be brought to Parliament in this particular fiscal period. With the consequence that to give effect to the stated intentions of the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development to establish the fund from the excess in oil revenues in the fiscal period, it has become necessary to transfer the sum of \$415.272 million from the Consolidated Fund to an interim fund, established under section 43:02 of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01.

I want to correct some of the statements made by Members on the opposite side of this honourable House, which implied that the 1999/2000 fiscal balance would be in greater deficit when this fund is established. Must we emphasize that the fiscal balance would be in surplus before transferring the sum of \$415.272 million to establish this fund? A fiscal deficit arises only when the amount is transferred from the Consolidated Fund to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, and is included as an expenditure item in the fiscal account.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some even charge, unfairly I would say, that we have borrowed to put money into the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. The reality, though, is that a commitment was made by the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development in the 1999/2000 Budget Statement to this honourable House, that in the event that oil revenues were higher than that projected in the budget, a percentage of those receipts would be appropriated and put aside in a fund saving, so to say, for the rainy day. This is what this Government is now doing: sending the signal to all and sundry that we do not repeat what was done in the oil boom of the 1970s by the PNM government, which squandered billions of dollars because they had neither the foresight, intuition, courage, understanding, or ambition to manage the surpluses that we earned in those years, in a way which would have saved the country the consequent traumas that we went through in the 1980s and even the early 1990s.

**1.40 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I repeat again, what we are doing is putting away to save for the rainy day and creating that ambience, that environment, so that people would understand that we as a Government are taking the lead in having a futuristic understanding of expenditures and income. We are appropriating \$415 million out of an estimated excess of \$629 million to transfer to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. This was established to ensure that in this fiscal year we delivered on our commitment.

I would also like to address another of the charges made, that the country's debt stock has risen to unsustainable levels and we are going to borrow money to put in this stabilization fund. This charge was also made in this very House. Today, notwithstanding our continued presence in the external market, the country's external debt to GDP ratio for Central Government is now 21.4 per cent, the lowest over the last 10 years. We need to put these things on record.

I am going to put on the record some statistics, some figures which will put the lie to all the allegations that are made about squandermania, putting this

country in a debt trap and digging a hole, and all like that. This information, contrary to the kind of propaganda that is propagated, I will ask that copies of this statement be made so that the press can have it. I cannot tell them to print it, but I will make it available to them. Notwithstanding our continued presence in the external market, the country's external debt to GDP ratio for Central Government is now 21.4 per cent, the lowest over the last 10 years. In contrast, in 1993 this ratio stood at 38.6 per cent, the highest in the last 10 years. Let me repeat that. In 1993 the debt to GDP ratio for Central Government was 38.6 per cent. It is now down to 21.4 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not borrowing more than the country can afford, since we are mindful that the debt we incur today would be the responsibility of future generations. We must not be restricted to investing from our savings only. Let me repeat that: no country in the world managed by sensible people is restricting itself only to local savings, in order to invest in the development of the human resources and the physical infrastructure of the country; you have to borrow money. The question must always be: What are you borrowing the money to do? Are you borrowing it to run Development and Environmental Works Division programmes? Are you borrowing it to fund recurrent expenditure? Are you borrowing it to travel? You have to borrow money to invest, and in so doing you are doing the correct thing to benefit the country now and in the future.

Prudent management demands use of other people's savings to increase our productive capacity and our ability to adapt to technological change, in order to be competitive in the global economy. That mouthful only means that any sensible government, whether you are in the United States of America, Germany, Malaysia or Singapore, if you want to compete in the global marketplace, you have to equip yourself so to do, and to do that you have to build up infrastructure. The most important of which is your human infrastructure and the kinds of institutions that allow this human infrastructure to interact with factors here and abroad, so that the local country can be competitive, can hold its own against all comers in the world and the global marketplace.

This country's borrowing on the external market has been strategically executed to take advantage of opportunities presented in a sometimes volatile international market. At the end of August our gross official reserve position stood at US \$1.3 billion or 4.2 months of imports, which is quite an achievement for this country. This is one of the criteria by which the international investment community assesses the performance and the viability of a country. Our present credit rating reflects the confidence that they have in this country.

In fact, our investment grade rating says that the global financial markets have confidence that we will not borrow money to squander it, but rather to continue to pursue productive investments and minimize price distortions in the market consistent with what you would call “prudent macro economic management”, and people must understand this. When the credit rating agencies of the world look at you, they look at all these things; they look at *ex post* investment—what you did with the money. So that the current situation is a reflection of the confidence of the global marketplace, that we can borrow money and use the money well.

The fact is that during the period 1995 to now our external debt service ratio has fallen from 17.4 per cent to 10.3 per cent in the year 2000. In 1992 the ratio was as high at 32.4 per cent. The statistics available from Moody's reveal that in 2000 this country's external debt service ratio compares favourably with countries with a similar credit rating. These include countries such as Mexico, 19 per cent; Chile, 19.2 per cent; Poland, 8.3 per cent; Qatar, some 29 per cent. The Central Government's domestic debt to GDP ratio has maintained an average rate of 21 per cent over the 1995—2000 period, even while we brought to account a number of outstanding debts incurred in periods prior to the beginning of our term in office. The average rate for the 1991—1995 period was also 21 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, borrowing on the domestic market can be done for a number of reasons. The propaganda, again, that is being spread that you must not borrow, or borrowing is essentially and necessarily invidious, is not true. As I said before, borrowing depends on what you do with the money, and we include in the set of reasons: liquidity management, investing in physical infrastructure, investing in development which will benefit our citizens now and in the future.

This Government is committed to providing the citizens of this country with the best quality physical infrastructure money can buy. Let me repeat that, we ought not to be ashamed. This Government is committed to providing the citizens of this country with the best quality physical infrastructure we can buy, in order that the continued growth and development of this country is assured. We must not be ashamed to spend money for quality.

As a little boy I used to hear them say an old proverb: “Chinee say, cheap ting no good”, there is some value in that statement. You do not want to spend money and get no sense of value; good things are not cheap. If something does not have value, you pay nothing for it; if it has value you have to pay for it, and the higher the value the more you have to pay.

The services provided by our state enterprises and statutory bodies previously have not kept pace with that required for a country seeking to compete

successfully in this global environment. During the oil boom of the 1970s, as we all know, calypsonians sang about it, journalists wrote about it, we heard it on the radio, that during the oil boom of the 1970s Barbados and other Caribbean countries, Caribbean islands, built better airports than Trinidad and Tobago. Some of them even said that they did it with our money. We are investing now in a state of the art facility which would be the envy of many in this country; the envy of many, and indeed, it will redound to the benefit of all.

When we assumed office the water and electricity system, the road network, the airport and other social infrastructure all needed drastic overhaul. The financing of these facilities required huge injections of capital that could not then be got from internally generated funds of the enterprises themselves, or from transfers from the Treasury. It was, therefore, essential, necessary over the past five years to finance these infrastructure projects by borrowing on the local market or through concessional borrowing from multilateral agencies, and this we did. This Government sees the provision of these services as part of our responsibility to foster and stimulate the growth and development of this country.

The establishment of this fund—before I deal with that I think I need to put this on the record, because I expect, I anticipate, as, indeed, I have been here for the budget debate and the few times we spoke, and we met after that, and almost every time I am hearing this thing about debt and corruption and all of that, and it is essential that I place this on the record. I am going to give you a table here, Central Government external debt, the debt service ratio in millions of Trinidad and Tobago dollars for the years 1991—2000. I am going to read out every item, because I want it on the record, to have it in the *Hansard*.

The Central Government external debt—I am reading across 1991, 1992, and so on up to the year 2000 and so forth. I will not repeat 1991, I will just repeat the figure starting with 1991. So the gross domestic product is the first line I will read, and that is, for 1991, \$22.3798 billion; next year, \$23.117 billion; next year, \$24.4905 billion; next year, \$29.3117 billion; next year, \$31.697 billion; next year, \$34.5866 billion; next year, \$36.442; 1998, \$38.4592; and in the year 2000 we have \$50.2315 billion.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am reading the other line which says what is the Central Government's debt in gross terms. As I say that figure I will give you the ratio, which is like the percentage. So the Central Government's external debt was \$5.2559 billion; and the debt to GDP ratio was 23.5 per cent, that was in 1991. In 1992 the external debt was \$6 billion and the debt to GDP ratio was 26 per cent. The next year the debt was \$9.455 billion, and the debt to GDP ratio was 38 per cent.

The next year the external debt was \$10 billion and the debt to GDP ratio was 34 per cent; the next year it was \$9.7 billion, and the debt to GDP ratio was 30 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was in the year 1995. In the year 1996 the debt was \$9.589 billion and the ratio was 27 per cent. The next year the debt was \$10 billion and the ratio was 27 per cent. In 1998 the debt was \$9.2 billion and the ratio was 24 per cent, declining since 1995. In the next year the debt was \$9.284 billion and the ratio was 28 per cent; declining again, and in the year 2000 the debt was \$10 billion and the ratio was 21.4 per cent.

These are not the figures of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development; these came from the Central Bank. These are the records of the country of Trinidad and Tobago showing you that the external debt to GDP ratio has consistently declined from 30.7 per cent in 1995 to 21.4 per cent today; this is not propaganda, these are the facts.

Let us go now to Central Government external debt service and put that as a fraction of GDP. In 1991 the external debt service was \$1.032 billion, and the percentage of GDP was 4.6 per cent. In 1992, it was \$1.3 billion and the percentage of GDP was 5.7 per cent. In 1993, the external debt service was \$1.688 billion and the percentage of GDP was 6.9 per cent. In 1994, it was \$2.259 billion and the ratio was 7.7 per cent. In 1995, it was \$1.759 billion and the percentage was 5.6 per cent. In 1996, it was \$1.868 billion and the percentage was 5.4 per cent. In 1997, it was \$2.733 billion and the percentage was 7.5 per cent. In 1998, it was \$2.428 billion and the percentage of GDP was 6.3 per cent.

### **1.55 p.m.**

In 1999, it was \$2.766 billion and the percentage was 6.5 per cent; in the year 2000, it was \$1.7 billion and the percentage was 3.4 per cent so you see again a decline going over the period from 1995 to the year 2000.

External debt service as a percentage of export of goods and services: In 1992 that was 32.4 per cent; in 1993 it was 30.8 per cent; 1994 it was 26 per cent; in 1995 it was 17 per cent; in 1996 it was 14 per cent; 1997, 15 per cent; 1998, 9.7 per cent; 1999, 7.8 per cent; in the year 2000 it went up to 10 per cent.

Central Government internal debt as a fraction of gross domestic product: In 1991 it was \$4.9 billion and as a fraction of gross domestic product it was 21.9 per cent, call it 22 per cent. In 1992 it was \$5.249 billion, and as a fraction of gross domestic product it was 22.7 per cent. The next year it was \$5.6 billion, 22.9 per cent, the next year it was \$5.7 billion, 19 per cent. In 1995, it was \$6.589 billion, 20 per cent; 1996, it was \$6.738 billion, 19.5 per cent; 1997, \$7.75 billion,



21 per cent; 1998, \$8.157 billion, 21 per cent is the fraction; 1999, \$9.105 billion and 21 per cent and in the year 2000 it is \$10 billion and 20.1 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see again a gradual tendency to decline over the periods 1995 to now.

Central Government's internal debt service as a proportion of gross domestic product: In 1991 it was \$777 million and as a fraction of gross domestic product, it was 3.5 per cent. In 1992, \$976 million and as a fraction it was 4.2 per cent; 1993, it was \$1.1 billion and 4.5 per cent; 1994, \$1.076 billion and 3.7 per cent; 1995, it was \$993 million and 3 per cent; 1996, \$1.08 billion and 3 per cent; 1997, \$1.083 billion and 3 per cent; 1998, \$1.636 billion and 4.3 per cent; 1999, \$1.9 billion 4.5 per cent; in the year 2000, \$3.24 billion and 6.4 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these figures were not manufactured by this Government to spread propaganda, you can get it in the *Central Bank Report*, these are the figures that are internationally available. These are the facts, but we hear a continuous cacophony of discordant noises dedicated purely to the purpose of spreading propaganda to confuse those who do not know and those who cannot understand. *[Interruption]*

The establishment of this fund will ensure that in the years to come, the revenue flows needed to meet the expenditure required to continue the development of Trinidad and Tobago will be more assured even during periods of depressed oil prices.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this measure institutionalizes a kind of process in managing the macroeconomics of Trinidad and Tobago that we had denied ourselves the opportunity to do in the years past. We are doing it now and hopefully, that example will feed back into the entire society especially for those subcultures in this country who have a higher preference for present gratification and present pleasure, and discount heavily future rewards and returns from savings and investments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this measure is intended to be a temporary one impending the enactment of more comprehensive legislation which we will bring to Parliament before the end of this parliamentary term.

In closing, I wish to advise Members that this Bill will increase the 1999/2000 appropriation by \$415.272 million, the total amount to be appropriated for 1999/2000 will therefore be \$15,380,975,216.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Colm Imbert** (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, once again we are treated to the spectacle of the assistant Minister of Finance floundering his way through fiscal measures. Fumbling and bumbling, while the real Minister I understand is holidaying in Malta, the Canary Islands, London and the Czech Republic and I see the Attorney General is laughing because he knows it is true. In which country in the world does a Minister of Finance get the opportunity to go on a holiday to Malta, the Canary Islands, London and the Czech Republic to attend an International Monetary Fund meeting that lasts for about two days, but he has gone off for 21 at the public's expense, and all this is going into the estimates.

I heard the Member for Tobago East say they do not borrow to travel. I would like to know who is paying for all this travel by his substantive Minister. As we listen to the cacophony of nonsense from the Member for Tobago East, to use his phraseology, it seems that he did not even attend the Cabinet meeting of September 12, 2000. He comes here with his alter ego and tells us that his Government is disciplined, it is prudent, responsible and does not borrow money for recurrent expenditure.

I will read into the record for the Minister's information a document which has already been mentioned in this House, Cabinet Note No. FP&D (2000)237 dated September 12, 2000. It says:

“2 Cabinet may recall that by Minute No. 628 dated April 5, 2000 it agreed, inter alia, that:

Republic Finance and Merchant Bank Limited (FINCOR) and Royal Merchant Bank and Finance Company Limited be each awarded a mandate to arrange and fully underwrite Bond Issues in the sum of TT\$300-Mn. on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago...”

Listen carefully, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Member for Tobago East.

“to accelerate the domestic borrowing programme to meet Government's shortfall in its recurrent expenditure.”

Do they live in the same country, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Is he in the same Cabinet? There is conclusive evidence of this Government borrowing money for recurrent expenditure pretending they will have a surplus and all sorts of foolishness, and the Minister says they are so prudent and rattles off statistics from God knows where. It is certainly not from this book, the *Central Bank Economic Bulletin of May 2000*, or this document, *The Review of the Economy*,

*Ministry of Finance, August 2000*, or this document, *Draft Estimates of Revenue 2001*. God alone knows from where this Minister gets these bogus figures. I need to educate him.

I did a simple calculation while he was rattling off his foolishness and I have worked out the ratio of total debt to gross domestic product in 1995 and 2000 and for the Minister's edification, in 1995 according to his own book, the gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago at constant prices was \$17.3 billion in Appendix 1 in the *Review of the Economy*. In Appendix 16, we look at the total public debt in 1995, which was \$18.8 billion; GDP, \$17.3 billion—total debt \$18.8 billion. So the ratio of total debt to GDP in 1995 was 1.09 per cent.

Let us move on to the year 2000 using the Minister's own document. Gross domestic product in 2000, \$22.7 billion in Appendix 1; debt, \$30 billion so the debt is \$30 billion, the GDP is \$22 billion. The ratio of debt to GDP is 1.33 per cent, sorry 109 per cent and 133 per cent. So in 1995, the debt and the GDP were almost the same, the debt was \$18 billion, GDP was \$17 billion, but in 2000, in the Minister's own document, the debt is \$30 billion and the GDP is \$22 billion. Which child doing this new examination, the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA)—not even a child going to a model school above a rum shop—would come into this Parliament and tell us that 18 over 17 is more than 30 over 22?

**Mr. Sudama:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** I am not giving way. What kind of mathematics is that? *[Interruption]* Let me repeat for the record. *[Interruption]* Be quiet and sit down!

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Oropouche, please observe the rules of the House.

**Mr. Sudama:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** What is the point of order?

**Mr. Sudama:** The Member is misleading the House. That is not allowed.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** What is the Standing Order?

**Mr. Humphrey:** Wrong information, he is lying in other words.

**Mr. Sudama:** He is misleading the House, he is not giving the facts.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Which is the Standing Order?

Member for Diego Martin East, please continue.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, if misleading the House was a problem, every one of them would be in breach of the Standing Orders every time this Parliament is convened. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members for Oropouche and St. Augustine, the Member is on his feet, he is making his contribution, you will have your chance, we have the whole afternoon. Please allow him. *[Interruption]*

It would be nice to respect the Chair sometimes. Member for Diego Martin East, continue.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know what they are getting so jumpy about. "Yuh beg and yuh beg and yuh get through as a candidate, cool yourself." *[Laughter]* I do not know why they are so jumpy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. "De two ah dem."

I will go to Appendix 1 in the *Review of the Economy 2000*. I do not know what the problem is. In 1995 the gross domestic product was \$17.3 billion. It is here in black and white, and in the year 2000, the GDP was \$22.7 billion. It is here. What do they want to hide? It was 17.3 in 1995, and 22.7 in 2000 and then we go to the debt which was 18.8 in 1995, 30 in 2000 and I repeat 18 over 17 could never be more than 30 over 22.

### 2.10 p.m.

As I said, even a child going to a model school over a rum shop could figure that one out. This is why I wonder about the Minister of Finance and his alter ego. He comes in here and rattles off figures. He feels that we are all a bunch of fools; he feels we do not have access to these documents. You see what the Minister and his two comrades are trying to pretend, is that the local debt is not \$10 billion; the external debt is not \$10 billion and the guaranteed debt is not \$9 billion. That is their problem. They want us to forget one of these things. They want us to overlook the fact that our total debt is made up of guarantees, domestic debt and foreign debt. They want us to forget that.

So when they go on a borrowing spree for the airport and they borrow \$1.3 billion and it is not appearing on the books; and they borrow \$400 million to build stadiums and it is not on the books; and they borrow \$300 million to build schools and it is not on the books; and they give a guarantee to InnCogen for \$900 million and it is not on the books; and they give a guarantee for the Desalination Plant for \$800 million and it is not on the books. That is what they want us to do. They want us to forget these things. *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Job:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of clarification. The Table that he is reading from—there is a thing called a GNP deflation which takes current prices and makes them into the prices of a base period. When you do that—he is using those prices and saying that the GDP, in 1995, was \$17.38 million. That is the GDP at constant prices. The figure that I used in the Table, which is in the records, is GDP at the current price, which is \$31.697 billion. So, in fact, he is putting on the record mischief deliberately—because I am sure he understands what he is doing.

**Mr. Assam:** No, he does not. He is mischievous.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, this just confirms that the Minister is just a caretaker waiting for the other man to come back from Malta. The reason for this Table is that it takes account of inflation and all the factors that have occurred since 1985. [*Desk thumping*] I have the constant prices, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Valley:** They are stupid!

**Mr. C. Imbert:** They are foolish! [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin Central, it is not nice to say those expletives across the floor. That does not mean to say that would make it right. We have not suspended the House for a long time, so I would advise Members here to let us do things with decorum. I know the press and members of the public are here, so try your best to put on your best behaviour. Once again, the Member for Diego Martin East.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not understand what their problem is. Why are they so jumpy? What are they carrying on so for? As you have said on many occasions they would get their chance to speak. It is my turn to speak now and I am being consistent. I quoted from constant prices in 1995 and in 2000. [*Desk thumping*]

Are they going to the model school or something? “What happen?” Is it “Goldilocks” and “Chicken Licken” on that side? I am being consistent. This is why I asked the Minister: Does he understand anything he says? He does not understand anything. You know, they love to jump between the *Review of the Economy* which is their own document, and the Central Bank document whenever it suits them. When the figures in the *Review of the Economy* look nice they use those figures; when the Central Bank has a figure that they like, they use the Central Bank figures; but when there is something in here that they do not like, they say, “that is Central Bank man, doh worry about them.”

*Finance Committee Report*  
[MR. IMBERT]

*Friday, September 22, 2000*

I am now going to quote Table 14 of the Central Government Fiscal Operations, Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago—which the Minister extolled the virtues of a little while ago—*Economic Bulletin, May 2000*, Volume II, No. 1, if he needs to know where it is. [Interruption] Table 14. It is not a page, it is a Table.

“Overall deficit, first quarter of 1999 minus \$425.2 million. Second quarter minus \$142.3 million; third quarter 1999, minus \$62.5 million; fourth quarter 1999 minus \$725.5 million.”

So when you add up for the entire 1999 you get a deficit. Let me explain what a deficit is—because you know they do not want us to let people know what a deficit is—when you spend more than you earn! You have an income and expenditure and you are living beyond your means.

So that in 1999 they had an aggregate deficit of \$1.2 billion. So they spent \$1.2 billion more than they earned. But year after year—and I am using the Central Bank document that they love so much—the Minister of Finance, the Malta boy, comes in to this Parliament and tells us about a surplus. He talks nonsense for an hour and a half and then tells us that he expects to achieve a surplus in fiscal 1999 or fiscal 1998 or whatever, of \$200 million, \$300 million or whatever it is. He has done it for five years and every single year, as night follows day, the Central Bank Report proves that this surplus is magically converted into a deficit.

If we look at 1999/2000 for the period October to March, the same Table 14, the overall deficit minus \$926 million. So that for the first six months of fiscal 1999/2000 they spent \$926 million more than they collected in revenue. And they are borrowing it from the Central Bank; they are borrowing it from the local banks; they are borrowing it from anybody overseas that would lend it to them; they are scrambling; pushing the Central Bank overdraft right up to its limit and scrambling and soaking up money in the local system. It is all right.

You see, instead of dealing with these issues; instead of dealing with these facts; they come to the Parliament with all of this “ole talk”. I mean the Minister spouting utter inconsistencies when we had a Cabinet Note of September 12 that says “a borrowing to finance recurrent expenditure.” That is what the note says. But the Minister gets up and says his “Government is prudent. For the first time there is an Oil Stabilization Fund.” And he knows very well because he was a public servant. He knows very well that there was a long-term development fund created under the PNM administration that had almost \$1.8 billion in it in 1986.

He knows that very well. Created out of surplus oil revenues. A long-term development fund for Trinidad and Tobago had almost \$2 billion in it in 1986. But he will come into this Parliament and try to “mamaguy” people who do not know that this is the first time this thing has ever been done. This is the first time a Government has ever done this. *[Desk thumping]* And, oh, they are putting \$400 million. What is \$400 million compared to \$2 billion? And it is also an imaginary number. They are borrowing the \$400 million to put it over here. They are digging a hole here to fill a hole there. It is like a company going into bankruptcy. You are owing all about. So you borrow money here to pay off here. So you create a new debt to discharge an old debt. That is kiting. This is what this Government is all about. I understand that is the financial term: kiting. And they are coming to pretend that they are such brilliant managers.

**2.20 p.m.**

I want to read into the record an extract from an attachment to this Cabinet Note of September 2000, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is the Cabinet Note where they tried to “manners” Royal Bank, where they said that, you know, “Royal bank was supposed to raise money for us, and Royal bank is behaving bad and they must be omitted from future requests for financing proposals until they behave themselves”. That, in effect, is what the Cabinet Note said. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me quote from a paragraph in the letter. The letter is dated August 14, 2000, and it goes like this:

“For the year to date the market has supported a very heavy level of activity...”

This is just a month ago, you know:

“...led by Government and Quasi Government issues which we estimate alone aggregate over TT \$2.0 billion.”

This wonderful, brilliant Government, managing the debt, took the debt from \$18 billion to \$30 billion. The GDP only went from \$17 to \$22 but they “managing the debt”.

Let me read it again.

“For the year to date the market has supported a very heavy level of activity...”

This is from a bank to the Ministry of Finance.

“...led by Government and Quasi Government issues which we estimate alone aggregate over TT \$2.0 billion.”

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, listen to this:

“As a consequence short term rates...”

They are talking about interest rates:

“...have increased, and the market has been lukewarm to recent issues.”

This is a bank politely giving the Government some advice. “Look, you are borrowing too much money. You are borrowing billions and billions of dollars on the local market. The market cannot stand it. You are pushing up interest rates. You are causing economic problems in the country”. This is what this is saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They come here to pretend that this is not the kind of thing in which they are engaged. I mean, what arrant nonsense!

Coming back to the matter at hand, I will read from the Minister’s speech, page 37, Budget Statement 2001. He spoke, you know, on August 28, 2000, which is three weeks ago:

“Mr. Speaker, this Government keeps its commitments, even if they mean taking tough decisions. This Government has put \$415 million into the Revenue Stabilization Fund.”

Those are the words of the doublespeak Minister holidaying in Malta. That is August 28 but on September 12 he talked about the need to put in place an interim arrangement to facilitate the establishment of the Revenue Stabilization Fund. That is what they have come here to do today, but on August 28 he was boasting for everybody to hear—they put \$415 million in the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Lie, Mr. Deputy Speaker—lie, lie. That is all they are good at—lie, lie.

It pains me when I hear about this airport for which they are borrowing \$1.3 billion while trying to pretend it only cost \$700 million. So they are saying that the airport cost \$700 and the cost of the other things amounted to the rest of the money. *[Interruption]* The terminal building, sorry—the frame, the cowshed, the portal frame up there—cost \$700 million. The other things cost the rest. So they feel the car park and the—*[Interruption]* No, they did not build a runway. The car park and God knows what else cost \$600 million. How they could have an airport without a runway, without a parking apron and without air traffic control equipment, I would love to know. But in typical doublespeak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we heard a Cabinet Minister say that this airport only cost US \$160 a square foot and if one checks Puerto Rico it cost \$200 and if one checks Aruba and some other place it cost more.



So our airport cost \$160 a square foot, according to the Minister, which, by the way, is a thousand Trinidad and Tobago dollars. Our airport only cost TT \$1,000 per square foot but it cost more in some other countries, and he completely forgets all the ancillary and support services associated with the airport. He just pulled out the building cost. I mean, \$183 million went to Calmaquip, that famous company again that was charging \$30 million for the gates at the prison when we had actual invoices for \$14 million. They took it away from the Central Tenders Board, they took it away from Nipdec and they came up with some “nancy-story” that the Airports Authority is going to be in charge of this equipment, so they are the ones who must award this contract. I mean, they take the country for fools, utter fools, and that \$1.3 billion cost price on that airport “is joke”!

You see, we have been getting the price in driblets. First it was US \$100 million, then we found out another \$15 million is for fees, then we suddenly find out they forgot about the ground control, they forgot about the paving, they forgot about this and they forgot about that. So “it gone to \$800, it gone to \$900, it gone to \$1,000; \$1,100, \$1,200, \$1,300” and “it goin’ and still climbing”. At last count consultants’ fees on that airport exceeded \$250 million. I saw an article in the newspaper, written by a local architect. I could not believe it. Consultants’ fees in this Trinidad and Tobago of \$250 million—a quarter of a billion dollars—[*Desk thumping*] for no value added? Mr. Deputy Speaker, you do not get concrete for that; you do not get steel; you do not get asphalt; you do not get anything for that. That is just paper and letters, like the letter written about Overseas Communication whatever it is. Two hundred and fifty million dollars, Mr. Deputy Speaker—it has to be a world record.

I have a particular problem with the acting Minister of Finance in his presentation. He talked about the debt that was incurred. He said they had to bring to book debts incurred by another administration, so he is talking about current liabilities. You see, they talk out of both sides of their mouth. They say that they had \$4 billion in current liabilities from another administration so that had to be put on the books. I have already pointed out, using the same *Review of the Economy*, that that is a fantasy and a figment of the Minister’s imagination, because when one looks at the *Review of the Economy*, which is published by the Minister of Finance, one sees that the debt in 1995 was 18.8 while the debt in 1996 was 18.6. So if the debt went down one year after this administration came to office, where did this \$4 billion go? Did it vanish into the ground, Mr. Deputy Speaker? How could \$4 billion of PNM debt come on the books as soon as this administration took office, yet it is not recorded here? It is not here—18.8 in 1995

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and 18.6 in 1996. Where? How? Show me. I would love to know. It is all a figment of their imagination.

You see, “dey get ketch”, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, their budget presentation was a flop. They came here thinking it was an election budget full of goodies, you know. [*Desk thumping*] Give the pensioners \$100 and they will say “ey” [*clapping sound*] and they will vote UNC but forget to tell the pensioners that while “dey givin’ dem a little cacada, a lil’ \$100, they gi’in’ deyself a \$10,000 increase”. [*Desk thumping*] It is a flop. It is naked greed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is manifesting itself with this Government and as the time gets closer and closer to the election, this feeding frenzy is going to increase.

Just yesterday someone working at the port came to tell me about two brand new Mercedes Benzes that had just arrived in this country for two Cabinet Ministers. They know an election is coming, you know, so they are hustling to get their concessions on their Mercedes Benzes. I heard this story about the Cabinet now being called the Wabenzi tribe. There are more Mercedes Benzes per capita in that Government than any government in the world. Even in Nigeria I am sure they do not have the number of Benzes per capita as they have in the UNC administration; and BMWs and Volvos, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I remember poor Augustus Ramrekersingh in 1992—I have to call him poor. I do not mean in the financial sense, I mean unfortunate Augustus Ramrekersingh. He bought a Toyota Corolla, the smallest car on the market, because he never was—he was not a person who wanted to be ostentatious. So he bought a Toyota Corolla using the concessions available to Ministers and he got tax concessions of maybe \$15,000 for which he made the front page of a newspaper. He was written up with a whole-page article, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about this expensive motor car that he bought—a Toyota Corolla. This UNC administration, then in Opposition, carried on about Augustus Ramrekersingh’s Toyota Corolla, and as soon as they came into office “dey tripping over themselves—who could buy de first BMW, who could buy de biggest Mercedes Benz, who could buy de newest model Volvo” and so forth. They are tripping over themselves.

The Member for Oropouche has been driving an old car for four years, a foreign-used, diesel engine something—shutting down all about. The minute he goes to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, he buys a brand new 300 SEL Mercedes Benz, that Member for Oropouche. You know, what bothers me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the hypocrisy. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Just a question to the Member for Diego Martin East. Are you in any way imputing any improper motives to the Member for Oropouche?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not imputing any improper motives to any Member of this House who is entitled to tax concessions on an expensive motor car. The fact of the matter is that they are a bunch of political hypocrites because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, hypocrisy is a common thread that runs through and through this administration. You see, when one builds one's reputation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on human rights, and then when one comes into office one systematically takes away all the human rights of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and withdraws the country from the human rights conventions, that is hypocrisy.

Amnesty International, the same organization that was the darling of the Members for Couva South and Couva North—anytime anything happened in Trinidad, “dey bawlin” for Amnesty International to come here. However, “dey in Government now”. They have taken us out of the United Nations Convention on Human Rights. They have withdrawn us from the International Protocol. They increased the time for holding public meetings. They are bringing all kinds of draconian legislation in this Parliament.

They are pushing their heavy hand into the media. We are seeing it with Power 102. We see it with the coverage of the Olympic Games, interfering with citizens' rights, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have lived to see the day the Member for Couva North and the Member for Couva South, who spent all their time in Opposition championing human rights, say that Amnesty International is giving Trinidad and Tobago a bad name. I have lived to see the Member for Couva North cussing the parasitic oligarchy for his entire career in Opposition—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin East, is this related to the appropriation—no, no I am just asking. Are you on any trend relating the appropriation to the Judiciary or something? I see you are talking about all kinds of human rights and everything else.

**2.35 p.m.**

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, certainly, we are talking about the Consolidated Fund. If I go into the notes of the Finance Committee, in order to correct their “mamaguy” of this Parliament, they are asking for transfer of the amount of \$415 million from the Consolidated Fund. Now, the Consolidated Fund is the fund into which all government revenue goes. It is from the Consolidated

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Fund that allocations are made for development programmes, infrastructure, schools and so on and, therefore, I have a problem when the Government is taking \$415 million from poor people's money—out of the Consolidated Fund—that could be used to build schools; to fix the hospitals; to buy drugs for patients who cannot afford it; and to fix infrastructure in depressed areas. I have a problem when the Government is taking \$415 million from that fund which is for poor people in this country, and this is their conduct. That is the parallel I was drawing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this administration has come into office pretending to be in support of the common people of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government has come into this administration pretending that government expenditure should be properly managed; there should be no waste and no mismanagement.

I remember the Member for Couva North saying that the way to balance the budget is to stop the corruption. That was one of his famous statements in the previous eras—just stop the corruption and the budget will balance “one time”. Well, that statement of the Member for Couva North is more applicable today than it ever was. If the Government stops the corruption now, not only will it balance the budget, but it will declare a fiscal surplus on the account of over \$1 billion. [*Desk thumping*] That is why I have a problem. [*Desk thumping*] Instead of having a surplus on the fiscal accounts there is a deficit and the Government is now taking money out of the Consolidated Fund to create more problems again. That is why I have a problem with a government coming into office making these kinds of inane statements—cut out the corruption and you will balance the budget. The Government came into office and engaged in squandermania and irregularities that this country has never seen in its history.

It is a common view, on the other side, that corruption is not an issue in this country. The Government keeps saying it. They say it inside; they say it outside; they say it in the tea room; and they say it in the corridor. The Government comes and says what we are getting on with that for. Nobody is interested; nobody cares about that, especially poor people—they do not care about that. I have heard Members on that side say on several occasions that the ordinary folks in this country do not care about corruption. Well, as far as I am concerned that is simply not true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see, when you are squandering millions of dollars from the Consolidated Fund on Miss Universe—\$100 million down the drain and nothing to show for it; when you are taking \$1,300 million and squandering it on an airport; and when you are taking \$900 million and giving it to a short-pants man for InnCogen and I see —

**Mr. Manning:** Do you know InnCogen II is on the way?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I am on my feet, let me express my sincere condolences to the family of the former General Manager of Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, Mr. Ottley, who passed away before his time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you see what this Government is doing—it is taking money out of the Consolidated Fund and engaging in a feeding frenzy. As I have said before, there is a little group of characters who sit down in some little room somewhere, and they dream up all of these schemes, and they say what can they do next to make some money and that is how InnCogen was born; that is how the desalination plant was born; that is how the airport has become the monster that it is; that is how the schools can go from \$80 million to \$120 million to \$180 million to \$200 million to \$300 million; that is how the stadia can go from \$80 million to \$100 million to \$300 million to \$400 million; and everything is off the balance sheet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you are talking about current liabilities, the Government has to be truthful. The Government claimed that there were some current liabilities that were on the books in 1996, but it is not shown in the figures. We know about current liabilities of this present administration that are not on the books. We know that the airport debt is not on the books, we know that. I would like if it is there for the Minister to show me where it is. I want the Minister to show me where the \$1.3 billion for the airport is contained in the *Review of the Economy*, in the total public debt and so on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, let the Minister get up and show me where the debt for the airport is shown. The Minister cannot! The Government is calling it all kinds of funny names like transfer, subsidy and all kinds of *vaille que vaille* arbitrary schemes to hide what is the real public debt in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is why I cannot see any reason to support what is going on here today. I do not know what the Government is doing. The Government takes out \$400 million and puts it somewhere, and God alone knows what they are going to do with it. Every day you hear about something new. It is like this road-paving programme. One hears by the way, that Tidco is borrowing \$200 million—the Tourism Company, that is the company that put on that fiasco, the Miss Universe \$100 million flop. Tidco does not have a single road engineer working for them; they would not know what asphalt is if it hits them in their face, and they never saw a Lake Asphalt truck in their life—

**Mr. Valley:** They paved a dog in El Socorro. *[Laughter]*

**Mr. C. Imbert:** The Tourism Company is borrowing \$200 million to pave roads. I saw something very intriguing in my own constituency from this road enhancement programme. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my constituency, there is an area called La Seiva where almost 1,000 persons live. Next to La Seiva is the area of Fairways. So if you combine the two areas together, one is an upper income and the other is a lower income, and you are talking about maybe 1,200 or 1,300 persons.

In 1995 a contract was awarded to construct a proper bridge into the La Seiva area to help the poor families of La Seiva. Well, of course, this Government comes in—it is in a PNM constituency—and they scrapped the whole thing. The Government removed the temporary bridge that was put in place to facilitate access and so on and nothing happens for five years, and then two months before a general election, they go to an area where two high-ranking political activists live—not PNM activists by the way—activists from another party. There are about 10 houses in this district, maybe 12. The people have used a bridge comfortably for the last 20 years—12 houses maybe 50 to 60 people living in this little area—and the only money this Government could spend out of that \$200 million road enhancement programme in my constituency—potholes all about, landslide, road falling down because they have done nothing for five years—is to build a new bridge for these two political activists who live in this little area where there are 12 houses, but the 1,200 poor people in La Seiva and so on must not get a bridge; and I must not get vex for that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is obscene the way the Government is dealing with public funds. It is the same way they are taking public funds from the Consolidated Fund; the same fund they want to take this \$400 million from and they are widening—

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**2.45 p.m.**

**Mr. C. Imbert:** It is the same way they are taking hundreds of thousands of dollars, maybe millions. You know the way this Government operates. The price for asphalt is \$150 a square foot but you are charging \$300 so let us say they are taking half a million, or maybe a million dollars, to widen the road between the Kapok Hotel and Stanley's Maternity Clinic in my constituency.

Do you know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because there is a particular individual who allegedly gave the UNC \$1 million as a campaign contribution in 1995 and he does not like traffic passing in front of his house—one man—so that 15,000 residents of Maraval, Long Circular Road, Bellevue, Dibe, Paramin, Maraval Village, Morne Coco, Saddle Hill, La Seiva—ordinary, common folk—will now be forced to go on some five-mile roundabout. They cannot come through Maraval anymore; they cannot come through Boissiere Village. Right now, to drive into Maraval, you drive into Boissiere Village, pass Kentucky, go up Saddle Road and that is how you get to Maraval. It is about 200 yards but now, because of one man who does not like traffic in front of his house, who is a personal friend of the Prime Minister and gave UNC \$1 million in 1995, 15,000 people must suffer for one man to be happy. That is how this Government operates with taxpayers' funds out of the Consolidated Fund.

They are getting letters from the US Ambassador, from the British High Commission, from all the residents in the entire area, from the national security people at Camp Ogden at Long Circular Road. They are all telling them that it is nonsense and foolishness. They are creating a gridlock along Long Circular Road to facilitate one person. They are creating a security risk for the Army; they are causing problems for the Embassy. “Nah!” The Prime Minister gets up on a platform in San Fernando two or three weeks ago and says, “Ah doh care what dey say. Dey could make all de noise they want but I sending de traffic that way.” That is what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago and, as I have said before: Let them come. Let them go on with the foolishness. It is 10,000 people who will be waiting for them. Let them go ahead with the foolishness.

This is why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot support this nonsense. The Minister has demonstrated complete ignorance of the fiscal operations of the Central Government. He cannot even read the Central Bank bulletin. He cannot interpret data. He cannot do mathematics. He cannot even do simple calculations. He does not understand the difference between market prices and current prices. He understands nothing. He is merely acting out a role, as I have said before, while the substantive Minister is having a joyride in Malta and the Canary Islands at taxpayers' expense.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam):** Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Hart:** That is the last hurrah.

**Hon. M. Assam:** You could say what you want, last or no last. You think I am looking for work like you? I “ain’t scrunting”, you know. [*Laughter*] Always had the top jobs in the country and in Canada where I lived and in the United States. Top jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to join in this debate on the Motion:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Fourth Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the public revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1999/2000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I always feel a sense of sadness when I rise in this House after listening to Members opposite. I reflect a lot after I leave this Parliament in my moments of solitude and soliloquy and come to the inescapable conclusion that why this country has been in trouble for such a long time and why God was so great, almost like when Moses delivered the Israelites from the torment of the Egyptians, that the UNC has come on the scene to do so for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you listen to the Member for Diego Martin East, he seems to be suffering from a degenerative disease, because to stand up in this House to say the things he has said this afternoon and to repeat the same thing every Friday or whenever this House meets, is a disgrace, not only to himself, to his party, to the Parliament, to his constituency, but to the national community. He is an utter disgrace.

**Mr. Manning:** Talk on the issue.

**Hon. M. Assam:** He never talks about the issue. He goes around the world and talks about everything except the business before the House. What is sad is not that he goes around the world and educates us and informs us about anything that is elevating, he descends to the gutter, always to the gutter. I often wonder where he was born or conceived. He descends to the gutter. He always has the worst kind of descriptions, the worst kind of information, the kind of dishonest remarks and inaccurate statements about everybody on this side of the House. Do you know what is sad about it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? He does not realize that the very things he is alleging against Members on this side—he is the total incarnation of all those things! He speaks about corruption. He should look in the mirror! He speaks about people buying Mercedes Benzes, BMWs and so forth. I hate it when people come to this House and talk about who issued bounced



cheques, who cannot pay their mortgage and who is buying this and that. I find that is such a disgraceful performance for somebody who wishes to be called “honourable” because the Member for Diego Martin West was disputing why, in the *Hansard*, he was not called honourable and I understand why you people cannot be called honourable.

**Mr. Manning:** Why?

**Hon. M. Assam:** Because you are totally dishonourable.

**Mr. Manning:** Okay. All right.

**Hon. M. Assam:** That is why you cannot be called honourable. He is talking about Members opposite here. When we got into office, everybody knew that one of the perquisites of being a member of the Executive or even being a Member of Parliament, was that there are certain tax concessions one gets when one buys a vehicle. Everybody knows that. When he was in office, he bought the most expensive car.

**Mr. Imbert:** Me? What did I buy?

**Hon. M. Assam:** And repaired his house at the most expensive cost. He and several other Ministers who are not here, but I will not call their names.

**Mr. Imbert:** Lie!

**Hon. M. Assam:** They did it. You should go and see the kinds of houses they have now and what they had in 1991. They come to this House and try to malign people opposite without realizing that the majority of people on this side are professionals—lawyers, doctors, engineer, dentist, business persons, accountants.

**Mr. Manning:** What about professional politicians?

**Hon. M. Assam:** People who could not earn a decent living when they were out of politics and, up to now, cannot satisfy their liabilities. He wants to talk a lot of nonsense. That is something that really annoys me and for this pipsqueak of Arouca North to talk about “this is my last hurrah” as if I am looking for a job.

**Mr. Manning:** You are.

**Hon. M. Assam:** A man like me who was a president; a chairman; an executive of a bank; a high commissioner; a managing director of companies; an assistant to presidents, both in the United States and Canada [*Desk thumping*] and he is talking about me and looking for a job.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Tell them jobs looking for you!

**Hon. M. Assam:** Everything I say here is verifiable. I "ain't" looking for any job. In fact, I made an enormous sacrifice in terms of my career, my health, my family, my recreation, my friends and my leisure time.

**Mr. Imbert:** Your friends, too?

**Hon. M. Assam:** Yes. Because many of my friends do not call me anymore simply because they feel that by calling a Minister, I may think they are asking for a favour, so they do not call me. Friends are important to me; maybe not to you. Family is important to me; maybe not to you. That is the kind of sacrifice one makes. He wants to talk nonsense about a job. Is this a job? He must be joking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all the accusations that the Member for Diego Martin East made this afternoon and all the irrelevant excursions that he journeyed into this afternoon had nothing to do with the simple proposition before this honourable House. The simple proposition is that this Government wishes to get parliamentary approval to put the sum of \$415 million into a stabilization fund.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what this Government has done is nothing novel. We have not invented anything, so we are not taking credit for some revolutionary, innovative initiative. It is not. Every country that has had windfalls in any form or fashion has put surpluses into a stabilization fund; a heritage fund; a developmental fund; a fund for the future—every country that has had windfalls. In Canada, when I was there, they called it the Heritage Fund when they had large oil windfalls, particularly in certain parts of western Canada. This is nothing novel.

The Member for Diego Martin East said that in 1986, they had almost \$2 billion in a long-term development fund. In 1986, \$2 billion in a long-term development fund. There are certain safeguards with respect to this fund. Only 25 per cent could be withdrawn at any one time. There are certain procedures that must be followed to access this fund.

During a previous PNM administration, they had several funds. They had an agricultural fund, a sports fund, a road fund. They had many funds but none of those funds were subject to parliamentary approval. What happened was, the Minister of Finance who was always the Prime Minister at that time during the PNM administration—it was only the Member for San Fernando East who divorced himself from any portfolio when he became Prime Minister. That is a laudable thing. I congratulate him for having divorced himself from any portfolio when he became Prime Minister.

**Mr. Manning:** We follow a portfolio under the Prime Minister.

**Hon. M. Assam:** All I am saying is that the Office of the Prime Minister carries certain things. You are in charge of security and ecclesiastical matters. Those are routine matters. We know that. We are talking about a serious portfolio of running a department or a ministry on a day-to-day basis. The Prime Minister co-ordinates all those things and he has certain things under the Constitution—Cabinet and constitutional. We know that. We are talking about a department. It was a good thing to divorce himself from that. I think that was a very good thing. I credit him with that. I also credit him with moving the Drag Brothers. I credit him—

**Mr. Manning:** With the Brian Lara Promenade.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Well, the Drag Brothers is the Brian Lara Promenade—and with floating the currency. I credit him with that. I have told him so privately and I am telling him publicly today. If he thinks I was being dishonest when I told him so, I credit him with that because I think those were good and laudable things that his administration did, but it did many bad and wrong things, too, and an accumulation of bad things has now underdeveloped this country.

**Mr. Manning:** Well, I will talk.

**3.00 p.m.**

**Hon. M. Assam:** I was saying that every country does it. But, when they did it, it was not subject to parliamentary scrutiny, parliamentary accountability or control. Therefore, do you know what happened to these funds? Very similar to what the late Prime Minister of Jamaica said, although we had lent him US \$200 million when we were raking in a lot of oil revenue. He said: “All the money that passed through Trinidad went through the system like a dose of salts.” That was what the late Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica said about that administration. Similarly, all the moneys that were in several of those funds went through the system like a “dose of salts”. They squandered the money and nobody was able to account to the Parliament or the national community how these funds were spent, because they had no accountability to Parliament. There were no controls or procedures for spending these funds.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member spoke about \$2 billion in 1986. I wonder if we can throw our minds back to 1986? Can we? That is why, to some extent, the PNM lost the elections in 1986. This is because the entire economy went into a tailspin, and poor Mr. Chambers, a person for whom I have some regard—he is a person that I liked, one of the few Ministers of the PNM dynasty for whom I have some regard—poor “fella” he did not know how to manage the tailspin. The PNM

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started to draw down on all these funds, crazily. Not only did they draw down on the long-term fund of \$2 billion, they drew down on the foreign reserves of this country which he inherited at approximately US \$1.3 billion. That also went through.

When the NAR assumed office on December 16, 1986, not only was the Treasury bankrupt but, we were almost on the verge of minus foreign exchange reserves. I do not know if people are aware of that. If one looks at the figures one would see by 1987, that government was in overdraft in foreign exchange. Have you ever seen a government in overdraft—minus \$179 million in foreign exchange, minus \$83 million in foreign exchange, minus \$102 million in foreign exchange? Poor Mr. William Demas, the late William Demas who was the Governor of the Central Bank, was in stitches similar to the Prime Minister of the National Alliance for Reconstruction. That is the kind of economic mismanagement and lack of performance that that administration engaged in. The Member had the temerity today, to talk about the \$2-billion long-term fund. That is what he is talking about—a shameless record, a shameless performance of the PNM at that time!

Today, because we have had a windfall, this Government in its annual budget 1999/2000 budgeted a barrel of oil at US \$16. Very providentially, we did not do anything, so we cannot claim credit for it because it is all the international forces, the geopolitical forces, the OPEC countries and so on. They are the ones responsible. It is the way they manipulate supply and demand on the international market. They are responsible. The average price of crude oil during that fiscal year was probably in the vicinity of US \$24—\$25 per barrel. Therefore, we gained probably US \$8 or \$9 per barrel that we had not anticipated. We had not anticipated that. Therefore, it is prudent to take part of that windfall and stash it away for a rainy day and for future generations, so that in the event that there is some economic disaster, God forbid, down the road, whoever is in government—I hope it is not the PNM—it means to say, we would be able to have a softer landing because we will have a cushion to assist us and tide us over any rough economic period that may ensue in the future. That is the simple philosophy and rationale behind putting away this particular sum of money into a stabilization fund, with certain safeguards with respect to how much you can withdraw at any one time—25 per cent—and how you access the procedure for withdrawing this money over time. It is as simple as that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have the Member for Diego Martin East, who knows nothing about economics—in fact he knows little about engineering because he attempted to

build a wall twice and, like the wall of Jericho, it fell down on the residents. He was lucky that he was not around. Twice he built the wall and twice the wall collapsed. But he wants to talk about economics and challenge a man who has a Ph.D. in economics from a reputable university. *[Interruption]* So what was his first degree? What was his second degree? Oh my goodness! They always like to denigrate people. His first degree was economics and his Ph.D. was in agricultural economics. Why do they like to denigrate all the time? The Member tried to get a Ph.D. and he did not get it. He failed! He failed to get a Ph.D. and now because the man has his Ph.D., you are saying it is agriculture, as if agricultural economics is not a discipline that is worth a Ph.D., or it is not a discipline that one should pursue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the unfortunate things about parliamentary privilege and parliamentary immunity is that people feel they can stand in this Parliament and say anything at any time. This is simply because of the nature of our Standing Orders which, really, are somewhat archaic, and which should have been revised many years ago, to put more discipline into the debating practices of this honourable House. Members get away with all kinds of inaccuracies and, by extension, mislead the national community.

All the numbers that the Member for Diego Martin East quoted are totally inaccurate, misleading and mischievous, even the Miss Universe number which they had been trying to beat like a dead horse for so long. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and everybody know—it is on record in *Hansard* and it is a House Paper—that I laid the audited financial statements by a reputable auditing firm in this honourable House stating that we spent \$71 million. Even the Leader of the Opposition goes on his excursion, wherever he goes walking—I hope he will continue walking long after the next election has passed, he will continue walking so that he will remain in good health and trim, and that the exercise would be good for any condition that he may possess.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. The documents identified \$71 million. We quoted higher figures because we are aware that not all the items of expenditure were taken up under the report that was brought to this honourable House. May I suggest that the hon. Minister check that very carefully before he refutes it.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I am not going to respond to that, for the simple reason that it does not matter which authority one brings to this House: the Auditor General, they question it, the Central Bank, the Central Statistical Office, they question it,

the World Bank, they question it, the International Monetary Fund they question it, or the Inter-American Development Bank, they question it! Now the Member is questioning—*[Interruption]* Yes, the Opposition. They are always questioning. He is now questioning the records and auditing statement of a reputable international auditing firm. He said they did not take up all the records.

**3.10 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rest my case. They believe nobody except themselves, who they should not believe. *[Laughter]* They take the liberty to say all kinds of things because of parliamentary privilege and parliamentary immunity and because we have an archaic set of rules in the Standing Orders. But if the Standing Orders were different and we had an ethics committee of this House and you were sanctioned and punished for telling untruths, for misleading the House, for making inaccurate statements, for making wild statements, and for misleading the public, it would be a different story altogether. I pray and hope that even when I am gone, something would be done very quickly to update and modernize the Standing Orders so that miscreants will not continue to behave as they do behave in this honourable House.

**Mr. Sudama:** Miscreants will be miscreants.

**Hon. M. Assam:** They also have a very short memory; they talk about the expenditure on this side, but we can show something for the expenditure—that is the fundamental difference, even if you accuse this side of all kinds of cost overruns and squandermania and all kinds of excessive and extravagant expenditure. If what you are saying is true, which, of course, it is not, because you have not been able to verify it, and we have given you every opportunity.

We have amended the Constitution—there is the Anti-Corruption Act, the Equal Opportunity Bill, there are all kinds of things that we have enacted, all the United Nations human rights conventions; the Attorney General has it in a booklet and has read it out and so forth; we have done everything. We even set up an Anti-Corruption Squad in the police service two or three weeks ago. We have done everything to give you an opportunity to nail everybody on this side of the Parliament.

I want you to do it. Go to the necessary authorities, use the various laws or whatever is in place and lock up some of us, if we are guilty of anything that is improper; I would like to see that done. But you stand up in the Parliament or you go to Embacadere on the train line or you go to Hi-Lo's car park or you go to someplace else, and you are continually feeding a frenzy to the population that the

Government is lying, the Government is corrupt, the Government is extravagant and the Government has not performed. When you look at that book—I do not have it with me, but I remember it because I read it—*Accounting For The Tax Dollar*, which they were afraid to go and defend—they sent a chairman of a board, whose name I would not call, because I have some respect for him, to defend that *Accounting For The Tax Dollar*. [Interruption] Not a minister of Government at all; I would not call his name, but I would not argue with you.

In that *Accounting For The Tax Dollar*, in every project that the People's National Movement engaged there were cost overruns by 200, 300 and 400 per cent. In some cases there were ghost projects and in some cases you did not know where the money was spent: like the George V Park, the Caroni Racing Complex, PRIDE, the La Brea Industrial Estate and so forth and so forth. So when they come here today and speak about all these areas of mismanagement and extravagance, you are still seeing an airport.

I hope that the cowshed, as described by the Member for Diego Martin East—no cow would get into it from Diego Martin East. I hope no cow from Diego Martin East will ever enter into that cowshed to board a plane to go anywhere. I hope no cow from Diego Martin East will dare to drive on the roads.

**Mr. Sudama:** We have a quarantine service at the airport, which will be available for the Member for Diego Martin East. [Laughter]

**Mr. Assam:** Thank you, we will quarantine the cows at the airport. I sincerely hope so, because notwithstanding all the bad press, all the criticism and what they call “mamaguy” as he said, notwithstanding all these things, when that airport is eventually open to the public, I hope that all of you will have one word to say, or two words, or maybe three words: I am sorry.

**Mr. Manning:** When do you propose to open it?

**Hon. M. Assam:** I hope you have the courage, humility and honesty to say, I am sorry, because the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the travelling public of the region and the world would laud this Government for giving them an airport of world class. [Desk thumping] All the things you have said, you would see when it is open.

I do not know when it is going to be opened, but I know that when it is finished you too would be proud, as I was proud of you when you moved the Drag Brothers and implemented the Brian Lara Promenade. I too was proud of you, and I said to you to your face, “I congratulate you”. I hope you will come

and congratulate this side when you have to walk into the portals of that advanced, modernized airport. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Sudama:** When he is migrating. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. M. Assam:** You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he asks at what cost. If the airport had cost \$600 million and they walked into it, they would say, “Oh God, that is the cowshed you get for \$600 million”. That is what they would have said. “It cost \$600 million and look at the cowshed they give us for \$600 million.” You give them an airport which they say is \$1.3 billion and it is a beautiful, modern, state of the art, 14-finger, with all the computerized facilities, ramp, baggage handling and so forth, and they would say, “Well, is a good airport, but allyuh tief \$1.3 billion”. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you do it you are damned, and if you do not do, you are still dammed. And he calls himself a born-again Christian. What a Christian you are!

I hope like Saul of Tarsus, one day on the road, not to Damascus but to San Fernando, the scales will fall off your eyes, Member for San Fernando East. I hope one day the scales would fall off your eyes, as a certain brother is asking a certain sister to remove the scales from her eyes before too long. [*Desk thumping*]

What Members on that side do not realize is that we live in a very dynamic world. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am amazed that when the Member for Diego Martin East attempted to denigrate the presentation of my colleague, the Member for Tobago East, with respect to the figures that he read out in terms of the gross domestic product (GDP) and other ratios with respect to the management of the external and internal debt, that the Member for Diego Martin East, who knows nothing about economics, knows little about engineering because of his established record of failure, and other Members of the Front Bench who know nothing about economics, were pounding their desks very, very heavily, as if what the Member for Diego Martin East was saying was correct.

**Mr. Sudama:** The blind leading the blind!

**Hon. M. Assam:** They do not seem to understand the difference between gross domestic product at current prices and gross domestic product at constant prices. He was trying to make some kind of interpolation between the two so as to make this Government look bad, when we tried to show the ratios were declining from year to year in terms of debt servicing and our ratio of GDP to debt, both external and internal, and our ratio of export earnings to debt.

How could anybody try to mislead the public—because they cannot mislead this side—about using a figure of \$22 billion at constant prices, with the figure of



\$50 billion, which are current prices, to justify the argument? How could anybody do that? *[Interruption]* You know nothing about economics, that is not your background. Even if finance may be somewhat, economics is not your background, so you should keep your mouth quiet. If I were you, I would consult with the officers, technocrats and the professionals in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development. *[Interruption]* Apparently when you were the assistant minister—because apparently junior minister is no longer the nomenclature, it is now, according to the Member for Diego Martin East, assistant minister—nothing from these distinguished, intellectuals and professionals rubbed off on you; nothing rubbed off on you.

If you want to come today to argue on the same side as the concreted head of the Member for Diego Martin East, you are disappointing me, because I have a little respect for you Member for Diego Martin Central, you know that. Do not degenerate into the same kind of unfortunate, improper thinking, bacchanal and “comess” of the member for Diego Martin East. He is a dangerous fellow, I told you that in private. He tried to destroy one of your Members on the Front Benches there; he is a dangerous little fellow you know; I am telling you. If you did not know that, he is a dangerous little fellow, I am telling you, and he would destroy the Member for San Fernando East, as he attempted to do it early in your reign as Leader of the Opposition, and he will do it again. I will tell you something: leopards cannot change their spots; he is a dangerous little fellow. *[Crosstalk]*

The shorter they come—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for St. Joseph, are you imputing improper motives to the Member for Diego Martin East?

**Hon. M. Assam:** I was merely talking about his stature, hon. Deputy Speaker. Only his stature I was talking about, because they say that people of that kind of stature tend to compensate for the lack of stature with the use or misuse of power, and how they attempt to undermine others who are within their reach—*[Interruption]*—who are within their reach, that is the operative phrase: who are within their reach. *[Laughter]*

The figures quoted by the Member for Tobago East are valid and are the correct figures for measuring the performance of the economy and, more importantly, measuring the management of the economy by this administration over the last five years. They are the only figures you can use.

Additionally, the Member for Diego Martin East made a song and dance about Amnesty International. When I was High Commissioner to London I used to get

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on my desk every day voluminous tracts about Amnesty International investigating all the countries of the world, and wherever they feel that they can destabilize they would come and interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign governments.

Sometimes they are assisted by the emissaries of foreign governments in this country. I repeat: sometimes they are assisted by foreign governments in this country. [*Crosstalk*] One must be very careful that foreign emissaries in this country must not use their position to undermine sovereign democratic states under the guise of assisting organizations like Amnesty International, who have their own political agenda, more so, geo-political agenda.

They want to Europeanize everything. They want to turn us into homosexuals. The European Parliament wants to pass legislation forcing countries that depend on them for aid, grants or technical expertise and so forth, they want you to pass legislation so that homosexuality could become law. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, could become law; but they reduced it in England, under 16 years, because England is now part of the European Community. They are forcing dependent territories; those British territories that are still colonies, they are forcing them to introduce legislation into their colonial legislatures to bring in homosexuality as law. You have to be very careful.

The same thing they are doing surreptitiously with respect to the death penalty. The death penalty is the law of this country and there is provision in the Constitution of this country for it. When you have foreign bodies attempting to define and redefine the law, using their agents who have offices in the ministries of certain foreign governments in their metropolitan capitals to send their representatives here to destabilize and undermine the social peace, stability and good governance of this country, we are going to object in the most strenuous way, if we have to bring out the whole population against them. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

The Member for Diego Martin East talked about bringing out 15,000 people about a road. We are trying to improve the traffic congestion of this country that people suffer, particularly, at the peak times in the mornings and afternoons when they are going to work and coming back to their homes. He will bring out 15,000—we will bring out 500,000 to deal with the situation.

**3.25 p.m.**

If the hon. Leader of the Opposition and his team do not support us in this, “crapaud smoke yuh pipe”, I am telling you because you will be guilty of an act to

subvert the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. You will be guilty of that. You know it is all well and good for people to talk fancy talk, but when it comes to the unity of your state—that does not happen in the United States of America you know—on an issue as fundamental as this where the survival of democracy and the survival of your Constitution is involved, there is no partisanship in the United States of America, there is a bipartisan approach to anything that threatens the unity and strength of the United States of America. It happens in the United Kingdom, it happens in every country. It is only in this country that you find this kind of fratricidal warfare involving matters of national importance, even national security importance, where one Government is in office and the Opposition takes a side, and had they been the Government, they would have taken the opposite side, meaning they would have taken the side that the Government has taken today.

That is the kind of lack of a philosophical position that I cannot understand on the part of the People's National Movement. Instead of attempting to educate, elucidate and illuminate the minds of the citizens, they try to fool, mislead and misguide people on some of the most fundamental issues facing the very survival of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we were to sit and, according to the saying, play dead—with respect to the recent ruling of the Privy Council in the matter relating to the commutation of six death sentences on six convicted murderers in Jamaica—do you know what would happen to this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The rate of murder would spiral in an exponential fashion and this place would be a licence to kill and it would become like the West, a state of lawlessness.

I pray and hope that the irresponsible utterances of the Member for Diego Martin East in attempting to congratulate Amnesty International for what they are saying and doing, he will have a second thought about it. He will reconsider his position and I hope his leader will remonstrate with him for taking such an irresponsible position in this honourable House, and by extension endangering the lives of the national community particularly women who are the most vulnerable group in the society in terms of murder.

In fact, just recently I read where the Deputy High Commissioner for London and the High Commissioner designate for Nigeria were held up at gunpoint on the Lady Young Road. Is that the kind of thing you want?

**Hon. Member:** That was 10 years ago.

**Hon. M. Assam:** That happened two weeks ago, which 10 years ago? He was in court—*[Interruption]* I said he was in court two weeks ago. *[Interruption]* Ten years ago under your administration, but that is the kind of thing that they want. They want to come here and praise and heap encomiums on Amnesty International because it suits their purposes politically because an election is around the corner. I tell you, go ahead, play with fire, Member for Diego Martin East, play with fire, it will roast you, it will be worse than Dante's inferno when it overtakes you, you will be roasted. Don't play with fire.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, notwithstanding all the allegations, and all the accusations, the performance of this Government and the management of the economy during the five years of our stewardship is nothing short of remarkable. In every department, every index, every economic criterion when tested will pass the test. Every one has passed the test.

Not because I belong to this administration—I reflect a lot because I have been following the politics of this country from the time I was in high school. I remember when the late Dom Basil Mathews and the late Dr. Eric Williams had their debates in the library. I used to go to them, I was at St. Mary's College at the time. I was very inquisitive, I had a thirst for knowledge. I would go and read Plato and Aristotle at the tender age of 16 in order to follow the debates of these two scholars. They were considered scholars at the time. Because I have been following keenly the political as well as the economic history of this country, I can tell you the performance of the 1956 to 1961; 1961 to 1966; 1966 to 1971—all the various administrations in this country and I will tell you, every one of the PNM's administrations has been a failure in the main.

They say they built a few roads, you cannot help but build a few roads if you have a lot of oil money. They said they built a few schools, you cannot help that. They built Solomon Hochoy Highway, a few comprehensive and composite schools, a couple primary schools and so forth. In terms of delivering a quality life—what we do not seem to understand in this society is that it is not just building roads and schools, it is what gives you that economic comfort, you must tie these material things to the enhancement of the quality of life, and under the PNM, poverty increased; misery increased; crime increased; poor housing increased; unemployment increased; illiteracy increased. Every index of a quality society deteriorated under the People's National Movement from 1956 to 1986, and, of course, 1991 to 1995. That is a fact. The figures are there, notwithstanding, as I said, you built a couple roads.

When I was a little boy going to St. Mary's College transportation was excellent. There was the train and the school bus, no accidents, safe environment. The friends that I made when I travelled on the school bus and train in those years, I still have them today because there was a certain kind of civility in life. It was a gentle age, a gentle society, people were not afraid of each other, they respected each other. There was an adequate supply of water, adequate supply of electricity, adequate food and shelter. Most people had their little houses and so forth. *[Interruption]* Yes, that's right. Look at the figures, the same man you all discredited and destroyed who had to go to England, Albert Maria Gomes, look at his record. Look at the record of Ashford Sinanan and Mitra Sinanan.

**Mr. Imbert:** Nonsense.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Nonsense? I am sure the Member for San Fernando West will attest to that, and do you know when the PNM came into office they had an infrastructure in place and when I talk about infrastructure, there was a physical and a social infrastructure in place. Fine quality education, fine health system, fine water system because at that time the electricity services were decentralized, the Borough of San Fernando, the Boroughs of Arima and Port of Spain used to have their own water and electricity system. The Borough of Port of Spain used to have its own transportation; tramcars and trolleybuses. We had a proper system of transportation in place; we had the finest schools and we produced the finest scholars.

Do you know what happened when the PNM came into office? They destroyed local government, amalgamated everything into T&TEC, amalgamated everything into WASA, they destroyed Queen's Royal College, destroyed all the schools and the decline started and became more and more precipitous over time. What they did was pack the jails. They increased the population of the jails and they increased the population of the functionally illiterate and innumerate. That is the record of the PNM.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what was the budget of Trinidad and Tobago when the PNM came into office in 1956? They do not know

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about these things because they do not research. They do not even know their economic history. It was a little over TT \$90 million. Did you know that? When Williams came into office in 1956, the budget of this country was a little over TT \$90 million and that increased tremendously over time but the quality of life did not increase. The services to the people increased—in fact you found as the budget figures increased, the quality of life declined. Do you know why? Because of all the corruption. It started with the PNM printing press; it started with the *MV Port of Spain*; it started with the Lock Joint scandal; the Caura Dam scandal and it went on and on and on and they are talking about scandal. A scandal-ridden party. That party is a scandal-ridden party and did not develop the country as it ought to have developed when you consider the natural resources, human resources, marine resources, agricultural resources of this country. A country small in size but rich in human resources, agricultural resources, marine resources, and natural resources and they did nothing to garner and harness all these resources to pitchfork Trinidad and Tobago into a developed society and they want to talk about a 2020 vision.

After 40-something years as a party, today he tells Laventille, you see next time it is your time. After 45 years, he is going to tell Laventille that supported them for 45 years: “When I come into office next time, next time is Laventille time.” *[Interruption]* You know what you find in a cowshed? They should throw at you. *[Laughter]* I am ashamed and amazed that in 2000, you could go to the people of Laventille and try to fool them once more, saying that next time is Laventille time.

The Member for Laventille West should be terribly sad about that. Next time is Laventille time. Well you will never have the opportunity to have the next time because even if it is not your time, Laventille will be taken care of, have no fear. What we are talking about is that this administration in five short years from 1995 to 2000 has attempted to correct some of the fundamental ills that the PNM have introduced in this society. We have inherited a terrible legacy of illiteracy and innumeracy, a broken-down health service, a broken-down public service. Not that the public servants are broken down you know; the machinery is so archaic, the system is so outdated, it is so badly managed, not because of the public servants, but because they did no reforms. There was no transformation to meet the needs of both an independent country and a modern society. Everything broke down, and in five years you have the Minister of Health trying to grapple with the most serious health problems and succeeding. There is the Minister of Social and Community Development trying to grapple with the social system and succeeding; and the Minister of Education heroically—both of them, the Member

for Tabaquite followed by the Member for Siparia—began to transform the education system and giving every child an opportunity to do so and they are crying that we are putting children on top of a club and on top of a shop and a cowshed. He likes to use the word “cowshed”. I wonder if he has any kind of blood in him?

**Dr. Job:** He says we building schools for wild animals.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Of course he says we will be building schools for parrot and “douen” and so forth, he has said so. That is the kind of contempt the PNM has for the children. Imagine, an innocent child of God—the Member for Diego Martin East says that we are building schools for parrot and “douen”. Could you imagine that? In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century you would have been quartered and drawn. Yes, they would use the ball on you. Do you know that big ball? They would have used it on you, for your sins. So this Government, in five years, although you say that you had \$60 billion and we had the same \$60 billion, we can show what we did for the \$60 billion. Tell me what you did for your \$60 billion.

### **3.40 p.m.**

In the area of the environment, the Minister of the Environment assumed office less than a year ago and look at what is happening to the environment today; look at the labour laws that we have put in place; look at the tremendous astronomical success of the energy sector of this country. Enormous success! Never before in the history of this country have we been able to utilize our resources in the manner we have done in the energy sector. Not when you were Minister of Energy. You were manacled by the Minister of State Enterprises, and when you became Prime Minister and appointed a Minister of Energy, you not only manacled in front you manacled the fellow behind his back. Oh gosh, what a pity. What a pity.

Imagine in the area of training, look at how much emphasis this Government is putting on training and distance learning, trying to transform the culture, the mores, the entrepreneurial spirit of the society; creating businessmen and businesswomen and placing a lot of emphasis and putting a lot of resources in the development of micro, small and medium enterprises, and putting the mechanisms in place for their facilitation. Look at what we are doing in terms of foreign policy. Never before have you seen such a flowering of the foreign policy of this country; never before have you seen how many countries are rushing to this capital to establish permanent residence and diplomatic missions; never before have you seen the kind of confidence that the large countries of the world have in this country.

In fact, I am very fortunate to be Minister of Trade and Industry, because one of the things that ambassadors do when they come to present credentials, or to make their regular visit they come to see me, and I am reasonably sure that the things they bring for me about how they regard Trinidad and Tobago in their capitals cannot be—to use your word “mamaguy”—they have the healthiest respect for Trinidad and Tobago on how we manage our affairs. [*Desk thumping*] Not five years ago, how we currently manage our affairs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what about the laws of this country? Is the word *lacuna*, Attorney General? The amount of *lacuna* we had in the laws of this country. [*Interruption*] The plural is “ae”. Yes, of course, the amount of *lacunae* we had in the laws of this country, in five years we have succeeded in plugging so many loopholes; modernizing so many laws; introducing new measures to protect women; to protect children; to protect the livelihoods of people; to facilitate trade; to facilitate industrial development; to facilitate all kinds of human development and to promote the quality of life in this country. That is what we have been doing in our budgets from year to year to year and the budget of 2000/2001 is no different. It is merely a continuum in that great saga that this UNC has provided for the total quality nation and for improving the quality of life of all of its citizens; irrespective of class, race, religion or where you live. That is the Government that we have been operating.

I think it is a sense of envy you know. I see the green-eyed monster of jealousy in the Member for San Fernando East’s eyes all the time because he was not able to do it during his four short years which he gave up, nor did his predecessors in previous administrations. He has not been able to do it. So I can understand how uncomfortable the Member for San Fernando East feels, where everywhere you go in this country people are saying, “Boy, the UNC has really delivered. Is it roads; is it water; is it primary schools; secondary schools; industrial estate; export processing zone; settlements; distance learning; community centres; computerization; Internet.” They say, “but this is a magic Government. Like Mr. Panday is a magician. How that man delivered so much?” [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Valley:** No, he is an amazing fellow.

**Hon. M. Assam:** He is an amazing fellow. How that fellow and his team have been able, in five years, with no more resources than you all had, have they been able to deliver so much? I will tell you the secret. The secret is very simple. We put people first! [*Desk thumping*] That is the secret. We put people first! When



we sit down in Cabinet to deliberate the policies of this Government we put people first. As he said today, the stadia went from \$200 million, \$300 million and \$400 million but we are still putting young people first by building four stadia. We are still putting them first and they will be one of the greatest inheritances of the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs initiated by the distinguished Member for Tobago East for which he should be congratulated. *[Desk thumping]* We put people first.

Look at old age—the senior citizen, I should say. Look at what we have done; we have transformed their lives. In less than five years we have increased old age pension by more than 100 per cent. Look at social assistance, the physically challenged, the disabled; look at what we have done for them. We have recognized our heroes in this country. People like McDonald Bailey and Sonny Ramadin and the dancer who died recently, Beryl McBurnie, to name but a few. We have recognized them. When they were in distress we went to them! We did not leave them to suffer in penury and poverty. We went to them and brought them up in a dignified fashion.

Last night, I witnessed, as I told the Prime Minister, a big Bertha. *[Interruption]* You do not play golf so you would not know about those things. You must read even the books if you do not play it. It was one of the most scintillating programmes put on by this Government—and initiated by the Prime Minister—“The Innovation and Invention Award.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, my heart was filled with emotion last night. When I saw eight-year-olds, 10 years, 12 years, 14 years, 15 years, 21 years, 23 years, and the kind of inventions and innovations that these people came up with and they were suitably recognized and rewarded with both trophies and cash, and with hope and help they would be able to commercialize these inventions sometime in the future, with an organization and a mechanism that are being put in place. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was filled with emotion. And I went chatting with these little boys and girls to find out how they got their ideas and the inspiration to invent these things. It was touching. It is a UNC Government led by the Member for Couva North that did these things. Did the PNM in 45 years, ever think about innovating anything? And, of course, the greatest of them all is when the Prime Minister announced that the Millennial Award for innovation will go to the steelband. That was the crowning moment. *[Desk thumping]* The crowning glory of that afternoon’s proceedings. When he said the Millennial Award will go to the only musical invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the pan. It was the crowning award, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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All that is part of the budgetary process; all that is part of the planning; all that is part of the kind of policies and programmes that this Government has undertaken and will continue to undertake with the revenues that we have at our disposal. That is why I already have observed that the Minister of Finance has budgeted US \$22 a barrel for the fiscal year 2000/2001. And I see prices have soared to as high as US \$36.55, and I sincerely hope that they will hold notwithstanding any intervention by OPEC to increase its supply by 800,000 or so barrels. But even if it does not hold at US \$36.55 and it even goes to \$30.00, I am very comfortable because it will be better than the fiscal year that is ending.

Therefore, again, we will come back to this Parliament and tell you how much we intend to put aside, to add to this \$415 million so that down the road the grandchildren of the Member for San Fernando East would be assured of a bright future under the Rising Sun, of course.

**3.50 p.m.**

[*Interruption*] You see, one only “sets” when one becomes mature. We are not yet mature so we would not “set” quite yet.

In all seriousness, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the kind of Government that has been performing. This is how we have been using the people’s money. So when they talk about squandermania, corruption, misuse, extravagance and all kinds of things, I do not understand where they are living. What do they read? They get all the Cabinet Notes. I do not know from whom they get them but, so what, they get the Cabinet Notes. They do not see all the good things. [*Interruption*] I give them to the other side, yes.

They do not see all the good things, all the good policies and all the good decisions that the Cabinet has been making and implementing, in the interest of the people of this country, through the budgetary process. They do not see that the taxes we collect we seek to distribute in an equitable fashion, in order to get rid of that skewed income distribution, through the Ministry of Social and Community Development. Are they not seeing? Look at the wonderful work the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs has been doing. It is the first time a Ministry has been so proactive, not to speak of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, of course—ha, ha, ha, ha, ha—winning the Prime Minister’s award for excellence in the entire public service in 1999. Do Members know who the judges were? [*Interruption*]

No, the Member should find out. I am not going to do all the research for him. He is too lazy. He must do a little research, man. He should do research on his

own political history, his economic history and in the performance of the public service. He should do his little research and come back.

**Mr. Manning:** Save your energy.

**Hon. M. Assam:** “Save your energy?” Does the Member want a tonic, then? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the quality of this Government’s performance and that is the quality of delivery that we have made on all fronts, and we have not only concentrated on the material aspects, because sometimes they talk about the schools and the highways they built. They built a couple of them, yes. They could not help it. They had so much money they could not help but build a couple of things. We have concentrated not only on the material aspects, we have placed a lot of emphasis on human development, and it is through human development, the development of the human resource, that we are going to have sustainable development into the future. That is the only way it can be done.

The human resource is developed through culture. Culture is one of the most important—many people do not understand that. It is one of the most important aspects of human existence, culture. If one does not have culture one has nothing, because the culture is the totality of man. That is why we are placing emphasis on education, on sport, on youth development, on training, on distance learning, on the environment, on health, on social and community development and on gender affairs. That is why we are doing all of these things, all in a holistic fashion, guided by a certain philosophical underpinning—not like the PNM, hitting here and hitting there—but guided by a philosophical underpinning, so that eventually the dream of a total quality nation could be achieved.

Then Trinidad and Tobago, in the not-too-distant future, will be close to Singapore where we could be high up, not on the poverty reduction index—because we are going to eliminate, to a large extent, poverty in this country—but high up on the competitive index in this world where Trinidad and Tobago goods, Trinidad and Tobago services, Trinidad and Tobago culture, Trinidad and Tobago music, literature, poetry, sports and everything, will be number one. When Members rise tomorrow morning at 5.30 and put on their television, they will see that great athlete, Ato Boldon, running as he has never run before and “scoring gold” for and on behalf of this great nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Trevor Sudama):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to make a very brief contribution and merely to put the record straight, because, you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one sits

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here in this Parliament and is subjected to the outpourings of a sordid mind, the mind of the Member for Diego Martin East—a sordid, contorted and distorted mind. He sits there and levels accusation upon accusation, talking and imputing immorality and imputing irregularity to Members from this side in a fashion—his scurrilous statements in this House.

Now, I want to explain, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the word “scurry” is associated with a certain animal, and his scurrility [*Laughter*] in this House is quite disturbing. Today I want to—[*Interruption*] I would not engage in the kinds of things to which the Member for Diego Martin East is accustomed. I mean, there is a certain Cabinet Minister—when one is in Government, one’s private travelling is supposed to come from one’s private resources. A certain Cabinet Minister used to go to a gas station in Barataria and take petrol for his private business, for his private vehicle, and charge it to the account of the Ministry of Works and Transport. [*Interruption*] That Cabinet Minister comes here to talk about who steals and who takes bribes. [*Interruption*] That same Cabinet Minister, up to today, could not account for the resources devoted to the URP—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** “Call name”.

**Hon. T. Sudama:**—and he built a road in Paramin that exhausted the cement stocks of the hardware stores of this country. Where did the cement go? These are all questions we could ask. These are all questions to which we could try to get answers from the performance of that previous administration. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not of that ilk and I will not go into the sewers that the Member for Diego Martin East inhabits and where he scurries—in the sewers of this country. I will not descend there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been in this Parliament for 19 years. My integrity has been and continues to be beyond reproach. [*Desk thumping*] No one has been able—the scurrilous press of this country has not been able to say anything about my integrity and me, except in a positive light, for the last 19 years, whether I have been in Opposition or in Government. Yet I have to sit here, sitting after sitting, and listen to my integrity attacked and imputations being ascribed to my character. Today I am going to explain how I bought the new vehicle that I bought—[*Interruption*—and that Member will never be able to explain how he built his house. He will never be able to give this Parliament a record of where he got the finances to build and renovate his house.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to clear the air once and for all. I ordered a vehicle—[*Interruption*] It is a Benz, but I ordered it in June of 1999, long before I

moved to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, because one has to put in an order and it takes about nine months from the time one puts in an order in Germany to get delivery of a vehicle—and the records are there. I have all the receipts and those receipts could be made available to anyone who wants to scrutinize my dealings. It took nine months, since June 1999, long before there was any talk of my going to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

I had a term life policy with the Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Company, which I surrendered, which resulted in my getting \$64,000 on surrender. I hope the press hears this. I can provide the evidence for this. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all know it is a privilege, a benefit available to Ministers—they are entitled to annual holidays and some limited travel on the basis of being Minister. For this, if one does not take those benefits, one gets the equivalent of \$15,000 per year. For four years—1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999—I drew this money down and I saved it—\$60,000. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am a man of simple tastes. I am not extravagant. I do not have extravagant tastes and every cheque I issued has never bounced in this country. I am sure Members on the other side cannot say that.

So I have accounted for proceeds of a policy—\$64,000—and savings of \$60,000 from four years of getting money in lieu of travelling that was due to me. I have a small piece of agricultural land at the 25-mile-mark on the Rio Claro/Tabaquite Road in San Pedro. I was able to convert three plots from that land into residential lots, for which I received \$105,000 over a three-year period. So that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to put it on record here—\$64,000, \$60,000, and \$105,000 therefore making a total of \$229,000. A Minister is entitled to purchase a car and receive certain remission of tax. Value-added tax, customs duty and motor vehicle taxes are remitted. As a result of that, this vehicle which I bought cost me \$227,000.

I have accounted, from my proceeds, for how that money was obtained. I hope that what I have said here today is an example. You see, my life is an open book—transparent. I can provide all the bills and receipts to verify what I am telling this Parliament and, indeed, the country. So the next time the Member comes here to impute, to cast aspersions, let him say it outside and I will lose him in jail.

**4.05 p.m.**

Why do you use parliamentary cover to come here and make imputations as to what was the source of my income in order to purchase a vehicle?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying this for the benefit of this Parliament. I am saying this for the benefit of the country. I have nothing to hide. As I said, I have always lived my life beyond reproach; my integrity is beyond question and, therefore, I stand here today to defend myself against the devious mind of that Member for Diego Martin East, a front Member and condoned by the Member for San Fernando East—this “scurrility” which we have to put up with day after day, when we come and sit in this Parliament to discuss the people’s business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that this is the last time I will have to talk about the purchase of a vehicle to be used in the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I hope this is the last time.

**Mr. Imbert:** How much is the tax? You did not say that.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** That is an entitlement of a Minister. That is an entitlement, which you all used.

**Dr. Griffith:** Ignore the Member, he is sick.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Whatever I paid for it, I have accounted for it here. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also got up to try to put paid to that rumour-mongering that we have been subjected to, like the attack on one’s character and integrity. As I said, the Member used parliamentary cover. The Member should go outside in a public meeting and say what he said in this House. This is why we feel that things have really gone a bit far in this Parliament, in terms of people coming here—the Member from Diego Martin East; Diego Martin West; San Fernando East; Diego Martin Central; and the one from Laventille/East Morvant and regaling this Parliament with that kind of devious utterings that they come here and make. This is why we feel that things have gone too far in this Parliament. The other side could say things with impunity and cast whatever aspersions they want on people’s character on this side, and one just has to sit down and listen to it.

Well, I have said what I have to say, and I will not revert to this matter again. I would not have said anything, but it is coming with annoying regularity, especially from that Member for Diego Martin East. It reflects a certain sick mind. *[Interruption]* That was converted in 1986 under the NAR regime. *[Laughter]* *[Interruption]* I was not a minister of government then. I was out of the government, but that was changed then and not now, but I have accounted for that. I have put my integrity on the line; my dealings are transparent; and nobody in this country, scurrilous or non-scurrilous, should be able to question that.

**Mr. Imbert:** What about the change of use?

**Hon T. Sudama:** That is happening every day. You can apply and go through the procedures, and that is a daily occurrence. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also got up—wicked, mischievous little man from Diego Martin East.

**Mr. Humphrey:** Tadpole playing a big white shark.

**Hon. Member:** A little boy.

**Dr. Griffith:** They took away his engineering licence from him.

**Hon T. Sudama:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I spoke to the Member's father, who is a well-known man at the university here, and he said he does not know how that boy came out so. *[Laughter]* His father told me so one day at a function at the Trinidad Hilton where I met him. He said he does not know, but God alone knows how he came out so. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will just go on to make the other point, and that is to explain the blatant inaccuracies that are coming from the other side. The Member for Diego Martin East—ignorant and illiterate when it comes to economics—comes here to make misrepresentations in this House about economic and financial statistics. The Member comes here in his own very devious way to misrepresent the facts.

May I also say that I have been in this Parliament—this is my fourth term. In the three previous terms, the convention was—I am not saying that your ruling is incorrect Sir, but let me tell you what the convention was. If someone gets up in this House and seeks to mislead this House by misrepresenting facts and statements, that is a very heinous charge against the Parliament of this country or any country. If you let a Member do so that is something that is not tolerated. In the past, we used to get up on a point of order to indicate that the Member is misleading and misrepresenting, and point out the misrepresentation that was made, and that was upheld. If it is not upheld in this Parliament, fine. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Humphrey:** They could call the Member to substantiate.

**Hon T. Sudama:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you are talking about debt, you are talking about debt at current prices, because that is the price at which you pay back debt and, therefore, if you are relating debt to the gross domestic product, obviously, you must relate debt at current prices to the gross domestic product at current prices. That is a logical relationship to make. You cannot relate debt at current prices to the gross domestic product at constant prices, because it is the current resources that you will have to utilize in order to repay the debt that you

have incurred. That is the point I sought to raise and clarify, when the member for Diego Martin East did not give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me make this point that, at current prices, the gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago between 1995 when they left office—in 1995 it was \$31 billion; in 1996 it went to \$35 billion; in 1997 to \$36 billion; in 1998 to \$38 billion; in 1999 to \$42 billion and in the year 2000, it is estimated that the gross domestic product of this country has reached \$50 billion at current prices. In the last few years, this country has had one of the lowest rates of inflation in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Now, I think it has gone down to something like 4 per cent. That is what the figures show. So that you will see that the gross domestic product has been increasing substantially, in real terms over the period that this Government has been in office.

**4.15 p.m.**

So that, in 1995, when they were in their last year in office, the total public debt was \$19 billion—\$18.8 billion. Let us say, nearer to \$20 billion, but the GDP was \$31 billion. The ratio of that public debt to GDP in 1995 was two-thirds.

Today, with a gross domestic product of \$50 billion, our public debt is close to \$30 billion, but \$30 billion as a ratio to \$50 billion is three-fifths so that as a ratio of total public debt to GDP, we have reduced that proportion from 1995 to the year 2000. That is the performance of this Government.

I wrote him a little note and told him to compare like with like. You compare apples with apples and you compare oranges with oranges. That is why our performance with respect to the public debt is far superior to their performance. Of course, the Member for Tobago East talked about our debt service ratio, which is a more critical value in terms of assessing capacity to repay your foreign account.

I point out that when they got into office in 1992, the external debt was \$6 billion. By 1993, in just one year, they increased the external debt by 50 per cent. The external debt went to \$9,454 million. Now, it is far more serious to increase your external debt than your internal debt, because when you increase your external debt, you have to acquire foreign exchange in order to redeem that external debt. Look at what they did.

In 1992, \$6 billion. In 1993, it took them just one year to increase the external debt by 50 per cent. In 1994, they went to \$10 billion external debt. That is their record. Now they come here to talk about squandermania, financial indiscipline



and all these charges that are being made. When they left office, they increased external debt from \$6 billion in 1992 to almost \$10 billion in 1995. Do not tell me you devalued the currency simply because when you devalued the currency, it is the current resources that you had to take in order to repay your debt. That is the legacy of the PNM and they come to talk about debt and how we have been very irresponsible and so forth. The most irresponsible government in Trinidad and Tobago has been the PNM government—financially undisciplined. The most bankrupt government we have ever had is a PNM government and it is all here in the figures that I am providing to this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that when they put spokesmen on their side to talk about matters, they talk about matters which they know. They ought not to talk about matters which they know not. The Member for Diego Martin East appears to be an expert on everything. On everything under the sun, he gets up here to attack and talk as if he has expertise on whatever it is, except building a wall.

Now, I raise another issue here that has to do with integrity. We have been seeing charges and countercharges being bandied about in the press and the media. There is a contractor named Emile Elias who has openly accused the Member for Diego Martin East of irregularity. He has written to the engineering society to ask that he be thrown out of that society. He has done that. It is open knowledge. Whose integrity is in question?

**Mr. Assam:** He wrote the political leader telling him he cannot be a candidate.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** He wrote to the political leader but the political leader has gone through because, as can be seen right now, the political leader is just going through his last days and he says after this election, he is going to walk, that is, if he is capable of walking. After the sound licking they will get in the coming general election, I do not know whether the Member for San Fernando East will be capable of walking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, publicly a contractor is accusing him, questioning his integrity and saying that in the stadium project in Grenada, the Member for Diego Martin East was involved in skulduggery, in irregularity and possibly, in fraud. He sits there spewing moral indignation in this House, a man who does not have the authority to talk anything about morality, accusing this Government of immorality.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, I had no intention of speaking but I was forced to do so by the attacks on my integrity by the Member for Diego Martin East and I thought it was my duty to get up in this House to respond to these unfounded attacks which come time after time. Of course, you know, as this election approaches, these attacks are going to become more intense on Members of the Government.

As I said, they do not have the guts. If they believe that what they are saying is true, they do not have the guts to go out there in public and in fact, say it, as indeed, Emile Elias went out in public and made charges. Emile Elias did not come into the Parliament here to seek parliamentary cover to attack his integrity. He did not do that. He went out in public. He wrote the political leader of the People's National Movement and said that the man does not have the integrity to be a candidate. Lo and behold, the political leader just ignored that and put him back as a candidate for Diego Martin East.

That is to show how much they care about integrity on that side because they all have skeletons in their cupboards, therefore, they cannot do anything to the Member for Diego Martin East, because if they do the Member for Diego Martin East anything, there will be an exposé of Members on the other side, including the Member for San Fernando East, a man who cannot even run his own affairs. He has been in this Parliament for 29 years being a Minister and a Prime Minister and cannot run his own private affairs but coming here to cast aspersions on other people in this House—

**Mr. Imbert:** Oh! You are done with me. I can start back listening.

**Hon. T. Sudama:**—that shows a certain lack of fitness. If he cannot even manage his own private affairs, he wants to manage the affairs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, I wanted to respond before in this House and I thought that perhaps they would say it and forget it, but I find it is becoming a regular habit that when they come to this House, they try to put your character under suspicion. I said, “Look here, the time has come. Better I respond. I have nothing to hide.” I say that time and time again, “I have nothing to hide.” I file my reports with the Integrity Commission. I tell them all my affairs which they are free to check into and verify, so that at the end of the day, when I leave parliamentary life, which is not going to be for a while yet—[*Desk thumping*]

**Miss Nicholson:** You are dictating that?

**Hon. T. Sudama:**—because we all know that the Oropouche seat is a no-contest.

**Miss Nicholson:** Aye-ya-yaye!

**Hon. T. Sudama:** It has never been a contest and they cannot even find a candidate. They are looking far and wide and cannot find a candidate to put up in Oropouche.

**Miss Nicholson:** They cannot find anybody, so it “ain’t” have one opposition in Oropouche.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Not one they cannot find. They are scrambling to find a candidate for Oropouche. I am saying that I am not ready to give away my parliamentary term just yet. I have a few more blows to put on the PNM before I quit this august Chamber. We have many things to do, we have an unfinished agenda. The United National Congress has an unfinished agenda for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we are going to pursue that agenda vigorously in the post-election era.

**Miss Nicholson:** Make sure it “ain’t” 17:17.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** If it is 17:17, I know we can rely on your support.  
[Laughter]

**Miss Nicholson:** You know if it is me, you are not coming back.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Whom will you support? The PNM?

**Miss Nicholson:** You are not coming back.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Will you support that outrageous government that you have opposed all your life?

**Miss Nicholson:** More outrageous than you all? Rounds up and sit down.  
[Laughter]

**Hon. T. Sudama:** I think you should go gracefully, not go and say you are supporting that corrupt regime that you have attacked so many times.

**Miss Nicholson:** Just do not make it 17:17.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Well, I can assure you, it would not be 17:17.

**Miss Nicholson:** Please.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** When we come back here, we will be coming back with a comfortable majority to implement our legislative, economic and social agenda for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are coming back here for.

As you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have replaced the candidate in San Fernando East, and I myself will be joining the hustings there. San Fernando East borders my constituency. In fact, my residence is in San Fernando East so I will be on the hustings there. We have put up a bright young man in San Fernando East who has a political future.

**Mr. Manning:** I am shivering.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** That political future has to come at the expense of the Member for San Fernando East.

**Mr. Manning:** You “ain’t” see how frightened I am looking.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** You are looking frightened? I think you have to be more afraid of the fellows sitting on the right and left of you. Your greatest fear. Do you see the chaps to the right and to the left of you? Watch them very closely. That is where your fears should come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, I hope I am not provoked in this Parliament again because, if provoked, I will have to get up and defend myself and my integrity because they do not have any to defend. Their integrity has gone through! But I have to get up to defend my integrity and I will do it as often as it is required to be done, but on the issue of the purchase of a vehicle by me last year, I hope that I have said what needs to be said. I have put that matter to rest.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The sitting is suspended for half an hour.

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

**5.02 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Kenneth Valley (Diego Martin Central):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would want to try to bring this debate back to the issue before the House, that is the supplementary appropriation of approximately \$415.3 million for the establishment of the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. Of course, we have to notice, first of all, the fact that we are here today establishing a revenue stabilization fund when we thought, way back on August 28, the Minister had given us a commitment that he had made an allocation to the revenue stabilization fund. My colleague argued today and, I think last week, I made the point that, in fact, these funds would be coming out of borrowings. I think we would have to wait on the Auditor General’s Report to see the truth.

Over the years we have seen the Minister coming to the House with budget plans, only to see overruns year after year. If you were to look at the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* for the year ending September 2000, you would see that, while the original budget considered a total recurrent expenditure of approximately \$12.9 billion, the revised estimate is approximately \$13.9 billion. In other words while, last year, in the Minister's budget statement with respect to recurrent expenditure, he thought that he would be spending approximately \$12.9 billion, in fact, based on estimates as of today, he expects to spend \$13.9 billion, approximately \$1 billion more.

When one looks at the revenue estimates in the *Draft Estimates of Revenue*, one would see that the revenues have been flat, but recurrent revenues estimated at approximately \$12 billion—\$11,975,000,000, the revised estimate is \$11.992 billion—\$12 billion. Even with an oil price of some \$30, in spite of the fact that we were told he got \$669 million more in oil revenues, which have been taken into consideration in his revenues, there has been flatness in his revenues, while his recurrent expenditure increased by \$1 billion.

When we look at his capital revenues, where he estimated some \$993.9 million for 1999/2000, his actual capital revenues are now projected to be a mere \$64.5 million. Revenues are down and his recurrent expenditure is some \$1 billion more. This is why we say that this oil stabilization fund would be funded from borrowings, rather than from the oil revenues.

One can look at the Auditor General's Report to see why some of these things are happening. This is the Auditor General's Report for the year ended September 30, 1999. Listen to some of the comments from the Auditor General. Here the Auditor General is talking about rent accommodation. She says:

“The examination of the Appropriation Accounts disclosed that expenditure totalling \$71,771,295.59 was incurred in respect of lease/ rental payments for office accommodation for certain Government Departments and Ministries. In respect of sixty-four (64) tenancies for which expenditure of \$51,396,273.94 was incurred,...

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is 72 per cent of the total expenditure.

“formal Lease Agreements were not produced for audit examination.”

That is a nice way of saying that there were no formal lease agreements.

“The Auditor General notes with concern the high incidence of the non-production of these formal Agreements.”

In another place she would, of course, have to examine why this is so. Understand, here you have expenditure of approximately \$71.8 billion and you cannot account for 72 per cent of that. You have seen no agreement for 72 per cent of the expenditure. It goes on. Paragraph 3.24 of the report states that the Auditor General asked departments to indicate what were the commitments outstanding as at September 30, 1999. In other words, commitments which are not reflected in the budget. The Auditor General reported that as at September 30, commitments totalling \$48.4 billion, in respect of 38 heads of expenditure, were outstanding—that is, not included in the budget: all expenditure over and above that anticipated by the Minister, when he presented the budget.

**5.10 p.m.**

It says here at 3.49:

“A formal Agreement for the management of a Container Examination Station at Point Lisas was not produced.”

**Dr. Job:** Are you saying billion or million? You are saying billion all the time. You are talking about the expenditure on the rental accommodation and I am hearing you saying billion, should it not be million?

**Mr. K. Valley:** I am sorry, it is million.

“A formal Agreement for the management of a Container Examination Station at Point Lisas was not produced. As a result, expenditure of approximately \$3Mn incurred by the Customs and Excise Division was not verified satisfactorily.”

Here you have funds being frittered away in all different places. So you plan expenditure of some \$12.9 billion, and it is billion on this occasion, I am sorry, but you end up with expenditure of \$13.9 billion. One has to say really, as I said we cannot go on this way. We cannot go on this way. We have argued economic fundamentals, no problem, we know they are good, we put them in place, but, in fact, what is of concern to us is the poor fiscal management.

When you look at the Minister's budget statement last year, when he made the promise to establish this revenue stabilization fund this is what he said on page 32:

“Mr. Speaker, in arriving at a budgeted oil price of US \$16.00, I have, as usual, been cautious and conservative. Should we realise higher oil revenues than budgeted, I propose to set up an Oil Price Stabilization Fund out of any

additional revenues. This will provide a cushion against any unexpected drop in oil prices, and will strengthen the public sector savings effort.”

I would think that the layman reading that would conclude that, to the extent the Minister had excess revenues, 100 per cent of those excess revenues would have gone into the oil stabilization fund.

We are aware that this is advice from the International Monetary Fund, and the argument is simple—that simply because you do not control the price of oil, then you ought to base your budget on some conservative figure, and to the extent that your actual revenues are higher, it will go into a fund, surrealised as it were, from which you can draw down, if in any particular year oil prices are below your budget figure.

The Member for St. Joseph made the point, discussing the philosophy of the concept, that it is not the first time we are setting up funds, and, yes, perhaps, we did not do them with the proper safeguards on previous occasions, but yes, if we are setting up the fund, let us have the proper safeguards. If we are saying that we are budgeting on \$16 and the excess is going into the oil stabilization fund then we expect the excess to go. We do not expect that you would come and renege on that and say, “Well, listen, I am putting two-thirds.” We want the 100 per cent.

Secondly and most importantly, if you are saying that you were using an oil price of \$16 last year and you are now in this year, I think logic would suggest that, at best, you should simply take into consideration inflation over the period and say, “Fine, I am basing my budget this year on an oil price of \$18, \$17 something, or what have you. I do not know how you jumped from \$16 to \$22. It is not simply a benchmark worked out by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries because you are now working on a philosophy and you have got to carry that logic through.

If you are saying that, fine, we are dealing with a product whose price we cannot control, we have no control over it, therefore, we are taking a conservative approach and, therefore, we must cut our suit to the cloth we have. If we then budget at \$18 then we would know that we would have to have expenditure restraint and so forth. But if there is a Minister of Finance who wants to be able to spend \$1 billion more on recurrent expenditure than has been budgeted, he is not going to do that. He is going to budget on \$16 now and move to \$22 in this year.

I want to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, given the concept of the oil stabilization fund, the concept has to be that to the extent that your actual oil price is lower than that assumed, you can draw down on the fund. Does it mean that if actual oil

prices realized average \$20 that we can draw down on the oil stabilization fund? If we ask questions such as this we see the illogic of the procedure. I am saying that, really, if we are serious about setting up the fund and appropriating funds to it, then there must be consistency. If we say that our base is \$16 then the following year it ought to be that the base increased by the increased inflation for the particular year. So I believe that an oil price of \$22, obviously, is too high. Firstly, it allows a level of expenditure and drawdown from the fund to the extent that oil prices average below that figure.

Secondly, I make the point that the full amount of \$669 million ought to have gone into the fund, but then it could not, because if he has to borrow to put into the fund \$415 million he really does not have—he is making a mockery of the whole thing, hoping that the IMF would not notice.

Some other issues quickly: the Member for St. Joseph in his contribution also mentioned the Innovation and Invention Award. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the face of it, it looks quite good, but what is required to fund those innovations and those inventions is equity capital that can be provided via the venture capital legislation. The Minister is aware that there are certain shortcomings in the legislation and a committee seems to be making a career out of coming up with recommendations for amendment to the legislation, which are having the effect of just killing the whole venture capital regime.

**Mr. Assam:** I accept what the Member is saying. What you are saying is quite correct; equity, venture capital, but where you are not correct is that the committee is making a career. The committee's report went to Cabinet; Cabinet accepted all the recommendations; and the legislation is before the Attorney General and the Chief Parliamentary Counsel for the amendments. So we are hoping that will be done very shortly.

**Mr. K. Valley:** So it is the Attorney General's office that is making a career of the thing? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr. Assam:** I just told you we accepted. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. K. Valley:** I am happy about that, because we are two persons who have been trying to get this Venture Capital Programme off the ground, and whatever assistance the Attorney General's office can give us, I am sure the Minister, the Member for St. Joseph and myself would be very grateful. So we would hope that before the Parliament is prorogued, we would see the venture capital legislation before us.



The Member went on to state quite incorrectly that the People's National Movement seemed to have neglected Laventille for all the years and on this occasion we are saying “This is your time,” or “next time is your time”. Implied in that suggestion is that a government in office ought to select certain particular areas for special benefit, or areas that support the government in office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the period 1986—1991 we in Trinidad and Tobago saw what we considered an overemphasis on Tobago; remember there was the whole issue of the deep-water harbour and all those sorts of things.

**Miss Nicholson:** That was the only thing.

**Mr. K. Valley:** Okay, an overemphasis; and I remember in that period the Member for Couva North telling the then Prime Minister “Tobago is to you as Caroni is to me.” I do not know if he remembers that statement. In this period we are seeing that overemphasis in certain areas. I would hope that all of us would really see Trinidad and Tobago and see the benefit of developing Trinidad and Tobago for the sake of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*—]—providing opportunities for all, trying to allow every citizen to realize his full potential, not simply for his benefit, because we have to realize that by doing so he benefits the country, Trinidad and Tobago.

Though roughly one month late, we support the concept of an oil stabilization fund. Of course we support the concept of an oil stabilization fund. We do not believe that it should be funded from borrowing. We believe, however, that the logic must be clear, there must be consistency. We must understand the philosophy, and that, in fact, the assumption of a \$22 oil price makes a mockery of the oil stabilization fund, given that the price last year was some \$16 and inflation was extremely low, and secondly, that, in fact, the excess revenue ought to have gone into the oil stabilization fund.

There were some other issues. In spite of the fact that he went off on some tangent, I want to congratulate the Member for Oropouche for standing here this afternoon and stating his case. Honestly, I believe that the Member for Oropouche is one of the Members on the other side who I think the community would say is an honest person. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to challenge some of the others to do what the Member did. [*Desk thumping*] Specifically—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Assam:** He did it, you do it!

**Mr. K. Valley:** No problem, I could do it now! [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Manning:** “I doing mine” after Ganga Singh.

**Mr. K. Valley:** That is why I have that, because I “doh tief”, I do not take million-dollar bribes. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] The Member for Couva North has an outstanding issue. As the holder of the exalted office of Prime Minister, I think he owes the Parliament and the country an explanation of the part he played in that InnCogen transaction. [*Desk thumping*] I am telling you as an individual, it does not matter who the individual is, I would like to respect the office of Prime Minister. I would want to believe that it does not matter what is happening, that that office is above reproach.

I want to be able to say clearly that that office during the period 1995—2000 was above reproach. I would really hope that before this Parliament is dissolved that the hon. Prime Minister would explain to the national community the role he played in that InnCogen transaction.

**5.25 p.m.**

I congratulate the Member for Oropouche, I think he has done quite well. He stated clearly, I got a Mercedes Benz, this is how I got it. I want the Member for Couva North to take a leaf from the book of the hon. Member for Oropouche. We are hearing about all types of Rolex watches and all types of things. The Member for Couva North ought—that office is too important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not think there is anything else I need to add on this issue. I hope the Minister of Finance is here next week when we would ask him certain questions.

Thank you.

**The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know, and all of us gathered here are quite aware, that in a sense this is the season of unreason when on the hustings our fantasies and fancies get the better of us, and we saw a vivid demonstration of that from the Member for Diego Martin East this afternoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what went on this afternoon from the Member for Diego Martin East following on what the press had done last weekend, I do not want to go into any great detail, but I advise the people that I have been in a Cabinet for three years and nobody on this side—if you ask them privately or publicly—could say that in Cabinet meetings, or in my intercourse with them, I have sought to impose any idea of knowledge or intellectual brilliance about economics, agriculture or anything.

I also have no fear that I can go to all the institutions of learning that I attended from secondary school and all my transcripts are there, and they can

have it available to them. So this kind of invidious attempt to impugn my character is without purpose. I never got up here and said that George Chambers was a Prime Minister and a Minister of Finance and he never went to sixth form and he did not have h.c. and he did not have a degree. I never said that. I would not get up here and say that Eric Williams did not know anything about economics, mathematics, physics or anything and he was Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. I would not say that and I can go on like that. So I do not understand what is the point of dwelling on the *bona fides* of whether or not I am qualified to hold the position that I hold, so I would not deal with that and if they persist, I would deal with it because I can deal with it. I can get my CV and give them copies and let them see that none of them over there are as qualified as I am to be Minister of Finance in the Government.

**Hon. Member:** On paper.

**Mr. Manning:** Sense made before book.

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** So just do not provoke me because you might get what you don't look for. Right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the substantial matter on the business of the House this afternoon, I want to comment on the attempt by the Member for Diego Martin East to continue this charade of engaging the Parliament in propaganda which reminds me again of the institution that the Roman Catholic Church called *Sacra congregatorio de propaganda fide* which means the congregation for the propagation of the faith and this is where we get the English word "propaganda" from. I want to repeat it again because people must remember that propaganda is a methodology where you create allegations in order to damage an opponent, damage an organization, damage a government. This is what they are engaging in and I have said before that the Member for Diego Martin East reminds me of the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Herr Goebbels and he also reminds me of the German writer in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century who said: *Was ist das, was in uns lugt, mordet, stiehlt? Ich magdem Gedanken nicht weiter nachgehen*. What that means in German is: "What is it in us that lies and steals and kills? I really do not want to think about it any further." What he is saying is that apparently human nature is like that and you can see it manifesting in the behaviour of that Member—just deliberately using Parliament to spread propaganda, to say things that are not true about the airport and so many other things.

Why are they coming here every day to talk about the airport? I do not understand. The Member for San Fernando East has a price for the airport, I took

*Judicial Review Bill*  
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

*Friday, September 22, 2000*

a note of it, his price is \$1.3 billion; the Member for Diego Martin West has a price for the airport, his price is \$3.7 billion; I heard them quoting \$1.1 billion and another person in the Senate, Sen. Montano quoted \$1.5 billion. They do not even know what they are talking about and all of them bought houses, they have a mortgage. If the cost of the house is \$300,000—over the lifetime of the mortgage there are interest payments—do you add that and say that is the cost of the house? I do not know that people do that. Why is it if you make an investment in a facility like an airport, you go and extrapolate all your interest payments on loans made and tell people the airport costs \$4 billion? It is dishonest. Just like a while ago you heard the Member for Diego Martin East putting on the record that our national debt payment is more than the gross domestic product of Trinidad—when the data from which he was quoting and the data in the *Review of the Economy* are quite clear. We are talking about current prices, GDP at current prices and national debt at current prices. We have not deflated it down with a GNP deflator.

On page 43 there is a table Appendix 1, gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago 1995—2000 at market prices (1985 constant prices).

**Mr. Valley:** Would you not agree that the constant price table is the appropriate table to use in that circumstance? Is that a fact?

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** I do not agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think it is the Member for Oropouche who said since he was small in primary school they told him you do not add apples and eggs. In some primary schools they tell you, you cannot add two eggs and three apples. What is that?

**Hon. Member:** That is five.

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** When you are doing Algebra there is a variable called “x” and  $2x+2y+5z$  or something, “x” is one kind of thing, “y” is one kind of thing, “z” is one kind of thing. You have to put things in categories. When you are doing these kinds of manipulations, you either use current prices, or constant prices. If you use constant prices, you must use the GDP for constant prices and then deflate all the tax payments, all the debt payments to bring them also to constant prices and you will get the same result. Do you understand? *[Interruption]* I am being advised that maybe I should not persist in trying to teach the dumb and the deaf.

My mother used to tell me when I was a little “fella”—and my mother is a very wise woman. She used to tell me you can take an ass to water, you cannot make it drink; you can drown the ass, you cannot make it drink. She used to tell me that and she was wise, so I will be guided. Let us not talk about constant prices and current prices when people cannot understand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I still believe, on this question of the airport since they are going to keep on talking about it, I should make a few brief comments on that. We have a terminal building that has more than ten acres of floor space, more than 500,000 square feet of floor space, that is what we are investing in. You are getting 14 new loading bridges that can be used in all weather, modern escalators including facilities for those who they now say—they do not like to say “handicapped” anymore—are “physically challenged”. So in terms of our laws, where we try to make people with one eye and one hand, or one foot or whatever disability equal to everybody else, we have taken care of all that. You are getting state-of-the-art electronic facilities to protect the public. You are having 82 check-in counters at this airport, 100 per cent stand-by generators; you are getting fire protection in a modern kind of way with storage for 500,000 gallons of water.

You are getting in that new airport its own internal water treatment plant so you do not have to depend on WASA or anybody else and its own internal sewage-treatment plant. You are getting a parallel taxiway which could act as a runway with two high-speed turn-offs which could be used in emergency. You are getting new bridges; roadways and all the approaches to the airport will be fixed; you are getting new fuelling systems; new car park facilities; you are getting an upgrade of the Golden Grove Road; 25,000 square feet of duty-free concession space for small businessmen and others to make a living. You are getting modern facilities for customs, police, immigration, for health and emergency so if people get sick you do not have to waste time to go to Arima or somewhere by ambulance. You could get modern first-aid facilities right there, you might save a life or more. All that is being taken care of.

You are getting state-of-the-art X-ray baggage handling especially for outboard traffic so that you can check for guns and drugs and all these kinds of things. You are getting five new arrival carousels for handling baggage. The American FAA is in constant contact with what is going on to make sure that from opening day we get all the clearances we need. We are getting a tower for handling all ramp traffic and everything is as modern as you can get and I said that throughout the Caribbean during the oil boom days, they were saying that even in Barbados and other places, they used Trinidad and Tobago’s money to develop infrastructure facilities like airports when they were laughing at us in Trinidad and Tobago. This is what you are getting and I have no qualms to put it on the record and to have it said in this country that I am part of a Government that is quite willing to spend taxpayers’ money to give them the best in the world. You have to pay for quality. The Chinese say: “Cheap thing no good.” If things have value, you have to pay for it. That is how it is, that is the nature of the game.

If you want the best in the world you have to pay for the best in the world. That is all there is to it.

When people go to that airport when it is opened, they would be shocked and surprised beyond credibility and I hope, God forbid, that it will not be Mr. Manning opening that and grinning and palavering and prancing to say, "This is the Trinidad and Tobago airport." I cannot imagine that fate can be so cruel to us. I cannot believe that anybody in this country would permit that to happen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the statement from the Member for Diego Martin Central concerning that during Mr. Robinson's administration, Government was seeing about Tobago and during this administration all they are seeing about is UNC areas—I helped to open a bridge somewhere in the Ortoire/Mayaro area and I remember saying: "This bridge is to unite Trinidad and Tobago; this bridge is for Syrian to drive on; this bridge is for French Creole to drive on; this bridge is for Dougla to drive on to go to meet their Hindu family; this bridge is for who call themselves Indian to drive on; this bridge is for who call themselves African to drive on; this bridge is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago." All these roads that are being paved and all these bridges that are being built, there is no sign on the bridge that says: "No Douglas allowed." There is no sign on the bridge that says: "Nobody from Laventille allowed." All the infrastructure, when the airport is opened, everybody is going to be going through there. What is this rubbish, what is this nonsense, what is this irrelevant—as I said cacophony of discordant noises concerning that this UNC Government is only seeing about UNC areas, Caroni (1975) Limited?

When you raise old-age pension, is there anybody in that office to say we are not raising the old-age pension of black people in Laventille? Is it possible to do that? To say that you are not going to pay the black people in Laventille \$720 a month? As I said in Tobago yesterday, when this Government gets back in office, within the next two or three years the old-age pension will be \$1,000 a month for black people too. You have to deal with these people. They cannot go on saying these kinds of things.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have an argument going around—and this is what the PNM agents are doing. They are all around the country saying we know the PNM did bad things and we know the PNM is intellectually shallow in some regards but, in fact, you have to vote for the lesser of two evils. Their politics have come to the point where they are identifying themselves as an evil. They want to inflict an evil on this country! You are going to the country to tell people vote for the lesser of two evils of which the UNC is one! I cannot imagine it. I

thought people used to go to an electorate and say: “I have the best policy, I have the best programme, I have the best education policy. When you vote for me your grandchildren, your nieces and aunts would get quality education.” I thought this is what you did. I thought you wrote that manifesto and would go to the people with it and say “put us on the basis of this because we are going to do the best. This is the platform for the future.” No, no, no. They are about “taking night to make day” like Nicodemus to tell people “PNM is the lesser of two evils.” [Laughter] I cannot believe it.

You know something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a passage in the Bible—the Member for San Fernando East is a reader of the Bible but he does not understand what he reads. Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 says:

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

A time to build up and a time to break down, a time to gather stones and a time to pelt them away, a time to kill and a time to heal. [Interruption] It is not yet my time to stop speaking. [Laughter] You have to listen and learn.

**5.40 p.m.**

So that they have to understand that even in Laventille, the time will come when the people would pelt them down the hill, and that time is about now. So I want to end up by just advising all of us gathered here this evening, that this measure that we brought to Parliament this evening is for the good of the country. Indeed, the Member for Diego Martin Central, in his presentation, did advise us that they are supporting it, they have no problems with it, and for that the country would be forever grateful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Fourth Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on proposals for the expenditure from the public revenue which were not included in the annual estimates 1999/2000.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL**

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

That a Bill to provide for the Supplementary Appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2000 be now read a second time.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

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

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

#### **JUDICIAL REVIEW BILL**

#### **Senate Amendments**

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

*Be it Resolved* that the Senate Amendments to the Judicial Review Bill, 2000 listed in the Appendix be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 7.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

First Column

Second Column

Clause

Extent of Amendments

7

Insert after subclause (7), the following new subclause—

“(8) Where an application is filed under section (5), sub-section (6), the Court may not make an award of costs against an unsuccessful applicant, except where the application is held to be frivolous or vexatious.”

**Hon. R. L. Maharaj:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House agree with the Senate in the said Amendment.

The effects of these Amendments are in respect of Clause 7. That deals with the question of public interest litigation, where applications are made on behalf of poor persons, and it was felt that in those circumstances that the court should have a discretion in those matters not to award cost, except where the application is held to be frivolous or vexatious.



*Clause 12.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

12 Delete the words “certiorari, prohibition or mandamus,” appearing in line 8 and substitute the words “mandamus, prohibition or certiorari.”.

**Hon. R. L. Maharaj:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, in respect of clause 12, it is purely having the order of the words to match what was originally in the Bill. If you notice they are the same words but in a different order because the Bill had it in that order and that is what it was.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Kenneth Valley** (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise really to lend support to this Amendment, but I think that we need to use this as a general principle, not simply as the Member for Couva South stated for poor persons indicated—I do not think that is the intent of this legislation, I think it is clear that they are saying that persons who are filing judicial review ought not to be subject to cost unless the application is frivolous or vexatious.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might be aware that really this is being a precedent in Trinidad and Tobago since our Constitution of 1976. I am aware that the Member for Couva South knows of the precedent, not only in judicial reviews but also in constitutional matters. As a matter of fact, we would make a mockery of the whole concept of democracy. If an individual believes that one of his rights enshrined in sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution is infringed, and goes to court in an attempt to protect that right; if he is asked to pay costs when he is unsuccessful, then obviously the whole concept of democracy and the protection of human rights would be a non-entity.

As I said, one would see that the cases were reviewed since 1976 and even though cost is being awarded, the state has never demanded cost from an unsuccessful litigant. So while I think this is good, this has become necessary only because this Government has demanded cost in a matter of this type. I am saying that now that we find it necessary to amend this legislation, perhaps we need to make the appropriate amendment in the other legislation to ensure that litigants who were unsuccessful in suing the state on their constitutional motion should also be granted this right.

In supporting this, I ask that the Government, and especially the Attorney General, consider an appropriate amendment to the other legislation.

I thank you.

**Hon. R. L. Maharaj:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I should put it on the record that the “facts”, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, are not accurate. Since 1962, when the Constitution was passed in Trinidad and Tobago, a new remedy was created in constitutional motions. Under Section 6 of that Constitution a new remedy was created where one could file a constitutional motion against the state in respect of any allegation of a breach of a fundamental right.

From 1962 to 1976, the record would show that courts made orders against persons who filed unsuccessful motions and the state enforced orders for costs against those persons.

**5.50 p.m.**

In 1976 when the Constitution had to be rewritten, there were proposals made in constitutional motions that no costs should be ordered. The government of the day rejected that and in 1976 there was no amendment to that section, section 6, which then went in section 14 of the Constitution, that costs should not be ordered. So the present position—the position this administration met when it took office—is that in constitutional motions the court has a discretion whether or not to award costs, and we met a situation in which the state enforced orders for costs against unsuccessful defendants.

In respect of the proposal that the Opposition is making, I think it should be considered because that was one of the matters the opposition at the time was advocating. However, the government of the day did not want that to be the case because that was regarded at that time as a very important weapon that could be used by the opposition and persons opposed to the government, or persons who would want to challenge the government, to challenge legislation and decisions of the government. So if today the Opposition, in opposition, has changed its mind, I think it is a proposal to be considered.

However, in this matter, what is being done is that, if Members remember, the Judicial Review Bill introduced for the first time something known as public interest litigation. What that Bill did was say that even though a person who is affected did not file a case, a non-governmental organization, a group of persons

or another person could file a case and challenge the Government to say that a wrong is being committed. For example, if effluent is flowing into a river and persons are living along the bank of that river but they do not take any action because of—as the Act says—poverty, disability, or they are in a socially or economically disadvantaged position, then another person or group of persons acting *bona fide* can move the court under that section.

This amendment says that in those cases, that is to say, in cases where there is public interest litigation, and some group of persons has moved the court on the basis that this thing should be corrected and for some reason they lose, the court can say, “We are not making an order for costs, except where the application on the face of it—[*Interruption*] No, the court. It says the court may not make an award of costs against an unsuccessful applicant, except—[*Interruption*] It does not certainly mean shall—where the application is held to be frivolous or vexatious. Because if one is going to take away a discretion from the court in making an order for costs, that is something that will need to be passed with a specified majority because that is a discretion which the court inherently has. That is why it has to be framed in this way. Hopefully the judges would look at it and would say, “Listen, this is the intention of the Parliament”, and unless this is a frivolous application they would not make an order for costs. So this is the context in which it is done, and the same principle for costs in a constitutional motion applies in respect of other actions.

Now, if the Opposition believes—and I personally believe—that is a very plausible argument, but it is a policy decision which a government will have to take—it will have to consider it, and it is a matter which can be considered. I do not want to go into the matter which revolved around that particular submission, because I do not think it is fair for me to do that. The fact of the matter is, I think I should put on the record how we see it. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### **MINERALS (No. 2) BILL**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Finbar Gangar):**  
Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill entitled, “An Act to regulate mining and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto”, be now read a second time.

*Minerals (No. 2) Bill*  
[HON. F. GANGAR]

*Friday, September 22, 2000*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure and an honour to be afforded an opportunity to table such a historic and landmark piece of legislation, the Minerals Bill, 2000, in this honourable House. The Bill has been circulated with a significant amount of amendments which came from the other place. The amendments which have been circulated with the Bill came about, in fact, largely as a result of contributions made by Members of the Opposition in the Senate and from the Independent Benches. Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill should have a relatively easy passage in this honourable House.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in conformity with the request of the Leader of Opposition Business, Opposition Chief Whip, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.*

*House in committee.*

*Clauses 1 to 51 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

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

*House resumed.*

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

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot help but note that your presence in the Chair has the inspiration of having matters in this House dispensed with in a very quick way. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Wednesday, September 27, 2000 at 1.30 p.m.

On Wednesday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will try, in addition to what we have to do, to complete the two Bills we were supposed to do today, which we have not done. On Wednesday we want to do the Motion. You might remember, on the last occasion I mentioned the report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to -- consider and report on the children and family legislation, that is Motion No. 4. We also want to do the Motion in respect of the draft Order, the Elections and

*Adjournment*

*Friday, September 22, 2000*

Boundaries Commission (Local Government) (Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2000. We want to also do the two Bills we were supposed to do today if we have the co-operation of the Opposition to get them through very quickly. Based on certain discussions we have had, we will try. We would also try to do the Bill dealing with the amendment to the Citizenship Act and the Bill dealing with the justice protection matter.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, before I put the Motion on the Adjournment, there were two matters to be deferred, by agreement, to the next day.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.00 p.m.*