

*Leave of Absence**Friday, October 27, 2000***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, October 27, 2000*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from two Members of this House who have asked to be excused. The Member for Tobago West has asked to be excused from today's sitting, and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has asked to be excused, because of illness, up to November 17, 2000. The leave of absence which they seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Venture Capital Incentive Programme for the six month period ended 31 December 1996. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Venture Capital Incentive Programme for the year ended 31 December 1997. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Venture Capital Incentive Programme for the nine month period ended 31 December 1998. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Papers 1 to 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, may I ask for this item to be deferred for later in the proceedings, as there is a Bill on the Supplemental Order Paper which should be introduced.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement on this? This item would be deferred by agreement of both sides.

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE REPORT

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

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives which considered the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders to give effect to section 66A of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders in question are to give effect to section 66A of the Constitution, which section was inserted pursuant to Act 29 of 1999; which was a Constitution (Amdt.) Act, 1999.

Under that amendment, in addition to any other joint select committee which Parliament was empowered to appoint under the Standing Orders, Parliament shall, within one calendar month, after commencement of the Constitution (Amdt.) Act, or of the first meeting of the House of Representatives after any general election, or such time as the Parliament may resolve, not being later than three months thereafter, appoint:

- joint select committees to inquire into and report to both Houses of Parliament in respect of Government ministries, municipal corporations, statutory authorities, enterprises owned or controlled by or on behalf of the state or which receive funding from the state of more than two-thirds of its total income in any one year; and
- service commissions, in relation to the administration, the manner of the exercise of their powers, their methods of functioning and any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions.

You would recall that under that Act section 66A shall not apply to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

The Standing Orders before this honourable House, which are being asked to be approved, are before this House pursuant to the procedure which was followed under the Standing Orders Act; in that there was a Motion in relation to the proposed amendments, the matters were referred to the Standing Orders Committee, the Standing Orders Committee met, and there is now before this House a report of the Standing Orders Committee.

You would see in paragraph 1 of the report it says:

“...the House of Representatives appointed the following Members to serve on the Standing Orders Committee:

Mr. Hector McClean	-	Chairman
Mr. Ramesh L. Maharaj	-	Member
Mr. Trevor Sudama	-	Member
Mr. Mervyn Assam	-	Member
Mr. Eric Williams	-	Member
Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds	-	Member
Mr. Barendra Sinanan	-	Member

At the sitting of the House of Representatives held on Monday, October 23, 2000 the House resolved that:

“the draft of proposed amendments to the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives as listed in an Appendix be referred to the Standing Orders Committee for consideration.”

With respect to the committee’s work, the committee held one meeting on Wednesday October 25, 2000 to consider the proposed amendments and after careful deliberations the committee agreed to adopt the proposed amendments subject to changes which it considered necessary for the successful implementation of Act No.29 of 1999.

We would see that, having regard to the amendments which were proposed at the Standing Orders Committee stage, amendments were effected to those proposed amendments and the committee agreed. At the last paragraph of the report:

“The Committee therefore recommends that the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives be amended by inserting after Standing Order 79A the amendments listed at Appendix No.2.”

Mr. Hector McClean	-	Chairman
Mr. Ramesh L. Maharaj	-	Member
Mr. Trevor Sudama	-	Member
Mr. Mervyn Sinanan	-	Member
Mr. Barendra Sinanan	-	Member

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[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

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Both Mr. Williams and Mr. Hinds were not present at the committee meeting.
[Pause] Mr. Speaker, did I say Mervyn Sinanan?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, you did.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I am very sorry. It is probably the national unity.
[Laughter] I do apologize to both Mr. Sinanan and Mr. Assam.

Mr. Mervyn Assam - Member

Mr. Barendra Sinanan - Member

Mr. Speaker, in the report, at Appendix I, hon. Members would see what were the proposed amendments. I will deal with Appendix II because those are the amendments that we are dealing with. We would see that under Standing Order 79B(1), I quote:

“Subject to paragraph (3), the House of Representatives shall appoint Members to sit with Members of the Senate as Joint Select Committees to inquire into and report to it in respect of—

- (a) Government Ministries;
- (b) Municipal Corporations;
- (c) Statutory Authorities;
- (d) Service Commissions; and
- (e) enterprises...”

1.40 p.m.

This is, basically, repeating in the Standing Orders what is contained in the Act, which has been passed by both Houses of Parliament and assented to by His Excellency the President.

Under (2) it states:

"A Joint Select Committee referred to in sub-paragraph (1), shall be empowered to study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operations of the Ministry or body which is assigned to it by the House. In general, the Committee shall be severally empowered to review and report in relation to their administration, the manner of the exercise of their powers, their methods of functioning and any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions."

Mr. Speaker, may I mention that in order to achieve consensus in this matter we used the words of the Act to show what the powers of the Joint Select Committee will be.

- “(3) The House of Representatives shall appoint not more than six Members to any Joint Select Committee appointed for the purpose of this Standing Order.

A Joint Select Committee would not have more than six members, because it is anticipated that there would be more than one Joint Select Committee dealing with different issues.

- “(4) A Joint Select Committee may, by resolution, authorize its Chairman or Vice Chairman to continue meetings in order to receive evidence if it appears that a quorum can no longer be sustained, except that a quorum shall be required whenever a vote, resolution or other decision is taken.
- (5) Within ten days of the appointment of Members to serve on Joint Select Committees, the Speaker of the House shall summon a Meeting of each Committee and the first business to be transacted thereat shall be the election of a Chairman and a Vice Chairman and the determination of a quorum. If at such meeting a Chairman is not elected, the Speaker shall appoint a Member of the Committee to be the Chairman.”

It is the principle which one would find in the Standing Orders.

It continues:

- “(6) Every Joint Select Committee established under this Standing Order shall have the power to appoint Sub-Committees and to delegate to any such Sub-Committee all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House of Representatives.”

Mr. Speaker, we would recall that under this Act a committee was given the power to appoint sub-committees from among its members, and delegate any of its powers to such sub-committee. That was a power given under the Act.

- “(7) In addition to powers granted by these Standing Orders, each Joint Select Committee shall also have the following powers, namely—
- (a) to send for persons, papers and records;
 - (b) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House of Representatives;

- (c) to adjourn from place to place;
- (d) to report from time to time;
- (e) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not otherwise readily available, or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's or the Sub-Committee's order of reference;
- (f) to communicate with any Committee of Parliament on matters of common interest;
- (g) to meet concurrently with any other Committee for the purpose of deliberating, taking evidence or considering draft reports."

One would see the wide powers which are being given to these parliamentary committees.

- "(8) Except the House directs otherwise, every member of a Joint Select Committee appointed under this Standing Order shall continue to be a member of that Committee for the duration of the life of the Parliament;
- (9) Standing Orders 78; 79; 79A(3); 80, except paragraph (2); 81 and 82 shall apply to every Joint Select Committee or a Sub Committee appointed under this Standing order."

It is saying that the rules which are there in existence would apply in addition to these rules which we are making.

- "(10) The provisions of this Standing Order are in addition to and without prejudice to any other powers of the House with respect to Joint Select Committees."

This makes it quite clear that this is not going to take away any of the powers which the House has in relation to Joint Select Committees.

- "(11) Meetings of each Joint Select Committee appointed under this Standing Order and of any Sub-Committee appointed under paragraph (6) of this Standing Order shall be held in public, unless the Committee or both Houses otherwise resolve."

These committees are going to be sitting in public, unless a decision is taken otherwise.

- "(12) The Minister responsible for the Ministry/body under review shall, not later than sixty days after a report from a Joint Select Committee,

relating to the Ministry/body, has been laid upon the Table, present a paper to the House responding to any recommendations/comments contained in the report which are addressed to it. All such papers presented by the Ministry/body shall be ordered to be laid upon the Table without question put, and any motion for the printing thereof as a House Paper shall be determined without amendment or debate.

- (13) If the period of sixty days referred to in this Standing Order expires on a day when Parliament is in recess or the House is adjourned, the Minister referred to in paragraph (12) shall present to the House, the paper responding to the recommendations/comments, no later than the third sitting day following that recess or adjournment.”

Mr. Speaker, one sees under the Standing Orders that after the parliamentary committee has reported, the Minister responsible, within 60 days, ought to report to the House, responding to the comments or recommendations. This is how this accountability would work.

I know that when the Bill itself was debated there were views expressed, but what we are dealing with here are the Standing Orders to give effect to what is already approved in Parliament. The Government acceded to the Opposition requests for the amendments. All the amendments to the Standing Orders which were requested by the Opposition, the Government acceded to them, and the report is signed by both the Opposition and the Government.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, let me open simply by saying that everything is wrong with the Motion before us. It is a hodgepodge. It will not work, the Attorney General knows it, and one wonders why he is bringing it here.

In winding up his contribution, the Attorney General made the point that we are not concerned about the parent Act, that that was passed although we had objections to it, and today we are merely dealing with the Motion to give effect to the Act. It reminds me very much about an arbitration matter which this Government dealt with, only recently, with respect to the Airports Authority, where they told the arbitrator that he ought not to look at whether or not the contract was valid, he just has to assume that if it is valid what would be the liability.

Obviously, one would think that the extent of the liability would have a causal relationship with whether or not the basic contract was valid. But no, they did not think so, and eventually the state has to pay some \$29 million for a contract that the Attorney General said was null and void. This is what is happening. He is telling us today that even though our view is that something is wrong with the parent legislation, we should forget that and merely deal with the Motion. Mr. Speaker, we just cannot deal in that manner. [*Desk thumping*] If the basic legislation is faulty, the Motion cannot be valid; it cannot be.

Basically, the issue of doing a comprehensive audit on ministries has been on the table for some time. While this Government was in Opposition it made the point, and we told them that we were looking at it. When we left government the legislation was at the Chief Parliamentary Office to deal with the matter. We agreed that there ought to be some level of comprehensive audit for ministries and so forth. One has to ask, in that context, how come it is only in this unprecedented sixth session of the Parliament, that the Government is finally coming again with this, supposedly, type of legislation. As they are on their way out, they are now attempting to bring this legislation. As I said, it is a hodgepodge.

Mr. Speaker, let us try to understand what is happening: the Constitution provides for a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) under section 119. It provides for a Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. When we look at the organizations which fall under this legislation, we see government ministries, which already fall under the Public Accounts Committee; municipal corporations, which already fall under the PAC; and statutory authorities, which already fall under the PAC. We see that enterprises owned or controlled by or on behalf of the state or which receive funding from the state of more than two-thirds of its total income in any one year, would fall either under the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee already, or under the Public Accounts Committee. We also see service commissions—which are the only exceptions—because service commissions, as yet, as far as I know, do not fall under the PAC.

The difficulty is that we have existing committees, which are protected by the Constitution, so to make any change with respect to the Public Accounts Committee or the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, the Government would require a two-thirds majority. Those are committees which are protected by a special majority of Parliament.

Here the Government has passed legislation on a simple majority. We argue that the section of the Constitution that the Government has amended is totally

incorrect, that, in fact, they should have gone for a special majority, and the amendment should have been to section 119 amending the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, to widen its functions, and include the service commissions, other than the Judicial And Legal Service Commission, if that is what was required.

We have this issue, Mr. Speaker. Since this Bill is not passed by a specified majority, under what authority will they be able to summon persons to the Parliament? How can you interfere with one's liberty, one's right to freedom, if you did not honour the requirement of a special majority as required for situations involving the breach of sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution? Under what authority would you be summoning these people to Parliament? If they tell you, "No, I am not coming," what are you going to do? If they go to the courts and say that you are interfering with their fundamental rights, what are you going to do? We made that point. In my opinion, what is before us today is a complete waste of the parliamentary time.

1.55 p.m.

If we want to have comprehensive audit on the ministries and so forth, we have no difficulty with that, let us do it correctly, and the correct way to do it is an amendment to section 119 of the Constitution, but they fear. We told them they are going to have our support. Our difficulty was the inclusion of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission which they fought here, but had to amend it in the other place, and given they had done that, we had absolutely no difficulty with the legislation. We would give the support required for the special majority, but let us do it correctly.

The other conflict is, given that you are leaving the Public Accounts Committee in place, you are now setting up a new Joint Select Committee to do an expanded function, but there would be conflict. The Public Accounts Committee is to review the audited accounts and so forth of the various organizations and, as we do that, Members would tell you that we have delved into the area of comprehensive auditing. So it would have been a simple thing to expand the function of the Public Accounts Committee. Members would tell you also, that it is already a strain on Members to make the frequent meetings of the Public Accounts Committee and you are now setting up another committee. Would the Members be the same? Would it be different? How are you going to reconcile these things? How are you going to do it? You have a committee protected by the Constitution, have another one passed by your simple majority.

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The other issue is that, under the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, it stated that those committees must be chaired by a Member of the Opposition. Public Accounts Committee—Member of the Lower House; Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee—a Senator on the Opposition Benches. The committee they are setting up here is open. Could you imagine a committee that is supposed to do a comprehensive audit on the ministry being chaired by the Minister? It can get as absurd as that, Mr. Speaker, given the provision of the Bill. So you have, for example, a comprehensive audit being done on the Ministry of Local Government, and the Chairman of the Committee is Dhanraj Singh. Poor fella, he is not here. Do you understand? It makes no sense. It is clear under the Constitution. Section 119 (2) says quite clearly:

“The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee shall be a member of the Opposition in the House...”

“(6) The Chairman of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee shall be one of the Senators, if any, and if willing to act, appointed under section 40(2)(b) in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition...”

Clearly, if you want to make sense out of this, the chairman must be a Member of the Opposition, but if you look at clause 5 here, it is open. It says:

“(5) Within ten days following the appointment of Members to serve on Joint Select Committees, the Speaker of the House shall summon a meeting of each committee and the first business to be transacted thereat shall be the election of a Chairman and a Vice Chairman and the determination of a quorum.”

So the Chairman or Vice-Chairman could be a Minister or anybody—complete hodgepodge nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, one wonders why they feel it necessary in their dying days to come to the Parliament with this. Rather than call election, they are coming to waste people’s time. Call election, let us go out there and talk to the people. [*Desk thumping*] Tell them what you have been doing for the last five years. One wonders, if they are coming with Joint Select Committees they ought to come with one that makes sense, or if they are coming to amend Standing Orders, they ought to come with one that makes sense.

While they were in Opposition, they wanted amendments to the Standing Orders to deal with crossing of the floor. They argued that case. Why are they not coming with amendments to the Standing Orders to deal with that? Over the last

five years we have clearly seen the need for that type of legislation. They wanted it in the period 1991—1995, it is obvious that it is needed to protect the integrity of the Parliament. It is clear, but they would not come with that, they come with nonsense legislation. My hope is that the Attorney General would see the wisdom and withdraw this thing that would never even work, and come with legislation to amend—*[Interruption]* Well he could wait until the new term, let us just dissolve the Parliament, let us have election and in the new session, let us deal with amendment to section 119 of the Constitution.

Mr. Sudama: You hurry?

Mr. K. Valley: Hurry? Not me you know. It is the people out there who are saying the longer you wait the more you get them vex and it is more blows for you. *[Desk thumping]* We are waiting. I am happy.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that the correct amendment is to section 119 of the Constitution to expand the role and function of the Public Accounts Committee and Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee to allow—in addition to the examination of the audited accounts of companies and state enterprises—for the concept of comprehensive auditing. As well, we have no difficulty including the service commissions other than the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. We say that because the other service commissions are, in effect, doing an executive function on behalf of the Government we have no difficulty in having those service commissions before the Parliament.

We say more importantly, if the Government really wants to do something in its dying days, it ought to bring legislation to amend the Standing Orders to deal with the crossing of the floor to give vent to that constitutional provision that has been there for so long.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, this is the third session of Parliament for this week in the unprecedented Sixth Session of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago and you really have to wonder what is going on. At one point I thought that the Attorney General simply wanted to pad his *curriculum vitae* and try to go down in history as the Attorney General who passed the most laws. How else can one explain these bizarre sittings of Parliament arbitrarily called at the last minute dealing with all sorts of matters that appear out of nowhere on your desk five minutes before the sitting, and you are asked to pass it; pass it, even though there are errors in it, even though there are flaws in it, we would deal with it in the next Parliament. Pass it, just pass it!

One has to wonder. This happened with the Computer Misuse Bill. The Attorney General acknowledged there were flaws in that Bill, but “pass it”, “pass it”, “pass it”. The matter we are debating now is not just a waste of time, it is arrant nonsense. The Government has tried to pretend that it cares about people and accountability. It has tried to pretend that this matter before us will allow greater scrutiny of governmental action, but how on earth can you have scrutiny of governmental action by the Government? This is what this is all about. What is really going on here is that the Government has the misguided, foolish belief that they would be the Government on the next occasion and they are trying to get at the service commissions, and that is why they have put service commissions under the scrutiny of these haphazard committees which would be chaired by a government Member. They have no interest in looking into the actions of ministries and government departments. They have no interest in that at all. As my colleague has pointed out, it is foolishness in the extreme to expect a Minister of Government to investigate himself. That would never happen and if it happens, it would be a smokescreen as is taking place at NIPDEC right now, where I understand there is a guy called Linqvist who is ensconced in NIPDEC with four fraud squad officers now for the last two or three weeks allegedly carrying on some investigation. What Linqvist does not know, and I am letting him know now through this medium, is that they are shredding and burning files at NIPDEC. So all they are giving this poor fella is sanitized files. He is not going to get the whole picture. They are giving him documents that they believe will clear them. You see, the Prime Minister has this view that when himself investigates himself and declares himself to be clean that the rest of the country will just follow suit, and that is what the Motion is all about. Imagine setting up a committee to scrutinize the Government where the Government would have the majority on the committee and would chair the committee. What an absurdity! Can you imagine what the deliberations of those committees would be? That is why I say Mr. Linqvist is not going to find out what is going on at NIPDEC because I understand that they are burning files. They took some files to Chaguaramas and burnt them in a drum, but unknown to them, they just burnt the top and apparently some public-spirited person has retrieved the rest of the documentation. Just the top was burnt.

Mr. Speaker, we really cannot participate in what I call this act of foolishness. The Constitution provides for parliamentary committees chaired by the Opposition. That is the only way you could have proper accountability in this country. The Government cannot investigate the Government. The Opposition must investigate the Government and this is why the Public Accounts Committee

is chaired by a Member of the Opposition and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee is chaired by a Member of the Opposition. This is foolishness to the extreme. And all it is, is that a Government in its dying days, each Member is running in a different direction. The Attorney General is on a frolic of his own trying, as I said, to pad his *curriculum vitae* so that he will be the Attorney General who passed the most laws, no matter how defective, vindictive and evil these laws may be. No matter how ineffective, like the Offences Against the Person Bill where they wanted to change categories of murder and had to be told in the Senate that the law actually abolishes the death penalty. That is the consequence of haste. You know the saying: “Err in haste, repent in leisure.” That is what this is all about. It is like the Member for Tobago East who cannot even deal with Tobago East matters. There is a collapse of the air and sea bridge, but he would not speak on that. You would not hear the Member for Tobago East speaking to his constituents about the collapse of the air bridge and the problems with the sea bridge.

2.10 p.m.

He would not talk about that. He would not talk about the substantive portfolios. However, in an erratic effort to deflect attention away from his misguided and totally unjustified comments about police officers, that they are at the level of criminals—he was getting so much licks on that issue that he went off on a tangent and would not even check the records in his own substantive Ministry of Finance. If he had, he would have seen that it was the UNC that sold the methanol company shares to Clico in 1997.

There is a statement here from the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries made on April 11, 1997 where the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries reported to this Parliament that the Government had made a decision, their Government, to sell shares in the methanol company to a consortium, including Clico. They do not even know what they are doing. They do not have a clue. They are all off on a frolic of their own. They are getting confused. The Prime Minister does not even know when to call the election date. He keeps taking these internal polls, and they see that they are slipping in the polls. But, like any business that is going bankrupt, one has to cut one’s losses. The Prime Minister does not understand that they are a lame-duck Government. They are on a slippery slope and they are sliding down, [*Desk thumping*] and every day there will be more and more bumbles, *faux pas* and irrational behaviour from Government ministers. I mean, can you imagine a Government minister implicating the bosom buddy of the Prime Minister in irregularity!

Mr. Speaker: Would you please return to the matter of the Standing Orders.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is the environment that we have to deal with, Mr. Speaker. What kind of thinking would be having three sittings of Parliament beyond the date when, by precedent, elections are called? What is going on? If they are so confident they are going to win the election, they could pass all of these foolish laws in their next term. What is the point, Mr. Speaker? It is obvious to me they are not confident. They are unsure. They feel that there is a possibility they may lose and this is why they want to rush all of this nonsense through here and that is why desperation is setting in.

This is why we have to deal with the foolishness that was laid in this Parliament a few days ago by the Member for Tobago East—arrant nonsense, Mr. Speaker! He cannot even deal with the substantive portfolio. He is Minister of Tobago Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Finance. He “doh” read files in the divestment division. He “doh know wha’ going on” with Tobago and the air bridge and the sea bridge, but “he interfering” in matters of National Security about which he knows nothing. He cannot deal with his substantive portfolio—embarrassing the Prime Minister!

Mr. Speaker: Would the Member return to the Standing Orders, please?

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker, because there has got to be an end to all of this nonsense! I demand that the Prime Minister call elections now! [*Desk thumping*] We do not know which minister will get up next and bring some letter from Jack Warner or somebody saying, “Jack Warner bribe the PNM”. That is just an example, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You seem to be ignoring me.

Mr. C. Imbert: No, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I do not like you to ignore me. I ask you please, could we return to the Standing Orders?

Mr. C. Imbert: I thank you, Sir. It is just an example I am giving—I mean, the erratic behaviour of these people, attacking their own people, Mr. Speaker! But anyway, I do not support this nonsense. It is foolishness. It results in government scrutiny of government. It is a smokescreen. It reminds me of communist Russia. It is the kind of thing that took place in Argentina when there was a film, “*Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*”; that kind of thing, where people just disappear. This is arrant nonsense, Mr. Speaker! This is pretence. I want the Attorney General to tell me how a committee chaired by the

Government with a majority of Government members could investigate the Government with any semblance of integrity, Mr. Speaker. I totally oppose this. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj) [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, this Motion has nothing to do with general elections. This Motion has to do with the House approving the Standing Orders, to which the Opposition agreed at the Standing Orders Committee, to implement the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill that will give to parliamentary committees the power to investigate misuse and abuse of power of ministers and of public officials and to investigate allegations of corruption. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Rubbish.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, you see how the Opposition behaves?

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

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: You see how the Opposition behaves? Here it is the Opposition has been talking about machinery to investigate corruption and abuse and misuse of power. [*Interruption*] The Opposition in 1991 told the then government, “If you want machinery to investigate corruption, let us set up parliamentary committees with the powers as we have under this Act.” The then government held meeting after meeting and they delayed and delayed and delayed and the election was called—nothing happened.

I have been told today, Mr. Speaker, in this Parliament by the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, that the Chief Parliamentary Counsel’s Department had legislation in draft form to implement parliamentary committees. That is not correct. As a matter of fact, when I became the Attorney General and we asked whether there was anything done by the Law Commission or by the Chief Parliamentary Counsel’s Department in the form of any Bill, Act or anything like that, nothing was there. So it is the same policy now. The policy is that we came here with a Bill. The Bill was passed in this House. They opposed it. It went to the other place. They opposed it in the other place. The Independent Senators supported it and said, “Any country that wants to deal with corruption would want this kind of law to give to the people, through the Parliament, the power to investigate ministers and ministries.”

They have introduced the merits of this Bill into this debate. Mr. Speaker, let me explain what this law would do. This law would enable us to have a parliamentary committee on corruption and ethics.

Dr. Rowley: Nonsense!

Mr. Imbert: Nonsense!

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: He said, “Nonsense”.

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: He says, “Nonsense”.

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: He says, “Nonsense”. Mr. Speaker, I want to read it. Section 66A of the Act—because they are not interested in reading this—says:

“(a) in addition to any other Joint Select Committee which Parliament is empowered to appoint under its Standing Orders, Parliament shall, within calendar month—

- (i) after the commencement of the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1999;
- (ii) of the first meeting of the House of Representatives after any General Election,

or such time as the Parliament may resolve not being later than three months thereafter, appoint Joint Select Committees, to inquire into and report to both Houses of Parliament in respect of—

- (A) Government Ministries;
- (B) Municipal Corporations;
- (C) Statutory Authorities;
- (D) Enterprises owned or controlled by or on behalf of the State or which received funding from the State or more than two thirds of its total income in any one year; and
- (E) Service Commissions,

In relation...”

I will read it very slowly, Mr. Speaker:

“In relation to their administration...”

So that if the administration is corrupt, there are irregular procedures, tendering procedures are not being followed, people are being bribed, people are using it for

nepotism or misuse and [Interruption] abuse of power, administration—
[Interruption] He is saying, “No shame”.

Dr. Rowley: [*Words expunged*]

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, look at the shameless—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: One second. No. The outburst of the Member for Diego Martin West—[Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: He is provoking me, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The outburst of the Member for Diego Martin West that a Member has no shame is not right, and he knows it. Not only are you contravening the Standing Orders by making that utterance sitting down and without my permission, but it is offensive. It will be expunged and I ask, please— notwithstanding the closeness of a date of election, I ask that we contain ourselves—[Interruption]

Mr. Panday: Who says it is close?

Mr. Speaker: Well, it is closer than five years ago. But notwithstanding this, I ask that we contain ourselves, please, please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry. [Interruption]

Mr. Panday: January, January. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker:

“In relation to their administration...”

So if the ministry, which includes the minister, the permanent secretary and public officials, in its administration is corrupt, it practices irregular procedures, it engages in favouritism, it is unequal in its treatment, whatever it is, this parliamentary committee would be able to investigate and scrutinize it. But, Mr. Speaker, it does not stop there. Not only the administration:

“...the manner of the exercise of their powers...”

If the ministry, the municipal corporation, the statutory authority or enterprises or Service Commission in the manner of the exercise of their powers are corrupt, follow irregular procedures or breach tendering procedures, the parliamentary committee, the Opposition, Government and Independents would be able—and I will show you, Mr. Speaker—to send for persons, to call for

records and to bring the documents. Why is the Opposition afraid of those kinds of laws? This is not going to be only for 1995 to 2000. It is going to be for all time. So that, Mr. Speaker, this is giving the people the power which they did not have, and the people's power would be exercised through the Members of Parliament. Mr. Speaker, it does not stop there.

“...administration, the manner of the exercise of their powers, their methods of functioning...”

So any Government minister or ministry, municipal corporation, and all these bodies, the method in which they function would be able to be scrutinized in the Parliament for the people's representative to be able to see.

“...and any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions;”

So, Mr. Speaker, how could that be seriously said, when a second-year child in primary school would be able to understand that this gives to the Parliament the power to investigate abuse of power, misuse of power or any allegation of that sort of corruption by the Parliament?

Hear the other argument, Mr. Speaker. The other argument is that, “We do not want this. We want you to amend the Constitution to give the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee more powers”. But, Mr. Speaker, I have a report here from the Global Programme Against Corruption by the Centre for the International Crime Prevention of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. It is recognized worldwide that allegations of corruption are serious matters that all Parliaments must address. According to this report, one of the best ways in which governments can deal with this problem is to have the institutions that are existing more open and transparent so that government would become more accountable to the people.

In the report at a conference that was held from October 19—20, 2000 in Oslo, it says that a transparent system of checks and balances designed to achieve accountability among the various arms and agencies of the government, and one that manages conflicts of interest in the public sector, disperses power and limits opportunities for conflict of interest, is one of the ways in which corruption and misuse and abuse of power can be fought.

2.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of meeting with this body about a week ago in Vienna and they were discussing—and they gave me this report—countries which

they have been going to in order to investigate allegations of corruption. When they saw the report of Trinidad and Tobago, in respect of the legislation, which this country put in place in order to make the system more open and transparent, Mr. Speaker, they said that they regarded Trinidad and Tobago as a country which is leading in the world, in order to put machinery in place to fight corruption. Mr. Speaker, no country can fight corruption if its Parliament does not have appropriate committees in order to deal with allegations of corruption.

Mr. Speaker, when this law becomes effective if, for example, there is an allegation that at the airport there is corruption in a contract, this parliamentary committee would have the power to summon the chairman, to call for the books and to call for the records. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that you can really persuade people who do not want to agree. They have had a barrier over the years; they do not want to agree and even when they agree—the Hon. Member for San Fernando West, on behalf of the Opposition, agreed and they had to ask the Member not to come today because they were going to oppose it.

Mr. Panday: Did the Member sign it?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Yes. The hon. Member for San Fernando West signed this report for these Standing Orders, representing the Opposition—the Member was there.

Mr. G. Singh: The Member is the senior attorney-at-law there.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: He is the senior attorney—unless the Member for Diego Martin Central now wants to become an attorney—a bush lawyer—and the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Speaker, hear what the Standing Orders say and I am coming to hear all this thing about special majority. If the Member for Diego Martin Central or the PNM or anyone believes that this Act was unconstitutional, they could have filed a constitutional motion. They are very good at that. When they file constitutional motions they go to court and withdraw.

Independent Senators supported this Bill, not only in this place by the Government, but in the other place. The only problem the Independent Senators had with it was not to put in the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and we agreed to that, but they had no problem with the Bill. So you had Independent

Senators and the Government agreeing that if you want to investigate corruption; if you want to have contemporaneous machinery for the investigation of corruption, you must have machinery to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, under the existing Standing Orders, there are certain committees of Parliament, which have the power to send for persons, but we are giving to this committee the power to send for persons, papers and records. Mr. Speaker, a Minister is a person unless the Opposition thinks that a Minister is not a person. So, if in the Airports Authority, the Opposition is saying there is all this corruption, the committee could send for the papers; they could send for the Minister; they could send for the Chairman; and they could send for the records.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. Member would give way. I want to simply ask the Member, if you send for a person and under that legislation that person says he is not coming, what do you do?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I think any student who has been to Parliament knows that the Parliament has the power to punish people just as the court has the power to punish people. [*Laughter*] We sit in this Parliament all the time, we know about it. So is it because you do not want to do that you do not put machinery in place? Mr. Speaker, may I proceed? [*Laughter*]

- “(a) to send for persons, papers and records;
- (b) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of House of Representatives;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place;
- (d) to report from time to time;”

Mr. Speaker and hear what we have done.

“(e) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not otherwise readily available, or to elucidate matters of complexity.”

Mr. Speaker, for the first time we are going to have, in Trinidad and Tobago, a measure in which the Joint Select Committee would have the power to appoint advisers to assist it. So, therefore, if you want a forensic expert on corruption, Mr. Bob Linquist or otherwise, you could appoint persons to assist the committee but, Mr. Speaker, the PNM does not want that. I want to ask why it is that the PNM does not want it.

Mr. Speaker, when President Mandela assumed office in South Africa, he said that one of the things which must be corrected in the country was how to deal

with the question of corruption. He said in order to deal with that, apart from amending his integrity and corruption laws, he wants a system of Parliament in which parliamentary committees would have the power to monitor and scrutinize every aspect of the state. Mr. Speaker, in the South African Parliament under President Mandela, there are parliamentary committees scrutinizing every aspect of the state, including the judicial arm of the state. Mr. Speaker, since the parliamentary committees in South Africa started functioning, they discovered several instances of misuse and abuse of power, and the country has been able to save a lot of money. South Africa has done that.

Mr. Speaker, when Canada wanted to deal with corruption, misuse and abuse of power, it was found that apart from amending the laws, in order to deal with corruption itself and integrity, additional machinery was needed to strengthen the institution to be able to make it more accountable and they had parliamentary committees. Mr. Speaker, the same thing happened in the United Kingdom.

In the United States of America, the committee system functions very, very well and you can scrutinize anybody with these committees. Mr. Speaker, is the PNM interested in having an antiquated system of Parliament, an old-fashioned system, an archaic system in which all that happens on a Friday is that Members come and debate or on a Monday and Tuesday on the floor of the House, but the institution itself does not have any investigative powers to deal with corruption and misuse and abuse of power?

Mr. Speaker, we have had in this Parliament a code of ethics but we have had no machinery to deal with it. Such a committee would be able to deal with it and to see whether Members of Parliament are following the code of ethics. Is it that the Opposition does not want to be answerable to the people for the way they exercise their function? Is it that the Opposition does not want to be answerable to the people in respect of their administration, how they perform, the manner of the exercise of their functions, their methods of functioning and any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions?

Mr. Speaker, but I must say I find it strange. I never thought that the Opposition would have opposed this today. I cannot understand how a party, committed to the welfare of the people; strengthening the rights of people; empowering them and giving them the opportunity to scrutinize government; to know more about government and how moneys are being spent; to know whether the moneys are being misused; whether there is an abuse of power; and whether any Opposition Member is talking the truth when they talk about corruption—I cannot understand how the Opposition would be against that.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand and I cannot understand how an Opposition could have a representative in the Standing Orders Committee and agree that this is in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Opposition comes on the floor of the House to gallery and to make politics and say they do not want this Bill. I do not understand and I cannot understand it. It is unthinkable that any party committed to the welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago would get up and oppose this. The Opposition owes an apology to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, then the Opposition comes and asks why this Bill has come now. Mr. Speaker, was the Opposition sleeping? What have they been doing? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, since this Act was passed the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago took a decision to implement this Act. As a matter of fact, if the Member sits down and behaves himself—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: May I, on one more occasion, appeal to the Member for Diego Martin West not to go against the Standing Orders of the House. What the Member is doing is wrong. I do not propose to remind him about it again. I ask you please to conduct yourself in the fashion that the Standing Orders demand. What is happening now is that both sides had an opportunity of speaking on this, and two Members on this side exercised their right and nobody else wanted to. The Attorney General is now responding and it is not permissible that when he is speaking—whether or not one agrees with what he is saying—one is able to shout him down as you are doing. I ask you please do not force us to use any strong measures today.

Mr. Valley: Do you want to dissolve the House?

Mr. Speaker: If what? I ask you please, let us conduct ourselves in a manner which is befitting of parliamentarians.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I think the Opposition is making a joke of themselves and I really think that if they are serious about being an alternative government, they should really understand that sometimes there are matters which are serious and matters which are not.

2.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, one of the points raised by the Opposition is that this Motion has come here late in the proceedings. As I understand it, and I want to put it on record again, the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago gives the Parliament a certain lifespan. When that lifespan is given, anything done by the Opposition to

make it appear that that lifespan is not in existence, is not attacking the Government; it is attacking the Constitution. They are attacking the people and they are saying they are not in agreement with what the people authorized. Every time they get up and say here, "Call election now! Call election now!" they are attacking the people. This is the people's Constitution, and the Constitution is not the paper. The Constitution is what was passed.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand. When we come here to debate, if they are confident to win an election, go and win it! They cannot win by saying, "I will win. I will win." They cannot say they are going to win an election when we come here with serious matters to deal with the rights of the people and they attack people who have brought the Motion.

As I was saying, when this Bill was passed, the Government started to take steps in collaboration with the administrators of the Parliament in order to try to put mechanisms in place for the implementation of this Bill. The Bill, for implementing, did not only need Standing Orders. It needed additional administrative resources. Mr. Speaker, I think I would like to welcome the hon. Member for San Fernando West. It is good to see him in the Chamber. I am sorry he did not come in time to participate. His timing is very right. *[Interruption]* I would give way if he wants to withdraw his signature. Do you want to withdraw it? He does not want to.

Mr. Speaker, I deem in law, that is an agreement and in substance that is an agreement; on moral grounds that is an agreement, on religious grounds, that is an agreement. One of the things the Cabinet had to consider by a decision of July 20, 2000, the Cabinet decided that the legislation on parliamentary committee assisted by the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Clerk of the Senate, the Chief Personnel Officer and other officials of the personnel department, representatives of the Public Management Consulting Division of the Ministry of Public Administration and the secretary to Cabinet held extensive discussions with respect to the human resource requirements for the implementation of the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill and for the conduct of business of Parliament in general.

In that connection, the committee noted *inter alia* that knowledge of parliamentary practice and experience can only be acquired after many years of service. Therefore, once appointed table clerkship, it is desirable that persons remain in the service of the Parliament for their entire career life. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, the existing classification scheme, as it relates to technical positions, and so forth, especially in the light of new attractive opportunities for growth, needed to be changed.

Consequent upon all those discussions and the fact that this is what the parliamentary staff had at the time, the Cabinet agreed for the creation, with immediate effect, of the undermentioned positions on the staff establishment of the Parliament department: Parliamentary Clerk II, two Parliamentary Clerks I, two clerk typists, two verbatim reporters, and it also decided that consideration be given for additional resources.

In summary, therefore, in respect of this matter, the Government was engaged in providing the necessary administrative infrastructure so that when parliamentary committees have to meet, there will be sufficient human resource to deal with these parliamentary committees.

What we have done also, is not only to provide the administrative, human and other resources; we have taken steps to provide the physical space. That is one of the reasons the Red House has been vacated by other members of the state sector. It is because it is the intention to use the Parliament fully for parliamentary business so that there can be several parliamentary committees meeting at the same time so that one does not have to have one room only for parliamentary committees. There will be interview rooms, rooms where the Members of Parliament would be able to meet with persons to discuss matters, there will be conference rooms and that is all to give effect to a different kind of functioning of the Parliament. It is, in effect, to modernize the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Opposition has a complete misconception of what the Public Accounts Committee really does. When this Bill was debated, the same point was made by the Opposition, and we all know that the Public Accounts Committee has accounts for years, which they have not looked at. So, if one is creating a parliamentary committee system in which one is going to give to the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee work with extended jurisdiction, but it still has a whole backlog and they have a history of taking years to determine matters, what can happen is that one would be creating reforms, but in effect, one would be saying that one does not want those reforms effected, because the bureaucracy and the sheer workload will prevent the committee from functioning.

The Public Accounts Committee has limited functions. Under the Constitution, all that the Public Accounts Committee can do is consider and report to the House of Representatives, section 1(19)(2) of the Constitution, appropriation accounts of moneys expended out of the sums granted by Parliament. Such other accounts as may be referred to the committee by the House of Representatives and the report of the Auditor General.

All that the Public Accounts Committee can do is deal with what has been allocated by Parliament, what has been spent and how it has been spent. The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee: all it can do is the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by and on behalf of the state, and the Auditor General's report on any such accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, how is it that if one wants to deal with corruption, if one wants to deal with misuse and abuse of power, if one really wants to deal with that, how can one use the Public Accounts Committee to deal with that? The fact of the matter is that it cannot. The Public Accounts Committee is the wrong institution, and in South Africa, in Canada, in England, and in other Commonwealth countries where this system has been introduced to have parliamentary committees similar to those we have introduced here, they still have the Public Accounts Committee and other committees to investigate accounts, but this committee is not to investigate accounts. This committee is to investigate the administration of the ministries or the state corporations—the manner in which they exercise their powers, their methods of functioning and criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions. It is like a different jurisdiction altogether. It is like one court being a drug court and one court being a family court.

Mr. Valley: Nonsense!

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, they want a drug court to investigate family law matters. That cannot work! What will happen is that the court would not be equipped to deal with the situation. I would like to read from a report in order to show some of the matters in which parliamentary committees are recognized as giving more openness and transparency. In this report, Global Programme Against Corruption, it says that in recent years, corruption or the misuse of public powers for private gain has emerged as a serious obstacle to democratic government and economic growth. For this reason, there is now increased interest and need for anti-corruption policies and measures that are effective in building integrity to prevent corruption and increase the cost and uncertainty of national and international civil servants misusing their powers for private gains. That is the philosophy in which parliamentary committees are to be used in order to fight corruption and misuse and abuse of power.

Mr. Speaker, the headings in which this global action says that there can be corruption, are bribery, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, abuse of power, conflict

of interest, favouritism and nepotism. All these matters we have heard in this House over the years.

It is not only now that we are hearing allegations of corruption. Over the years, we have heard allegations of corruption against governments, public bodies and so forth, and the population does not know whether these things are true or false. As a matter of fact, sometimes they are left in the air and nobody does anything about it. What has happened is that for the first time, we are having reforms in order to put institutions in place to be able to investigate these matters. There really cannot be any genuine objection to that. The only reason one could object to that is if one does not want these things in place.

When the Government came to this House and introduced a Freedom of Information Bill, that was a law which internationally promotes openness and transparency, and puts a government and the public service to account to the people. When this Government came with this measure, the Opposition opposed it. The Opposition said it did not want this law. They said that is nonsense! “You cannot have that law! It would serve no purpose!”

The people and the Government are accustomed hearing this from the Opposition when it comes to laws to improve the well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They have raised it today. Is the objection that “The Act may be unconstitutional, but I do not take any action to challenge it, I do not go to court to get it challenged, but because the Act may be unconstitutional, I am not supporting it”? If that was a genuine reason, why did the hon. Member for San Fernando West sign the report? I have the report here. The report is signed by the hon. Member for San Fernando West. It was signed in our presence.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give way, can he tell me how many Members of the Opposition were on that committee, and could he explain why the other Members did not sign the report?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, the other Members did not come to the meeting! Here it is that there is a committee meeting, they offered no excuse; no explanation was given for their absence and they treated the committee with contempt—the Standing Orders Committee of the Parliament. They do not come and voice their objections and say why, but one Member came and he must be congratulated. He came and put forward suggestions to amend the Standing Orders. As a matter of fact, the Government accepted his submissions to amend the Standing Orders and he agreed.

2.50 p.m.

He agreed—Barendra Sinanan—and signed in the presence of everybody. He ought to be congratulated for that [*Desk thumping*] and after signing, they come here now to say this law is unconstitutional. I have the law here, Mr. Speaker, passed on November 4, 1999—almost a year ago—and the Opposition does not take any steps to set it aside, if they are saying it is unconstitutional. Mr. Speaker, they know that has no merit.

They come to gallery for election. They come to say, “Listen, you are coming here with this law and we are not going to support you, therefore, you are coming in the dying stages of a government to pass this law.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the Freedom of Information Act. I want them to go to the population—they are calling for election—and tell the population why, when the Government introduces a law which will give greater power to the people to get to know what the Government is doing, by which they will get a statutory right to find out what the Attorney General is doing, what the Prime Minister is doing, what the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development is doing; what the Airports Authority is doing; what the National Gas Company is doing, they did not want it.

Why did they oppose that? Why is it, if they are saying that the people must have more power, must be more part and parcel of governance, did they oppose that? I want them to say that. They are talking about election and I would want them to tell the people at election time why it is they did not do that.

Mr. Hart: We know what to tell the people.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I would have thought they would have gotten up to say that today. Why is it they have not supported that?

These Standing Orders are really, as the Act says, to give effect to this Bill. It says in clause 4:

“This Act shall come into force when Standing Orders are made to give effect to section 66A.”

What is the other point they raised? There are no other points raised. I would say that the Opposition really does not want to give greater power to the people and I would expect them, because of that, to vote against this measure as they have voted against the Freedom of Information Act, as they have voted against this parliamentary committees Bill, the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill. I would say they would vote against it, because they are saying it is unconstitutional.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking them to rethink that. I am asking them not to consider themselves—

Mr. Imbert: Call the vote now.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj:—consider the people. Consider that they are holding office in trust for the people. This is a measure for the people and they have a duty, as a trustee, to give to the people this vote by voting for these measures. If they vote against it, they must know that is a breach of trust, which they hold for the people. I am saying that the PNM, knowing how they are, they would not say no, they would not say yea, and they are likely to abstain.

Be that as it may, this Government is going to implement this Bill. It is going to implement the Freedom of Information Bill because the Government is committed to giving greater rights to the people and the people would be able to investigate any irregularity. Find out how their moneys are being spent and how their policies are being administered, because the policies are not the Government's policies, the policies are the people's policies. The Parliament is not the Government's Parliament or the Opposition's Parliament, the Parliament is the people's Parliament. The Committees of Parliament are not the Government's Committees or the Opposition's Committees; they are the people's committees. Therefore, if they are the people's committees, they must have the power to investigate and scrutinize Government.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 18 Noes 9

AYES

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Panday, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.

Griffith, Dr. The Hon. R.

Humphrey, Hon. J.

Sudama, Hon. T.

Maraj, Hon. R.

Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.

Assam, Hon. M.

Job, Dr. The Hon. M.

Khan, Dr. F.

Singh, Hon. G.

Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.

Partap, Hon. H.

Ramsaran, Hon. M.

Sharma, C.

Ali, R.

NOES

Valley, K.

Rowley, Dr. K.

Imbert, C.

Narine, J.

Hart, E.

James, Mrs. E.

Joseph, M.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

Mr. B. Sinanan abstained.

Question agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives which considered the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders to give effect to Section 66A of the Constitution.

FINANCE BILL

Order for second reading read.

[Minister Job stands]

Dr. Rowley: You have no conscience!

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

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

That a Bill to provide for the imposition or variation of certain taxes for the incorporation of the amendments made by the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2000, to introduce other provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters, be read a second time.

The Bill which is before this House contains measures outlined in the budget presentation which was presented to this House on August 28, 2000. It also contains certain other fiscal measures.

Part I of the Bill describes the short title of the Bill.

Part II amended the Old Age Pensions Act, Chap. 32:02, by increasing old age pension from the current level of \$620 to \$720. This measure took effect from October 1, 2000. Mr. Speaker, this represents the fourth increase in five years in the level of old age pensions. This increase achieved our goal of doubling old age pension from its level of five years ago. Seventy thousand of our senior citizens are expected to benefit from this measure.

Part III of the Bill amends the Student Revolving Loan Fund Act. This Act established the Student Revolving Loan Fund. The purpose of the Fund was to enable loans to be made to students desirous of pursuing prescribed courses of study at the University of the West Indies or any other institute of learning designated by the Student Revolving Loan Board.

By the Finance Act, 1998, the duties and functions of the board were altered, such that the board is no longer empowered to determine the courses of study with respect to which a loan may be granted. This was not what was intended. It is accordingly now proposed, via the amendment to section 10 of the Student Revolving Loan Fund Act, to restore the power of the board to process applications.

Part IV of the Bill amends the Rates, Taxes and Licences (Payments by Cheque) Act, Chap. 74:02. The purpose of this amendment is to bring the penalty under the Act for the offence of offering a dishonoured cheque tendered for payment of rates and taxes, in line with the penalty for the similar offence found in the Negotiable Instrument (Dishonoured Cheques) Act, 1984.

Part V of the Bill amends the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01. By section 5A, the rate of business levy levied on the gross receipts of sales of a business is reduced from the current rate of 0.25 per cent to 0.2 per cent. Since assuming office, this Government has reduced the rate of business levy from 5.5 per cent to 0.25 per cent. This measure further reduces the rate of business levy to 0.2 per cent.

Clause 5(b) amends section 10 of the Act. This honourable House may recall that by the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2000, section 10 of the Income Tax Act was amended with respect to deductions for mortgage interest and tertiary education. That amendment was effective January 1, 1999. In particular, section 10(4) of the Act was amended so that mortgage interest deduction claim with respect to spouses was now limited to the sum of \$18,000 in respect of the resident, rather than in respect of each spouse. Whilst the intention is that each spouse should be able to claim the \$18,000 deduction, the feedback on the amendment in the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill suggests that both spouses can now claim only an aggregate amount of \$18,000.

I trust that this amendment would put to rest any disagreement on the interpretation of section 10(4). Therefore, by clause 5(b) (i), with effect from January 1, 1999, section 10(4) of the Act is amended to allow the \$18,000 deduction to be extended to each spouse rather than to be limited to a claim in respect of the resident.

Clause 5(b)(ii), (iii) and (iv) further amend section 10 to correct a drafting error in the previous amendment to section 10 reflected by the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2000.

By clause 5(c), section 11 of the Income Tax Act is amended to introduce an apprenticeship allowance equal to 200 per cent of the wages actually paid to every apprentice hired by a person carrying on a trade.

Clause 5(j) makes a consequent amendment to the Eighth Schedule to the Act and clause 5(k) introduces a Ninth Schedule to the Act which provides details on the criteria needed to qualify for the allowance. For instance, the period of the apprenticeship will be limited to a maximum of six months per apprentice and applies to apprentices between the ages of 16 and 34 years old.

3.05 p.m.

This amendment is aimed at helping young people to move smoothly from school to the world of work. To do this, we need the co-operation of the private

Finance Bill

Friday, October 27, 2000

[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

sector. This allowance is intended to encourage more companies to hire secondary and post-secondary students between the ages of 16 and 24 for short-term apprenticeship programmes.

The ongoing introduction of new technology, particularly information technology and hi-tech manufacturing, is compelling workers to continually upgrade skills and to acquire a new knowledge; in addition to which, trade liberalization and international competition for local jobs are compelling workers to broaden and enhance their employability skills.

Through the apprenticeship system, young people can develop skills and knowledge through observation and participation at the work site. To promote the benefits of apprenticeship training, a marketing strategy will need to be devised; targeting employers in both the emerging and at the traditional sectors. Parents, students, career guidance counsellors, colleges, and tertiary institutions will also be targeted. It will also be necessary to develop flexible apprenticeship agreements which will enable employers to hire young apprentices without compromising principles, guiding collective agreements with the unions.

Mr. Speaker, it is well to notice at this juncture that two generations ago, before the 1960s, most of our artisans were trained—carpenters, masons, plumbers and electricians—by apprenticeship schemes as we are trying to revive here. Certain kinds of fiscal and employment policies undermined those systems. As a consequence, we are suffering greatly. The ambition to use the expanded secondary system in the 15-year education plan from 1967—1983 did not work. This is why when I make my statements they try to subvert the value of my statements concerning the way the education system is functioning. I am not dealing with myth, Mr. Speaker, I am dealing with matters of fact. If the country does not deal with the facts that I referred to, we are going to suffer greatly. I want to remind the Members opposite that it was not raining when Noah built the Ark. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. We need to look at these matters of fact. In that sense, I hope that the Members opposite are going to support this apprenticeship scheme in terms of what it aims to do.

You will also recall, Mr. Speaker, that over the last five years, the basic personal allowance for resident individuals was increased from \$12,000 to \$20,000. This is all towards simplifying the tax system and, at the same time, reducing taxes. In clause 5(d) the Income Tax Act is further amended to increase this personal allowance from \$20,000 to \$25,000 for persons under the age of 60. Where the resident individual has attained the age of 60, the basic personal allowance will be increased to \$30,000.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with matters of fact, and not conjecture or myth: that the policies and the programmes are to consistently reduce the personal income tax burden on a citizen of this country and to allow his income to be used for his own betterment, development and investment in ways that he or she thinks fit. The Government is less and less in a position to be dictating to the people how much they should save and how much they should spend.

It is important that the whole national community understand that this is a revolutionary change in the concept of fiscal policy and the role of Government.

Clause 5(e) seeks to reduce the rate of tax on interest income from the existing 10 per cent to 5 per cent. This measure applies to savings in \$TT denominated currency or in foreign currency.

By clause 5(f) all individuals earning salaried income only will not be required to file an income tax return. This measure will allow the Board of Inland Revenue to devote its resources to its compliance and enforcement efforts, and will take effect from January 01, 2001. This does not mean that the individual will be relieved from the payment of taxes. Taxes will continue to be payable. However, it will be the responsibility of employers to ensure that all appropriate deductions are made at the source.

Under the existing law, the employer is required to deduct pay as you earn from his employees' income, and remit the same to the Board of Inland Revenue. With the emphasis now being placed on the employer, it is proposed to strengthen the Board of Inland Revenue's compliance machinery. Employers will now be met with the full force of the collections and the compliance machinery of the Inland Revenue Department.

Currently, when an employer fails to deduct the amount of tax required to be deducted from his employees' emoluments, or to remit over to the Board of Inland Revenue the amount required to be deducted, the employer is liable to 50 per cent penalty plus interest at 15 per cent per annum. Clause 5(g)(ii) amends section 99 of the Income Tax Act to increase this penalty to 100 per cent, and the rate of interest charged to 20 per cent.

Clause 5(g)(i) also amends section 99 to clarify the law relating to the deduction of pay as you earn on emoluments. The amendment seeks to make it quite clear that a deduction is required even where an employer chooses to grant benefits in kind to an employee rather than make cash payments. Pay as you earn will be required to be deducted on the value of the benefit in kind. This

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amendment clogs a loophole in the law, which may be used by individuals to avoid payment of taxes properly due to the Board of Inland Revenue.

Clause 5(h) increases the rate of interest payments on all outstanding taxes from its present rate of 15 per cent to 20 per cent. This measure takes effect from May 01, 2001. Mr. Speaker, even as we take steps to reform and simplify the tax system, we must deal with defaulting taxpayers.

In order to purge the system and to provide a one-off opportunity to such individuals to bring their tax status up-to-date quickly, a one-time tax concession is offered to all taxpayers. All taxpayers with liabilities with respect to income tax, corporation tax, business levy, and VAT due and payable on or before December 31, 1999, where the liabilities are still outstanding, will be granted a waiver of penalty and interest on the amounts due and a waiver of penalty for late filing of returns.

However, the principal amounts due must be paid and the outstanding returns filed during the period August 28, 2000 and April 30, 2001. The concession has also been extended to cases where the outstanding principal amounts have already been paid and the returns filed, but the penalties and interests have not yet been paid. The concession provision is to be made law by clause 5(1), which appropriately amends section 103A of the Income Tax Act. I must make it clear that the concession does not extend to penalties and interests already paid.

By Part IX of this Bill, the concession has also been extended to interests and penalties payable in respect of health surcharge. Clauses 5(j) and (k) were dealt with earlier and relate to the apprenticeship allowance provision.

Part VI of the Bill amends the Corporation Tax Act, Chap. 75:02. Clause 6(a) amends section 3A of the Corporation Tax Act to reduce the rate of business levy from 0.25 per cent to 0.2 per cent.

3.15 p.m.

As mentioned earlier, an identical amendment was made to the Income Tax Act by clause 5(a) of the Bill. Clause 6(b) introduces an art and culture allowance by a new section 10G of the Corporation Tax Act. By means of this measure, companies carrying on business in Trinidad and Tobago which make payment in respect of certified artistic works, will be granted an allowance of 150 per cent of the payments made up to a maximum of \$300,000. This allowance is intended to provide an incentive to companies, and it is designed to encourage expenditure for the promotion of local art, local performing groups and artistes.

Mr. Speaker, I may add for the benefit of the House and the national community, that one of the fastest growing areas of commerce is in the provision of artworks, music, paintings, concerts and performances. In Trinidad and Tobago we do have a reservoir of potential that we have not been exploiting, and which will not be fully exploited until this Government brings in this innovative method to bring out the artistic and creative talents for the benefit of the people in the areas that so far have been denied these opportunities.

The deduction is only allowable where the artistic work is done by an individual who is a national of Trinidad and Tobago, and by this I mean a living, existing individual. The individual must also be registered with the ministry with responsibility for culture, or with the Tobago House of Assembly in the case of an individual residing in Tobago, because the THA by Act No. 40 of 1996 has devolved to it matters relating to culture. In the case of the visual arts the allowance may only be claimed in respect of the initial acquisition of the artwork.

Mr. Speaker, clause 6 of the Bill also adds a new section 10(h) to the Corporation Tax Act. You may recall that the Finance Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2000 introduced a new section 10(b) of the Income Tax Act with effect from January 1, 2000. This section provides a deduction for persons granting tertiary education scholarships to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. This provision was inadvertently not applied to the Corporation Tax Act. The result is that this provision does not apply to companies. This result was not intended. The new section 10(h) of the Corporation Tax Act introduced by clause 6 rectifies this.

You would see again, Mr. Speaker, that the thrust of this Government at every opportunity is to try to encourage investment in training and education, which alone explains the wealth of nations. Again, I refer to my oft repeated appeal for us to understand the inefficiencies and the massive and monumental waste that our existing and extant education systems have imposed on this country, and the burden that that is causing many people, in terms of unemployment, and many of the social perversions that we have to endure.

For the benefit of the Member for Diego Martin West, I have never at any time impugned the motives of the late great Dr. Williams with respect to his ambitions to expand secondary education to benefit everybody. What I am just asserting and repeating for the benefit of all of us, is that we must understand that we never had a proper evaluation. We never had an incisive and dispassionate evaluation of the costs and consequences of that system, with the result that some people, minority groups, benefited from it more than the people who it was

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intended to benefit, and we have to rectify that. We must rectify that, because it is costing us too much.

Mr. Speaker, clause 6(c) of the Bill increases the tax credit allowed to small businesses against their taxes payable from 15 per cent to 25 per cent. It is expected that this will go some way towards encouraging the small business sector to play a greater role in creating employment opportunities. By clause 6(d) the tax concessions granted under the Income Tax Act at clause 5(1), that is, waiver of penalties, interest and penalties for late filing of returns, are imported into the Corporation Tax Act via an amendment to section 19 of the Income Tax Act. Clause 7 amends the First Schedule to the Stamp Duty Act, Chap, 76:01.

In order to maintain affordable housing and facilitate the acquisition of housing by first-time home owners, it is proposed by clause 7(a) to increase the existing exemption from stamp duty on residential properties from its present level of \$300,000 to \$350,000, thereby reducing the incidental costs that attend acquiring one's home.

In the same vein, clause 7(b) amends the First Schedule in respect of the exemption of certain mortgage deeds from stamp duty. By Finance Act of 1991 the First Schedule to the Stamp Duty Act was amended so as to exempt from stamp duty certain mortgage deeds where the Board of Inland Revenue is satisfied that the sum secured by the mortgage does not exceed \$270,000. This sum of \$270,000 represents 90 per cent of the amount which is currently exempt from stamp duty, which is to say \$300,000 with respect to the conveyance or transfer on sale of residential property.

Since the ceiling for the exemption on residential property conveyances sale is to be increased to \$350,000, it is proposed that the mortgage transaction exemption ceiling be increased to \$315,000. This sum represents 90 per cent of the sum of \$350,000. Part VIII of the Bill amends the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, Chap. 77:01 by establishing the Green Fund. The purpose of this fund is to provide resources for communities and non-governmental organizations to carry out their own environmental projects.

The environment is all around us. It is the air that we breathe; the food that we eat; the water that sustains life in the sea, rivers and ponds around our country. The environment affects us in sundry and several aspects of our existence, and we also by our actions or inaction affect the environment both positively and negatively. We must all recognize our responsibility to preserve our natural resources and, therefore, corporations, especially, must acknowledge that they play a significant role in contributing to the destruction of the environment.

Often companies dispose of their industrial manufacturing waste inappropriately. This impacts negatively on all of us; from lead poisoning of our children, to the pollution of our air, rivers and streams with industrial waste. The level of pollution of the local environment at the level that is now extant is, indeed, unacceptable. We must balance economic progress with environmental care and social responsibility. This initiative is designed to help us achieve such a balance. We in the Government recognize our responsibility to create a framework for the development of awareness of environmental issues, and to persuade the corporate world to accept its social responsibility for the care of the environment.

Mr. Speaker, I may also add that the manifest degradation of the environment is also another indication of the fact that we have not done as well as we ought to have been doing, in terms of educating our people concerning how to protect the environment. I have lived in parts of the world where from primary school you teach children right on through to university of their roles and responsibilities in terms of environmental protection, and you see it when you travel, when you live in or when you drive through some of these areas.

The fund is to be financed through the introduction of a level of 0.1 per cent on gross sales or receipts of a company carrying on business in Trinidad and Tobago, whether or not such business is exempt from the business levy. This measure is effective from January 1, 2001, and is payable in each quarter ending on March 31, June 30, September 30 and December 31 in each year of income. I would like hon. Members to know that I will be introducing a list of amendments to this part of the Bill at the committee stage.

Mr. Speaker, clause 8 also provides for a Board of Management of the fund and other criteria such as the composition of the board and its parts. Part IV amends the Value Added Tax Act of 1989. Clause 9(a) further amends section 16(5) of the Value Added Tax Act. Section 16(5) initially provided for Value Added Tax on the supply of international travel or international package tours, where the travel or package tour was paid for in Trinidad and Tobago. This section was amended by the Finance Act 1998. The intent at that time was to prevent persons from avoiding the payment of Value Added Tax by paying for the travel or tour outside of Trinidad and Tobago. This section now imposes Value Added Tax where the journey originates in Trinidad and Tobago, or Trinidad and Tobago is the place of issue of the ticket for the travel.

It is now proposed that for the avoidance of doubt the section be amended to make it quite clear that where the travel or package is paid for in Trinidad and

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Tobago, then the supply of the travel or tour is deemed to have been made in Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, subject to VAT.

Clause 9(b) provides for the tax concessions mentioned earlier, that is, the waiver of interest and penalties outstanding in this instance in respect of VAT due and payable as of December 31, 1999. These concessions were discussed in detail earlier. Clause 9(c) amends Schedule 2 of the Value Added Tax Act to zero rate the sporting goods falling under the customs tariff headings described.

I do not think there is anyone in this House—and, indeed, in the wider national community—who would deny, I should say, the electric effect that Ato Boldon has on the nation's youth. I do not know that we should not take the occasion and opportunity to—I would use the word—exploit the benefits that can be gained in focussing the minds of the youths on Mr. Boldon's achievements, and to institute long run programmes, even if it means amending some of the financial rules of the country in order to facilitate that process.

We know that Mr. Boldon, over the years, has excelled as a top-class international athlete. He won two gold medals at the World Youth Championships in 1992; two bronze medals at the 1996 Olympic Games. At the 1997 World Championships in Athens he again achieved eminent success, and at the Sydney Olympic Games this year he gave Trinidad and Tobago the only two Olympic medals that we earned, which is no mean achievement. He has kept the Trinidad and Tobago flag and our national pride flying high, I would say.

While Mr. Boldon has been our most prolific Olympic medallist, he is certainly not the only one. This country has been winning medals since in the 1950s with people like Mc Donald Bailey. In weightlifting, running and other sports I mentioned Mc Donald Bailey. There was also Hasely Crawford who brought home gold in the 100-metre sprint in 1976. I do not know that we need to exclude from that mention our own Tobago Dwight Yorke and Brian Lara. Therefore, we are seeing that Trinidad and Tobago has put its stamp on the world of sport in different sports in very important ways at the highest level of international competition. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I will not be distracted. What they are doing is trying to deny the country from getting the benefit of the fundamental insight that the PNM education programme, far from what they are claiming it to be, has been one of the most baneful influences in this country, subverting its original intention of benefiting the poorer and lower classes. That is what I am saying. The Leader of the Opposition brought down a Michael Mc.D. Alleyne to hoodwink people here. In

his book he said that the whole purpose of the thing, why we never evaluated it, was because it had been the most successful political and vote-catching issue for the PNM. It is written here; I did not write the book.

Every election they go around talking about PNM education and what it did for people; every election. [*Crosstalk*] That is the only issue they can go with. In fact, the objective reality, if you analyze it properly and you understand what I am trying to tell you, that is the issue that this election should really be about.

3.30 p.m.

What we need to do is to make Trinidad and Tobago a first-world country in terms of overcoming all the lacks and regrets of technical training, education in mathematics, physics, information technology, proper teachers in the schools. All these issues we have not dealt with. We are dealing with all kinds of fantasies except those issues.

Mr. Speaker, we must encourage our young people to develop their God-given talents according to this measure and I am referring here to the measures that we are removing VAT from sporting goods. This measure is in recognition of the achievements of our sportsmen and sportswomen and is intended to encourage and assist all the young artistes of our country to achieve excellence in the sporting field by making sporting gear more accessible to them.

Part X of the Bill, as stated earlier, extends the tax concessions described earlier to health surcharge.

Part X1 of the Bill sets out the commencement dates of the various clauses of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the economy is expected to grow by 7 per cent this year; another fact. Many people in this country do not like to deal with facts. If you tell them some truth or some facts that do not make them feel happy, they think that by cussing the person who pointed out that fact will eliminate the fact. The fact is that the economy must grow 7 per cent this year, as indeed it grew last year. That is what facts are all about. Whether you like the fact, or you like the person who says it, does not change anything. This is one of the highest rates of growth in the world. The unemployment rate has dropped from 16 per cent in December 1995 to 12.5 per cent today. That is another fact, Mr. Speaker. We expect inflation to remain below 4 per cent.

Foreign investment has doubled. We have more than doubled our foreign reserves. All these are facts. They are not mischief. I thought I brought with me

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the *Central Bank Report of 1999*, where the Central Bank—not the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—again was talking about the growth in the previous four years and commenting on the prospects for this year. These are facts, not Government propaganda. I have it here *Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Annual Economic Survey of 1999*. They can all read it. The Government did not go into the Central Bank and take the officers there and tell them what to write in this report. They can read it.

We expect inflation to remain below four per cent, which is another fact we need to deal with, because by keeping inflation below four per cent we have been able thereby to assist the poor people, the lower income groups, to avoid unlegislated taxes. One of the most important taxations is the unlegislated taxes that come about as a result of the depreciation in the value of money.

As a matter of fact, many Governments, as part of the economic—the theory where you actually deliberately borrow money from people and then inflate the economy thereby depreciating the value of the debts you have to pay back. It is in the economic literature and in terms of our policy, and in terms of our knowledge of all these matters, we are trying our very best to release the burden of unlegislated taxes on the poorer classes of people.

So this Finance Bill will bring into law such fiscal and other measures which will continue the fiscal policy which has brought us this far and just because they have provoked me I will put it in the *Hansard* again because we need to deal with objective facts, and I do not say these things because I am malicious against anyone. I have said on sundry occasions that one of the great Trinidadians who has lived in this country in the 20th Century was Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, but he was not God and even God sometimes you have to put limitations on what He can do. He cannot cause time to go back. God cannot change what happened yesterday. What happened yesterday is irremediable. We have to understand that. We are dealing here with matters of fact and I am quoting what Dr. Alleyne has said on page 89.

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

He goes on in another section to say:

Dr. Williams, until his death, had always used education, especially at the secondary school level, as the major vote-catcher in election campaigning.

Dr. Williams has died and these people were there, a generation—what you would call in English the epigone. A generation not as exalted, not as intellectually competent, not as competent in terms of their vision and understanding. They keep going on with this thing about secondary education, not understanding that honesty demands that we analyze the system and deal with the matters of fact that Carl Campbell on page 206—207 is referring to, that Paula Mark at the university in a monograph said, that I have and that so many other people have been researching and telling the people that the system has indeed worked perversely because what they did when they expanded the system to include junior secondary was to put a set of primary school teachers there. So there were teachers who were not equal to the task meeting children who, traditionally, their parents had not gone to secondary school so they did not come to school with the culture, and you add to that the maxi-taxi culture and dub and all that, and you created an infernal mix which destroyed scores of thousands of people. These are the objective realities. It is not the maliciousness of Morgan Job that is talking here. These are the evident facts that too many people are aware of and they refuse to deal with them. They still refuse to deal with them as indeed if I quote Campbell. The Central Statistical Office does bulletins and I have one of them somewhere.

Mr. Speaker, this is the Central Statistical Office of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 1985—1992 social indicators: education, health, crime, consumption, productivity, demographics. I read all these things; I have a mania for collecting all these things. I collect them all the time. The people that Carl Campbell is talking about here: Syrians, Chinese, Lebanese; they are less than 1 per cent of the population, but you go to the prestige schools and they occupy benches way out of proportion, that is what he is saying. And this was not the intention of Dr. Eric Williams. There is a whole essay dealing with that, and the question of failure. I quoted the evidence from the Ministry of Education which tells you that over the last generation in terms of the pass rate for mathematics, science and English Language which really prepare a population to deal with the modern world is an abysmal, monumental failure. *[Interruption]* I am on the Bill. I am talking about scholarships and education.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I am dealing with the comments I heard from the other side. This national community must deal with the evidence if they want to help the lower classes, that is all I am appealing for, because if we do not do that, the situation will not be attended to and, as time progresses, it will get increasingly worse. That is what I am talking about. They do not want to deal with it because if they deal with it they would not have anything to say because just like Michael Alleyne says; all they have been talking about is their education and the success of their policy which is indeed the converse of that. The evidence is there for them to read and deal with.

Mr. Speaker, having gone through all that, I just want to re-emphasize the importance of the measures; in particular, those to do with training where we are giving concessions to people who hire people to give them training, this apprenticeship scheme and also the question of removing the VAT on sporting goods so expensive sporting goods would become more available to poor people.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Colm Imbert (Diego Martin East): Mr. Speaker, this debate today and the contribution by the Member for Tobago East is just another example of the intellectual bankruptcy on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at a Bill today to give effect to certain measures outlined in the budget, but if one goes through the various empty promises given by the Government in their various *Medium Term Policy Framework* documents over the years since they came into office, one sees that this Government in terms of fiscal and monetary policy, in terms of savings and investments has achieved absolutely nothing. If you go into their own documents you see all sorts of lofty promises to introduce widespread pension reform in the public sector, to legislate for mutual funds, for employee stock ownership plans and so forth. We have heard these mouthings from the substantive Minister of Finance every year since 1996. These mouthings about dealing with the reform of the pension system, introducing employee stock ownership plans allowing mutual funds, for five years nothing, absolutely nothing, and one would think that in their last dying days at least they would do something important in terms of divestment of state enterprises.

Year after year there is a line item in the budget, a financing item 6 for \$700 million of capital revenue that is supposed to assist our balance of payments, that is supposed to come from the divestment of state enterprises and it does not

happen. It is put in there, and then taken out one year later. The whole divestment situation is an utter mess, and I return to the statement made by the Member for Tobago East this week, and to the statement made by Sen. The Hon. Finbar Gangar in the House of Representatives on the Purchase of Shares in the Trinidad and Tobago Methanol Company on Friday, April 11, 1999. The statement, reads as follows:

“After a careful review of the energy sector in May 1996, the Government...”

That is the UNC Government.

“...took a decision that the effective and optimal commercialization of the natural gas resources of Trinidad and Tobago could be substantially advanced by deepening the involvement of the private sector, a policy guideline which we laid out in our 1995 Manifesto...”

UNC manifesto.

“The decision to sell our shareholding of 69 per cent; that is, our 45 per cent and the 24 per cent held by Ferrostaal/Helm is in keeping with this policy.”

The 69 per cent was divested to a consortium comprised of C.L Financial, Ferrostaal/Helm in 1997.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said this in this Parliament to the country in 1997 that the United National Congress had made a decision to sell shares to C.L. Financial and you see why he could come to this Parliament and talk this level of foolishness is because there is nothing going on in the Ministry of Finance. I made the point, where is the reform of the pension sector? What about portability of pensions that they have come into this House and mouthed about for five years? the portability of pensions that would allow public servants to move from the public sector into the private sector and *vice versa* so you could have synergies and exchange of experience between the public and private sectors?

3.45 p.m.

This is an important and critical requirement, Mr. Speaker, portability of pensions. What have they done about it? Absolutely nothing! They have done nothing with regard to pension reform in this country. Another proposed piece of legislation concerns employee stock ownership plans where employees should be entitled to invest part of their salary in stock options rather than having to wait on a company to make profits before they perhaps get a chance to get stock options. What about the reform of that system? What has this Minister done about that? Absolutely nothing!

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What about the mutual funds legislation that will allow the establishment of mutual funds in Trinidad and Tobago? Yet they talk about being in step with the modern world? Why has he not implemented mutual fund legislation in this House, instead of bringing all kinds of foolishness to change Standing Orders to give effect to nonsense, and the Attorney General talking utter—let me not use too many strong words, Mr. Speaker. The Attorney General knows very well that these committees will be useless, comprised of government members—government members investigating government members. What utter nonsense! Why did he not speak the truth? Why did he not say that in these other countries that he spoke about, these committees are not chaired by government members?

Mr. Speaker: You cannot go back. You know we cannot go back into that debate.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is what you are doing.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am sorry. If that is what I was doing, I apologize. That was never my intention. My intention was to make the point: they are wasting our time with trivia and the Member for Tobago East is always getting himself into trouble. He has no licence for his mouth. He went to a function when he was acting Minister of National Security and he insulted every one of the 5,000-or 4,000-odd police officers by equating them to the level of thieves, [*Desk thumping*] saying there are two caste systems in this country, one for one particular group who become professionals and so forth, and another for some other group that has an option. This is how he put it; the other group, which is one of the major groups in this country, has an option to become thieves or policemen. That is his contribution.

Even the Prime Minister, who is prone to making injudicious statements, who makes injudicious statements with regularity—[*Interruption*] No, I am not getting into that—was constrained to tell the Member for Tobago East, that was not a proper thing to say. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, could you imagine the Prime Minister, who is the master of making wild statements in this country, [*Laughter*] telling the Member for Tobago East, “That was not a very nice thing to say”! I mean, you could imagine how ridiculous the comment was, Mr. Speaker.

When the Member started to feel the heat from the police officers and from the members of the public who were outraged that he has this obsession, this self hate—he is a self hater, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] He hates himself. He has

this obsession and it just bursts out. It is in his subconscious and it just bursts out on occasion. He cannot help it. When he started to get the heat, Mr. Speaker, from the general public and so forth, he had to create a diversion, [*Desk thumping*] taking example from his mentor, the Member for Couva North who, whenever he gets into trouble, creates a scandalous diversion in the country, a red herring. So that the Member for Tobago East, following in his master's footsteps, decided, "Well boy, ah getting pressure here. Leh me create a diversion".

He came into this Parliament and used parliamentary privilege to accuse two corporate citizens of a criminal offence, going on to say that he had investigated the matter and he had determined the validity of the allegations. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker! In an effort to avoid the harassment, the justifiable outrage that was directed at him for his scandalous comparison of policemen to thieves, he came up with this nonsense. A member of the very company is a member of the Cabinet, and you know, one would think—I am sure that this was not sanctioned by the Prime Minister. I am certain of it. It was not sanctioned by the Prime Minister. He was on a frolic of his own, aided and abetted by other miscreants on that side, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Certainly this was not sanctioned by the Prime Minister.

He came into this Parliament—he is Minister of National Security. Take it to the police. If he feels he has all this evidence and so forth, let the police lock up the guilty parties and call in the leadership of the PNM for questioning, if he has the courage to do that, otherwise he should arrest himself for public mischief! [*Desk thumping*] Arrant nonsense! Even the people in Woodford Square are ashamed of him. [*Desk thumping*] You see, when one picks up candidates by the side of the road, that is what one is going to get. Really, if the Government was serious about privilege and so forth, they should bring the Member for Tobago East before the Privileges Committee. [*Desk thumping*] But, to use his own words, that and God face we will not see because they have no interest in integrity or morality in public affairs—misusing the Parliament. If he really felt that he had evidence of some bacchanal, why did he not take it to the police instead of coming here with his foolishness?

Mr. Speaker: You know, I think that the Member is concentrating on invective against the Member rather than—[*Inaudible*] We have to think about what we are doing. It is all well and good, in passing, to refer to something that we have just debated and the like, but you are making a habit of this. You have obviously decided—you know, it seems that you have decided that anything goes, where somebody has replied and you did not get an opportunity to say something,

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you would do it, but we cannot operate like that. I think that you are really pushing it too far and not dealing with the issue at hand. I ask you please, get back to the Bill.

Mr. C. Imbert: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, certainly. As a matter of fact, I have said what I have to say on this matter. The point is that there is nothing going on in that Ministry of Finance, absolutely nothing, just scandal, rumour and bacchanal.

When one looks at the Finance Act that is before this Parliament, there is no common thread in their policy. They have increased the limit for a mortgage on a residential property that would be exempt from stamp duty, and so forth, to \$350,000 but there is no corresponding increase in the allowance for mortgage interest. There is no common thread running through their policy, Mr. Speaker. Everything is “a vaps”. One would think that if they wanted to assist homeowners to purchase properties in the range up to \$350,000 they would have a holistic approach to this thing. But no; on the one hand they are exempting stamp duty on properties up to \$350,000; on the other hand they are restricting the allowance for mortgage interest to \$18,000; which could barely get a \$200,000 conventional mortgage for a young couple in their twenties or their thirties. It makes absolutely no sense! [MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*] The mortgage for a property costing \$350,000 would be about \$3,000 a month or \$36,000 a year, yet they have given an allowance of \$18,000. So the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. Utter chaos, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that Ministry; absolute chaos! Everything they do is populist foolishness.

They have removed the requirement for income tax returns for persons earning up to \$50,000. All they are doing there is avoiding tax refunds, because the majority of persons who file tax returns under the PAYE system get tax refunds. Because maybe there is some administrative error in the filling out of their TD forms and so forth, now where it is no longer a requirement to file tax returns, a number of persons, through ignorance or otherwise, are not going to receive tax refunds. This is what this is all about. There is no magic in this. This is intended to prevent. This is not to free up people from filing tax returns. This is to prevent them from filing tax returns so that they would not become aware that they are eligible for tax refunds. [*Desk thumping*] This is what this is all about—populist nonsense, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister talked about how they have increased pensions and so forth. I simply wish to repeat the statements we have made in this Parliament on their

boast about increasing old age pension by \$100. I simply wish to repeat that the \$100 increase given to poor people pales into insignificance when compared to the \$6,000-a-month salary increase that the Government has given itself, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is no link between \$100 for poor people and \$6,000 for Cabinet Ministers. [*Desk thumping*] It pales into insignificance.

What about this Green Fund? This is the Government that went and desecrated the savannah, them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, “rip up de grass in de savannah, pave it with asphalt, turn the savannah into a slum”; them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are the ones who bypassed the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and all the agencies that have authority for the management of our green spaces, and paved the savannah. For what? So that soldiers would not get their boots muddy for “Independence Day”. There is an Independence Day parade once a year, but what happens for the other 364 days? Imagine that, Mr. Deputy Speaker! They spent over \$4 million paving the savannah for no other reason except their own misguided, ulterior motives; and that is all. They want to convert the savannah into a fete venue. That is all it is. They want to make the savannah a fete venue. They have no understanding of the reason for green spaces.

You know, the Member for Tobago East always likes to pretend that he is a student of literature and so forth. We have already determined that he is innumerate—he cannot add—but he is also illiterate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because if one looks at our history and the development of Port of Spain as a city, one will see that in various locations in Port of Spain there are green spaces like Woodford Square, Lord Harris Square, Adam Smith Square and so forth and, the queen of all of them, the Queen’s Park Savannah, and also the Botanical Gardens. These are all designed to allow the city to breathe. You see, cities create a lot of carbon monoxide and other carbon gases and so forth. The creation of green spaces in any well-planned city is to allow the creation of oxygen gases and so forth to combat the carbon gases. Every little child knows this.

This Government is setting up a pappy-show Green Fund but it would not make the commitment to rip up the asphalt in the savannah and “put back” grass. They want to pave more and more and more. We hear some of their lackeys saying, “What is the big deal? It is 100 acres. So if you pave five acres that is only 5 per cent”. That is how the deterioration of a society begins. Next year it will be another five and another five and another five until it will be a big car park, because that is going to be the legacy of this UNC administration if they continue in office. The Queen’s Park Savannah will be turned into a paved car

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park, a fete venue for dub and other forms of musical entertainment. That is the legacy of the UNC.

Look at what they are doing down on the Foreshore, destroying the mangrove, in clear violation of every authority and law in this country. There has been no approval from Town and Country Planning and no approval from the environmental people and so forth. Nothing. It is a case of “Just do what you want”. Dredge the harbour and pelt it on the mangrove and kill the mangrove. That is their solution.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government is under pressure from environmentalists—the same thing with the Toco Port. The Government is going and lying on respected scientists in this country and saying that there is no coral in the Toco area or that the scientists said that there were corals when there were none and so on—all with their obscene desire to destroy the ecosystems and the environment in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, well, one thing we saw in Toco, was people power. That is what we saw, people power. [*Desk thumping*] We actually saw an oppressive Government halted by the protest of little people in this country. [*Desk thumping*] We actually saw that and this is the Government that wants to come with a Green Fund. When one looks at the nonsense—the purpose of this fund is to give Non Governmental Organizations which the Government will decide are suitable. The Government will choose whichever Non Governmental Organizations it wants to give this Green Fund to—give it to selected Non Governmental Organizations and—

Mr. Sudama: We will give it to Elias.

Mr. C. Imbert:—funds to reforest and replant and so on. What utter nonsense! This Green Fund is a tax. Instead of dealing with the thing in a holistic manner that, those who damage the environment must be made to pay—that is what this is all about. Mr. Deputy Speaker, before the Government comes up with some kind of comprehensive system where, if an oil company pollutes the waters and there is a fish kill or something like that, or if there is a discharge of waste in some area that causes a threat to the environment and a company is found guilty of doing this, the Government could deal with it and fine these people and put that money into a fund to clean up the environment and so on. I mean, this is utter nonsense!

The Government comes here and says that there will be no new taxes. So the Government reduces business levy from 0.25 per cent to 0.2 per cent and then adds a Green Fund of 0.1 per cent, so the net effect is an increase from 0.25 to 0.3 per cent and the Government feels people are stupid. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government will go down in history as being the most environmentally insensitive Government in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Everything the Government does—no regard for the environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is a country that has large volumes of surface water but the Government solution to water shortages in Trinidad and Tobago is a desalination plant that will dump concentrated brine into the already disturbed Gulf of Paria. The Gulf of Paria is already in a delicate balance. There are problems with the ecosystem in the Gulf of Paria because of discharge from the various industries, overfishing and so on and the Government's solution to the delicate and fragile situation with the Gulf of Paria is to dump concentrated brine into the Gulf of Paria. That is their solution and the Government gets some quack to come and say there will be no problem; this will not result in any damage to the environment; no marine life would be affected and no flora and fauna would be affected—everything is fine. That is the legacy of this Government, only a serious of mouthedness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not blame the Member for Princes Town. The Member just went to that Ministry and his two hands are behind his back because they are throwing him out anyhow. So I do not expect him to be able to do anything. I have serious difficulty with the way this Government has conducted its business. There are fundamental fiscal and monetary policy issues that have only been spoken about for the last five years—lip service has been paid to these issues by the present administration but absolutely nothing has been done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what about reform of the venture capital system? If the Government had any interest in entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial development in Trinidad and Tobago the Government would have reformed the venture capital system, but no. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a Minister of Finance, Planning and Development who is on holiday, clearly. The Minister is gone again. We have a Minister of Finance, Planning and Development who is on a permanent holiday.

Mr. Valley: He is like Dhanraj.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Member is like Dhanraj. As a matter of fact, I am told that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has indicated that he is not coming back. [*Laughter*] When one looks at what has occurred in terms of development of the

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financial sector over the last five years, precious little has been done—just talk, talk, talk—and within the last six months, absolute zero.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what about the demonopolization of the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited? The Government came in this House and talked about it two or three years ago that they were going to allow foreign companies to come in and compete with the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited but they must go through this big gas station upgrade first. The gas station upgrade turns out to be an absolute scandal where there is a public squabble between the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Chairman of the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited going on for almost one year now. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Chairman of National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited have been fighting for almost one year and not a single Texaco or Esso or British Petroleum or Shell or Chevron or any of these companies—not one gas station—has been constructed or put into operation. There has been no demonopolization of the gasoline sector—it is just talk, talk, and talk and fix up their partners and their friends. That is how this Government operates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why—in the face of the jokes and so on that we get from the Member for Couva North—we are asking him to stop prolonging the agony of the population. The population is getting tired. I really do not know what benefit the Prime Minister feels he is going to gain by extending the election into December or January or February. I really do not know what benefit he expects to gain, because everything is being done harum-scarum, crazy, crazy, crazy and this Government is trying to undermine the integrity of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. They are trying to undermine them.

We heard of the situation with respect to the illegal transfer of votes and, just today, we in the PNM got a notice at 12 o'clock today saying that this afternoon, a couple hours later, all PNM constituencies must send their polling agents for training—today for today. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not how you run a democracy. There is some UNC activist who is trying to make the Elections and Boundaries Commission look bad. That is what is going on here! I mean, imagine sending out a notice at 12 o'clock, summoning political parties to send their polling agents for training at 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock or something like that on a Friday. It does not make any sense! I am charging the work of some UNC activists for that—trying to create confusion in this country. That is what is going on. *[Interruption]* It is not!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we are in this unprecedented Sixth Session of Parliament, and the Government having been stopped in its dirty tracks with its illegal plan to steal the election by the transfer of illegal votes to the marginal seats, every day we see more and more evidence of their desperation.

4.10 p.m.

We on this side have a tremendous difficulty in coming to this Parliament and involving ourselves in these debates about legislation that even the Government has admitted is flawed and ineffective. Even the Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has admitted that all of this badly drafted legislation they are rushing through Parliament is flawed and ineffective. They are coming back with amendments time after time.

Here we have something on the table today, I think it is the Freedom of Information Bill. We heard the Attorney General gallerying about this Bill which the entire media knows is *functus*. Ask any Member of the media if he could get any information out of that Government with that freedom of information legislation. They cannot. The Bill is *functus*! The number of restrictions, number of qualifications, the number of blockages and stone walls that have been put in the way of accessing information—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are you anticipating what the—continue.

Mr. Imbert: I am not anticipating anything at all, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'll clarify the point I am making. They are fumbling and bumbling their way through the Parliament with badly drafted legislation. They bring their nonsense here, we tell them it is rubbish, they use their majority to railroad it through and then a year later they come with their tails between their legs, cap in hand with amendments to the very legislation.

Within less than a year, they have to come and amend the legislation because they realize it is rubbish; just like the Computer Misuse Bill; rubbish! Offences Against the Person Bill, rubbish! And their answer is, we will amend and correct the legislation in the next session. What are they passing it for? What is the point? If they are going to be in Government in the next session, save it for the next session!

We have to really wonder what is going on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if it is some devious plot on the part of the UNC to keep us Members of Parliament in the House busy so that we cannot go out and meet the people, well they have another thing coming! We will turn night into day. They will have to keep us here 24

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hours, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] We are not going to allow them to stop us from going to ask people to exercise their franchise. They could have Parliament every day, Monday to Friday, they are not going to stop us from going outside there to campaign for this election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have tremendous difficulty with the way in which this Government has dealt with the financial sector over the last five years—tremendous difficulty! [*Interruption*] I will sit if the Prime Minister will call elections. I will willingly take my seat if the Prime Minister will get up and call elections. If he is not going to do that, I will exercise my right to speak.

Let me come back to the divestment of state enterprises. Where is this NEL? Is it the “death NEL” of the UNC? Where is the National Enterprise Limited where the shares of TSTT, National Flour Mills and so forth were supposedly the brain child of this administration for the last five years. Where is NEL? All this talk about people's participation in the economy—where are the instruments to allow people's participation in the economy?

I come back to the employee stock ownership plan legislation. Where is it? The mutual fund legislation, where is it? Where is the National Enterprise Limited, the opportunities for little people in this country to get involved in, so they say, ownership of state enterprises? Where is it? The answer is nowhere, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because nothing they do is serious.

It is like the proposed sale of Caroni (1975) Limited rum. Instead of putting the company out on the open market and selling it as a going concern so that they could get some capital receipts and capital revenue to help our balance of payments, the Minister of Agriculture comes into this Parliament and is very careless with the truth. I had the same Cabinet Note he had, and in that Cabinet note it makes a categorical statement that the valuation of rum is on a liquidation fire sale. It is if the company is going out of business. It would take this smart Government to go to a customer of Caroni (1975) Limited, a company that buys bulk rum from Caroni (1975) Limited, and ask that company to value the rum. What do they expect them to do? What do they expect a bulk purchaser of rum from Caroni (1975) Limited to do?

We have to believe that some sort of upset price was a vehicle. It is not the PNM that is the only organization that is opposed to that nonsense. It is interesting. I saw Boysie Moore Jones, the successor of the Member for Couva North, getting on about this Caroni (1975) Limited rum sale. I saw all the managers and the staff in Caroni (1975) Limited getting on about the rum sale.

It is so convenient. They say Boysie Moore Jones is a PNM, all the staff and employees at Caroni (1975) Limited are PNM. That is their answer when their fraudulence is exposed. The valuation put on the distillery as a going concern is \$272 million, and let the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources say that is not so! The valuation is \$272 million as a going concern. He cannot answer. He has a Cabinet note and he is talking about misleading the House? He has a Cabinet note in front of him that says the value of the rum distillery is \$272 million, but he will come in this House and read some contrived report to say that the value of the rum is \$20 million. Utter nonsense!

Even if they sell the rum as pure alcohol without diluting it, it is worth more than that. The good thing about this is that that transaction is not going to go through. That transaction is not going to go through because the people in Caroni (1975) Limited, the sugar union, the employees and the staff are opposed to it. As I said, it is not just the PNM, and they cannot realistically say that the All Trinidad General and Sugar Workers Union is a set of PNM. They could say that on the platform and nobody is going to take them seriously. That is like the pipe talk. That is "picong". I would equate that categorization to pipe! Put it down at that level.

When they get resistance from their own people, that is when they better watch out. I know why the Prime Minister would not call an election. He knows that he is slipping in the polls. It is gaffe after gaffe, error after error, mistake after mistake, day by day. Imagine the Prime Minister saying that he gave information to the police on one of his Cabinet Ministers three month ago. He had the information for over a year, he gave it to the police three months ago, and left him in the Cabinet, Mr. Deputy Speaker!

He did not reshuffle him, park him up and make him Minister without portfolio or put him in the office of the Prime Minister. He left him there. The excuse is that he wanted the police to have a quiet environment to complete their investigations, and when they had completed their investigations, it is then he took action.

Who is he trying to fool, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has been a raging inferno burning away in the UNC Cabinet for the last five years and they just did not know what to do with him. They did not know how to "out the fire." That was the problem. They have to put on a pretence, put on a face and say "No, nothing is wrong with him, my best Minister. How dare they criticize my best performing Minister?", when they knew very well that there are problems.

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This is why none of the matters I have spoken to, the whole question of foreign investment in this country, of upgrading our foreign investment rubric, the environment for foreign investment; what have they done about that? Have they brought meaningful reforms for the foreign investment legislation into this Parliament in the five years they have been here? No, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have not. They have not dealt with that at all.

I was listening on the radio this morning and some fellow called in from Canada complaining about how there was some article in the *Toronto Star* about how there is intolerance in Trinidad and Tobago and he was so vexed. I just listened and then he went through a long discourse on how he does not understand why these articles appear.

Then he made a startling observation! He said that this kind of thing should not appear in the press, because the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is on such a sound footing that it does not matter if the PNM comes into office on the next occasion. Then he went on, to my amazement, to say that all the UNC did was implement the plans and programmes that were put in place by the PNM. This is what I had to hear. This was his evidence of why we have such a strong economy. Because the PNM put systems and programmes in place and the UNC implemented them.

I have to disagree with the caller. That is not so at all. There were many programmes and policies that the PNM put in place that the UNC has not implemented. They have derailed them, destroyed them, bungled them and mismanaged them. For example, the reconstruction of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from Chaguanas to San Fernando, they have completely bungled that programme. The National Library, they bungled that. The National Drainage Improvement Programme, they have completely demolished that.

There are so many programmes. The secondary school programme; they mashed up that. The airport is a whole fiasco, the ferry service, the modernization plans for the Port Authority, they completely destroyed that. I am afraid I do not agree with the caller. I know when the PNM goes back into power that although it is going to take a little while to repair the damage that was done, we will be able to. We have the capability; we have the track record; and we have demonstrated when we took over this country in 1991, we did not have a very easy situation at all.

We put this country on a growth path. It was the People's National Movement that, after years of negative growth in this economy, turned this economy around and had two successive years of positive growth.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members for extending my time.

Mr. Speaker, you see the mouthing of the Members on the other side. We understand this Carville fellow, after he almost caused Gore to lose the election in the United States, has hightailed it out of the United States of America and has come back to deal decisively with the UNC. I understand his advice to the UNC is, create as much confusion as you can in the country; create as much scandal and distraction as you can and anything the Leader of the Opposition says, attack him. The people in this country are smarter than that.

The Prime Minister was so upset at the invitation that the political leader received, to speak to the American Chamber of Commerce, that he had to come out and make wild statements, but people know the PNM. They know what we were able to achieve in this country between December 1991 and November 1995. They know that we stabilized the economy. They know that we created a current account surplus. They know that the reason this country has not crashed under this incompetent Government is because of the framework that was put in place by the PNM administration.

No amount of “ol’ talk” from the Member for Couva North is going to reverse the collective memories of people in this country about the management capability of the People’s National Movement—no amount of “ol’ talk”. [*Desk thumping*] They have done nothing. It is the PNM that restructured the state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago. Look at any one of them. Look at WASA; look at T&TEC; look at the port. It is the PNM that restructured those enterprises and put them on a path to profitability. They did not do it. As a matter of fact, they have completely mismanaged and bungled the financial sector in this country.

They could say what they want, their taxation plan makes no sense. I repeat that we in the PNM have a proud record of financial management of this country

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and we are not going to be involved in any “vaps”, mishmash, hodgepodge of rates and taxes like this Government.

We in the PNM, unlike them, are committed to reduction of personal income taxes. We have already said so. We have already said one of our first priorities, when we get into Government, is to have a 5 per cent reduction in the rate of income tax in this country in the first instance and we are committed to that. They could say what they want, but when you look at the \$1.3 billion that has been squandered on the airport; the \$100 million on Miss Universe; the other hundreds of millions of dollars that have been squandered on all these get-rich-quick schemes, one sees that to cut out the squandermania, to quote the Member for Couva North, to balance the economy, just cut out corruption. I remember him saying that several years ago. To balance the budget, just cease corrupt practices. As sure as night follows day, when the population removes the UNC from office, they will also cut out corruption automatically, [*Desk thumping*] instantaneously and the budget will balance “one time”.

That is why we in the PNM can say with conviction that we are going to reduce taxation in this country. It is no idle boast of the UNC that says no new taxes and then they impose a green fund levy, which is just a tax in another form; which says no new taxes and then make owners of private motor cars pay nearly \$200 to have their private cars inspected and pay thousands of dollars to have their private cars upgraded and so forth. They say that is not a tax.

We are not like them. We are committed to reform of the taxation system, of the pension system and we will put in place all the things that the UNC has been prattling about for the last five years: employee stock ownership, mutual funds and pension portability in the public sector.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, before you take the tea adjournment, there was an item on the agenda—because I propose to move the Adjournment of the House—“Introduction of Bills”. Can we deal with that very quickly and then I move the Adjournment?

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (AMDT.) BILL

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

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at the next sitting of the House.
[*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Question put and agreed to.

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ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now stand adjourned to Monday, October 30, 2000 at 1.30 p.m. when we will complete this matter and also do the Freedom of Information (Amdt.) Bill, 2000.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, before you move it, I wonder whether the hon. Attorney General could inform us on this side so that we could plan our way, how many days we would be sitting next week, given that he has adjourned to Monday rather than the normal Friday.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I will do that on Monday.

Dr. Rowley: You are making the Parliament a joke.

Mr. Speaker: Would you gentlemen care to get together behind the Chair?

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I should have said, before we took the Adjournment, there was the question of a matter to be raised. I understand that both sides have agreed that it be deferred.

Assent indicated.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.33 p.m.