

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, January 22, 2001*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT  
PRESENTATION**

**The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the First Report (2001 Session) of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates, 1999/2000.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER  
(LEAVE)****Delapidated Roads (La Brea)**

**Mr. Hedwige Breaux (La Brea):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise under the provisions of Standing Order 12(1) and (2) a definite matter of urgent public importance, to wit, the delapidated state of certain roads in the La Brea constituency, namely the Siparia/ Erin Road, Pond Road, Aripéro, Sobo Road and the entire network of roads within the village of La Brea.

The matter is definite because it refers to a specific and identifiable omission which has been left unattended by the UNC Government for its entire five-year term.

The matter is urgent because the condition of these roads makes it impossible for my constituents and other persons using the said roads to go about their business, for example, transport construction and other materials; bring produce from gardens. Additionally, the pools of water which exist are breeding places for mosquitoes and therefore constitute a health hazard.

The matter is of public importance because hundreds of thousands of the travelling public are affected as demonstrated by the several petitions and letters which I have received from persons residing or doing business in those areas. Moreover, the roads are arteries serving persons and corporations doing business with Petrotrin and Atlantic LNG and, therefore, their continued disrepair would have an adverse effect on the nation's revenues.

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**Mr. Speaker:** Hon Member, although I agree that the matter is important, it does not qualify under Standing Order 12(1).

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

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1999/2000 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

*Motion made,* That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Sen. The Hon. G. Yetming*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT  
ADOPTION**

**The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Be it resolved* that this House adopt the First Report (2001 Session) of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates, 1999/2000.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Tuesday, January 16, 2001 and confirmed the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee of Wednesday, September 20, 2000, Item No. 1 on the Agenda, and agreed to a number of proposals relating to the 1999/2000 accounts.

These proposals included Item 2 of the Agenda—Head 18: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development. The Finance Committee approved:

- (a) write-off of an amount outstanding on a loan to the Trinidad Amateur Basketball Association—\$6,452.85;
- (b) write-off of an amount outstanding in respect of a loan to the South East Port of Spain Community Council—\$1,200.58;
- (c) write-off of amounts outstanding in respect of loans given to various Co-operatives—\$5,873,825.96;
- (d) write-off of amount outstanding in respect of loan given to St. Anthony's College—\$938,125.81;
- (e) The variation of the 1999/2000 appropriation in the sum of \$3,666,993 under three heads of expenditure.

The Finance Committee also noted:

- (f) transfer of funds between sub-heads under the same Heads of Expenditure in the sum of \$64,645,543.

Item No. 3 of the Agenda—Head 25: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources: The Finance Committee approved the write-off of the accrued interest on two loans to the Trinidad Islandwide Cane Farmers' Association Incorporated.

Item No. 4 of the Agenda—Head 45: Ministry of Social and Community Development: The Finance Committee also approved the write-off of losses of Government property totalling \$4,896.80.

Before I continue I would like to say that during the Finance Committee, various issues were raised by Members. Some of the issues raised were addressed at the meeting and I wish to report that the promised responses to the others have been circulated to Members.

I now refer to Item 2 of the Agenda. A transfer of \$3,666,998 was made as follows from Head 18: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development; Sub-head 1—Personnel Expenditure; Item 1—General Administration; Sub-item 12—Settlement of Arrears to Public Officers: \$3,666,998 to Head 26: Ministry of Education; Sub-head 2—Goods and Services; Item 1—General Administration; Subitem 8—Rent Accommodation, \$259,792; Sub-head 4—Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 6—Education and institutions; Subitem 20—Fees to students at Private Secondary Schools, \$931,063. Those two items total \$1,190,855. And to Head 8: Elections and Boundaries Commission, Sub-head 2—Goods and Services; Item 1—General Administration, Sub-item Expenses, \$2,476,143, for a total of \$3,666,998.

These transfers were required under the Ministry of Education to implement the Government's policy of ensuring that every child receives a school place at secondary school. It was necessary, therefore, to purchase a number of places in private secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago for the school term which started in September 2000. Funds were also required for the rental of accommodation for the Port of Spain model school.

#### **1.40 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the other area of expenditure was to provide funds for the Elections and Boundaries Commission to enable the Commission to implement exercises with respect to the local government by-election held in the municipal electoral district of Rio Claro North and the recently held parliamentary general

election. Savings to meet these costs were available under Head 18: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development, Sub-Item 12, Settlement of Arrears to Public Officers, since the number of officers who accessed the facility was lower than was anticipated.

Mr. Speaker, the transfer of funds between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure, Members are asked to note that with effect from August 1, 1988 Cabinet delegated its authority to approve transfers between subheads under the same head to the Minister of Finance working on the advice of the Budget Division of the Ministry of Finance. Consequently, the transfer of funds in the sum of \$64,645, 543 between subheads under the same Head of Expenditure was approved by the Minister.

These transfers were approved on requests made by the respective ministers as circumstances in ministries and departments changed and priorities were reordered. A statement showing the approved transfers is attached as Appendix 1 and explanations for some of the more significant transfers are attached at Appendix 2 of the Agenda. These were provided to the Members of this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Item 3 of the Agenda under Head 25: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the Finance Committee approved the write-off of accrued interest on two loans to the Trinidad Islandwide Cane Farmers Association Incorporated in the sum of \$261,000. The principal amounts were repaid in July of 2000.

Mr. Speaker, finally, under Item 4 of the Agenda, the Finance Committee also approved the write-off of losses of Government property, Head 45: Ministry of Social and Community Development in the sum of \$4,896.80.

In conclusion, I wish to state that the variations in the allocation of Heads of Expenditure were not increased in the 1999/2000 appropriation which was already approved by Parliament.

I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Colm Imbert** (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, it is noted hon. Members that we have a guest in our House today in the persona of the Minister of Finance. While I consider his attire to be extremely elegant, from a casual point of view, I would ask that we formalize the rules regarding attire in this House so that we will all understand what we are supposed to wear, otherwise I may come in a short pants on the next occasion. [*Interruption*]

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

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Having said that, I wish to thank the Minister for the responses he has given to the questions and I would ask the Minister whether on the next occasion we could get some of these responses a little earlier. While the Minister was speaking, I found myself having to go through some of the responses and determine some very strange statements made by the Minister in his responses.

For example, and I suspect that other Members would deal with this in more detail, regarding the selection of BH Rose building on London and Sackville Streets, for the model school. [*Interruption*] The “Kamla Sec” you call it? The post primary school, by another name. I notice that the availability of the BH Rose building was drawn to the attention of the Minister of Education. I wonder how this occurred. Did it occur in a fete? Did it occur in a lime? Did it occur in a meeting of party activists, or, did it occur during a pipe laying exercise? Perhaps we can get some information on the manner in which the BH Rose building was drawn to the attention of the Minister of Education.

Mr. Speaker, we know about advertisements. We know about putting something in the newspapers stating that you are advertising for accommodation and then you get responses; there is an evaluation where you determine the best tender and then you make a choice. It appears that this Government is rewriting all the rules. [*Interruption*] It appears that this Government is rewriting all the rules and I really think we need to talk about it. We need to let people know that the rent for this building is \$150,000 per month. Therefore, we really need to know what went on. Was this given to a party activist? A friend? Or, was it just a happy coincidence? Was the Minister just walking along London Street, saw that building and decided, “Ah, that looks like a good place to put a post primary centre and I will call it a model school”? We need some more information on that.

I have noticed that the Minister has also admitted—I do not ascribe any blame to the new Minister of Finance; he has come in here with a clean slate, for now, in terms of his governmental conduct and not his conduct about the election; we may have a lot to say about that at another time in another debate—that instead of a surplus that his predecessor boasted about in this House just about five months—his predecessor boasted about the prudent and fiscal discipline of the Government and the fact that they were managing the economy effectively and so on; they were going to achieve a surplus for yet another year when the Central Bank has been consistently reporting that all these surpluses are the product of a very fertile imagination—there was no surplus and there was a deficit of \$272 million.

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The Government squandered \$272 million in the last fiscal year. They could not balance the books. They lied to the population. This is why we have this burgeoning debt crisis where our debt is almost \$40 billion. That is the public debt. It has gone from somewhere around \$18 billion when the PNM demitted office to now \$40 billion in five years. All because of these unplanned deficits. Maybe they are planned. Maybe they just come here and tell untruths. They always plan to have deficits.

**1.50 p.m.**

I also noticed—this Government came into office in November 1995; it is now January 2001—the reasons given for not renovating the Red House. They can build an airport for \$1.4 billion; they can renovate Whitehall for \$35 million; put chandelier in the office of the Member for Couva North; put marble tiles on his floor, but they cannot fix the roof in the Red House. There are still tarpaulins on the roof. It leaks every time it rains.

However, they took five years and they are now saying that before works related to phase one of the Red House restoration project could commence, it was necessary to evacuate the ground floor so that the Parliament staff could be relocated.

It took five years to relocate staff from one little building? They are now saying that a contract has been awarded in the sum of \$1.9 million to meet relocation costs and work on the project has recently commenced. They took 62 months to award a contract to relocate furniture and files so that this magnificent building could be restored to its proper condition after the damage that was done during the 1990 disturbance and during other problems that occurred with this building. For five years they did absolutely nothing.

I noticed that we have some information on the Elections and Boundaries Commission. I guess other speakers will talk about that at another time and on another motion.

If we go to Head 15—Tobago House of Assembly, I do not accept the information given by the Minister. The Minister claims that the head of the European delegation has advised that European Commission funds will not be used for the construction of the L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road. The Government, for five years, has refused to build this road, which is a coastal road. It is my understanding that, at present, when someone goes into Charlotteville, in order to get to the other side, to Castara, he cannot go around the coast, he has to come back out of Charlotteville, probably go down to Bloody Bay or Roxborough and then come across. The whole purpose of this road is to allow coastal transportation around Tobago.

For five years this Government refused to do that road and is now blaming the European Commission, claiming that the European Commission said that their funds will not be used for the construction of the road.

However, the Member for St. Joseph has spent nearly \$900 million in the last four months, paving and re-paving roads; paving roads that were paved two and six months ago. The cost of the L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road is less than \$30 million, as far as I know. They are at war with the people of the Tobago House of Assembly so the people of Tobago must suffer. I do not accept this explanation. It is typical of the nonsense that we hear from the other side.

Look at Head 22. I requested the reason for the delay in the recruitment of personnel for the Maximum Security Prison. For five years they have had that prison and cannot hire personnel. They inflated the cost by almost \$100 million during their tenure and for five years they cannot hire one prison officer.

Look at the reason. They have stated that the examination for Prison Officer I was held on March 7, 1998 and the results were received in March 2000. That is efficiency; that is performance; that beats "ole" talk. There is an examination in March 1998 and results coming from the "Minister of Maladministration" in March 2000. It took two years to get the results.

In the meantime problems in our prison; dangerous overcrowding; they cannot commission the Maximum Security Prison. That is performance that beats "ole" talk.

I notice some other information given on farmers who got relief. As I said, this response came so late that I have not had the opportunity to go through this in any great detail to determine whether there has been some favouritism among the grants given.

Looking at what has taken place in the year 2000, I notice they gave money to people in Clarke/Rochard, which is in one of the southern constituencies. They gave money to people in Morne Diablo, in Penal, Pluck Road—I remember that, that is in Oropouche—San Francique, Barrackpore, Debe, Moruga, Caroni, Aranguez North and South, Barataria, Arouca, Bamboo, Macoya.

They gave out \$2.3 million in the year 2000, of which a considerable sum was spent in certain marginal constituencies. Maybe other speakers will deal with that. It is clear to me, on the face of it, that all of these farm grants are highly irregular. We asked for the reasons. The Minister did not give the reasons. He just said that rain fell and the crops were damaged. We will deal with that at another time.

With regard to overseas travel of the Minister of Finance—the Minister of Trade—I noticed that on one little trip, he spent \$85,000. We asked them which Minister and they reported that the Member for St. Ann’s East requested a breakdown of the amount expended to facilitate the attendance of the Minister, the Permanent Secretary and officers of the Ministry at essential overseas meetings and conferences. I guess it is the Minister of Finance.

The money spent was: \$85,000 for the Minister; \$69,000 for the Permanent Secretary and \$341,000 for his officers. Good for them. The most travelled Government in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I also noticed that the Assistant Director of Information was part of the official delegation accompanying the Prime Minister to South Africa in November 1999. One man’s airfare cost \$29,000; hotel cost \$21,000; meals, \$5,000; transport, \$12,000. The man spent \$115,974 on one trip—one man.

I see the former Minister of Foreign Affairs smiling. One man went to South Africa with the Prime Minister in November 1999 and it cost \$115,000. Squandermania! Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to say.

This Minister would not be able to tell us anything. He was not around so he has a perfect excuse. It was not him. We cannot blame him. That is what I mean when I say that he has come into this House with a clean slate, but his slate starts from today. From now on, we will be looking very carefully at this Minister, examining him very closely to see if he engages in the vulgarity of the previous incumbent in that office, the contempt that the previous Minister of Finance had for this Parliament; his utter disdain for public accountability, for the public purse, for answering to the people for the massive squandermania, graft and corruption that have taken place over the last five years. I therefore wish to put the Minister on notice that, notwithstanding his elegantly casual attire, we will be watching him very, very closely [*Desk thumping*] and we do not expect that he would follow in the footsteps of his infamous predecessor. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Patrick Manning** (*San Fernando East*): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I did not at all intend to intervene in this debate. I assure you that I propose to deal with the substantive issues. We have had a caucus and we have identified persons on our side who will deal with the matters that have arisen out of the meeting of the Finance Committee and out of the Finance Committee’s Report to this honourable House.



I rise to just take up where my colleague from Diego Martin East left off and to object in the strongest possible terms to the attire of the hon. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] It is all right for those on the other side to snigger and to laugh, you see, because, as far as they are concerned, there are no standards by which any institution in this country [*Desk thumping*] is regulated. That is their view. [*Desk thumping*] I want to advise the hon. Minister of Finance that he is a guest of the Members of this honourable House [*Desk thumping*] and that we will accept him in this House, Mr. Speaker, only if he is prepared to conform to the acceptable standards of dress to which we normally subscribe in the Lower House, the House of Representatives.

What is worse, Mr. Speaker, if he were in the bank I am sure he would not do that. He would think nothing of wearing a jacket and a tie, which is the least we—well we have a jacket, because we also have the Deputy—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Renegade.

**Mr. P. Manning:**—but he is a renegade anyway. He would think nothing of wearing a jacket, Mr. Speaker, in the bank, but he believes that he could come to the Parliament and that he can treat the Parliament as he wishes merely because he feels that nobody could do him anything.

Mr. Speaker, I am making the assumption that you did not see him because I refuse to accept that you would have seen him and would have said nothing about it. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, let them talk. They all could talk as much as they want. They have subverted the airport in this country. They are now subverting the Constitution. [*Desk thumping*] They are in Tobago now trying to subvert the House of Assembly and the established arrangements between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Tobagonians by way of the House of Assembly. Now they want to subvert the Lower House and we are expected to sit here and accept that. All I am saying is that we take note of it on this occasion and I leave it to the good graces of the Speaker to take the appropriate action.

I want the hon. Minister of Finance and all Members on the other side to understand that, if they do not know and if they do not recognize that there must be standards in the conduct of public affairs, the PNM recognizes that, ladies and gentlemen. [*Desk thumping*] We are a young democracy; we know that. We have not been independent for too long and we know that we are going through a period and a phase where the traditions of our society are being established. Therefore, as lightly as the Minister of Finance may wish to take it, we consider it a very serious matter because we would only hope that what the hon. Minister of

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Finance has done today and, incidentally, on the last occasion, is not seen as the tradition by which we conduct the business of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. He should go to the House of Lords or the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, and he would understand what proper tradition is. I rest my case. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism (Hon. Mervyn Assam):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to join in the debate on the Motion: Be it resolved that this House adopt the first report of the 2001 session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the public revenue which were not included in the annual estimates 1999/2000.

Before I begin my contribution, Mr. Speaker, permit me, although belatedly, to express my sincere wish for all Members of this House for a very successful, productive and prosperous 2001. [*Desk thumping*] I sincerely hope that this new session of Parliament will usher in a new level of seriousness, responsibility and civility and that we will dedicate our efforts in this House to serving the nation's interest [*Desk thumping*] and, by extension, all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is my intention and the intention of this side to ensure that the national objectives articulated in the *Manifesto 2000* of the United National Congress do, in fact, materialize. They are:

- “• Sustainable Growth.
- An intelligent Nation.
- More and better jobs.
- A faster pace of development.
- A better quality of life for all of our citizens.
- High quality health care for our citizens.
- Greater equity in our society.
- Peace, security and harmony.
- A competitive economy.”

It is our intention to achieve these very noble objectives so that Trinidad and Tobago could become an intelligent nation, a developed country, a competitive economy and a society of compassion for which this Government of the United

National Congress has a mandate both in terms of the plurality of votes and the majority of seats that we just won at the recently concluded December 11, 2000 general election. Make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker, this is a legitimate Government. [*Desk thumping*] Those who wish to contest the legitimacy of this Government should take a second look at what they are doing as there would be serious consequences that they will have to bear because as you would know, Mr. Speaker, in the past they have not been able to meet their liabilities after the courts ruled against them.

We came to the House this afternoon to discuss some very serious matters with respect to the accounts of this country for the period 1999/2000 and, as you know, Mr. Speaker, last week we held a Finance Committee meeting where the Minister of Finance presented what was required so that he could come today and formally move the Motion and have the Bill passed. Several questions were asked during the course of that Finance Committee meeting and today we are very proud that someone who has just entered into Government and who has just gotten his feet wet could, only in a matter of days, present to this honourable House such a comprehensive document giving some of the most comprehensive answers to some of the most innocuous questions. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when people rise in this House—and I think, as I advocated in the last session, we should revise the Standing Orders, because people should not rise in this House and be so uninformed and use the occasion of Parliament to gallery to the press or to the public gallery rather than stick to the business on the Order Paper. I thought that we had come to a new session of Parliament with a new resolve. I thought that the election had been concluded. I did not realize that we were still campaigning and it is very clear to me that certain Members opposite want to perpetuate the attitude adopted in the last session.

I want to warn them that the very reason they lost the last election is simply because of their behaviour and the attitude that they are displaying once more today. [*Desk thumping*] I thought that they would have learnt their lesson, although some of them do not believe that they have lost or some of them cannot take their defeat in the stride in which people of some substance and character can take defeat. However, the people have spoken and we are very happy, Mr. Speaker, that today the United National Congress is once more the Government of this country, leading Trinidad and Tobago into a new halcyon period that will usher in increased and continued prosperity and development for all. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, what does the dress of the hon. Minister of Finance have to do with a Motion before this House? [*Interruption*] They want to talk about wear and decorum and dress, but if you would permit me, Mr. Speaker, to refresh your memory and the memories of all of us, I remember when the Member for La Brea in the last session took off his jacket and pulled his tie and threatened the last Speaker. I was wondering whether the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for San Fernando East have such short memories that they do not remember that sad spectacle on that very sorry day when the Member for La Brea displayed some of the most uncivilized behaviour for an honourable Parliament. In fact, not only was he silent, they all walked out with him eventually, as if to indicate to the House that that was the type of behaviour that they wanted to approve and sanction.

I am not going to answer for the Minister of Finance about his code of dress. He will answer for himself because he has an opportunity to respond to the nonsensicalities that we heard this afternoon from the mouth of both the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for San Fernando East. [*Interruption*] You know, Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that, again, Members opposite would have learnt their lesson because one of the reasons this Government was re-elected on December 11 was our education policy. [*Desk thumping*] It was because—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Breaux:** You brought people from Caroni East to vote. [*Words expunged*]

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, am I a [*Word expunged*]? I am not prepared to tolerate that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for La Brea, I am saying to you that is not the way we will conduct business in this House in this session. [*Desk thumping*] The Member is on his feet and you will have every opportunity, in accordance with the Standing Orders, to make your input. This Speaker will not tolerate yelling across the floor and disturbing the Member while making his contribution, so I ask you to conduct yourself accordingly. Press on, Member for Tunapuna. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for La Brea called me a [*Word expunged*] and I appeal to you that he should unequivocally and unreservedly apologize and withdraw that statement. I am not a [*Word expunged*], and I wish to have it expunged from the record, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Could that be expunged from the record.

**Hon. M. Assam:** As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons the United National Congress Government was re-elected on December 11, 2000 was because of its education policy [*Desk thumping*] and that policy took into account one fundamental right, the right of the child to be educated and to have an equal opportunity to be educated. It was the first time in the history of this country, as you very well know, that Universal Secondary Education in fact became a reality.

**2.15 p.m.**

Hitherto, Mr. Speaker, thousands of children, after having sat the Common Entrance Examination, for one reason or another—one of them being a deficiency of school places—could not be placed into secondary schools. As a consequence, at that tender age of 11 or 12, they had to be either left at some post-primary class or thrown into the dung heap of history. As a consequence, we have the problem today of serious juvenile delinquency, teenaged pregnancy, all kinds of violation of the law, and indeed, leading to tampering with some kind of psychotropic substances from time to time. That is the legacy that this Government inherited.

It is to the courage and leadership of the Member for Couva North, the leader of the UNC and the Prime Minister of this country, together with the former Minister of Education, the Member for Tabaquite, and reinforced and carried out to its successful conclusion by the Member for Siparia, that today we have every child who sat the Common Entrance Examination in a high school, and this will continue in perpetuity. Whether they call it a model school, a BH Rose school, Kamla high school, Ibis High School, whatever the name will not change the purpose for which it was established; that is to give free secondary education to every child and to give equal opportunity—a Bill that they voted against in Parliament—to every child in Trinidad and Tobago.

Very casually, the Member talks about how the Minister came upon the building. Is it necessary? The point is, the school is a reality, whether she came upon it in a carnival band, in a rum shop, or whatever it is, as he suggested in his contribution, trying to pooh-pooh and to derive some form of cynicism about a noble act of educating children and putting a building together in the shortest possible time, Mr. Speaker. We should be congratulated for these Herculean efforts at revolutionizing the education system, the curriculum, providing school places and placing every primary schoolchild who sat the Common Entrance Examination into the mainstream of secondary education. He comes here today in his usual cynical manner, trying to deride the efforts of the distinguished Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

It is a pity that we have to put up with the Member for Diego Martin East for another five years. [*Laughter* I would have thought that my colleague would have crushed him, but this was not to be.

**Dr. Rowley:** Panday was not successful.

**Mr. B. Panday:** This is going to be a fun time today. A fun time! [*Laughter*]

**Hon. M. Assam:** When the new primary and secondary schools are completed, hopefully by September of this year, I would like to hear the comments of the Member for Diego Martin East. What would he say then, when at that time, not only would there be more school places for children, but the pupil/teacher ratio would have been reduced, and the kinds of facilities they would be offering in these schools so enhanced that Trinidad and Tobago will be able to de-shift and would then be able to boast of an education system that is second to none in every developing society?

Mr. Speaker, I feel so proud of this achievement because education is the key to mobility in this society. [*Desk thumping*] Education is the key to improving the standard of living. Education is the key to the eradication of poverty. Education is the key for levelling everybody in a society. Education is the key for dignity and self-worth, Mr. Speaker. That is what the Member for Diego Martin East stands here today and tries to do, to pooh pooh an effort that has proven to be beneficial and successful. We should cry shame on him.

Just as in the last session of Parliament, that same Member for Diego Martin East got up in this honourable House and said—I hate to have to repeat it, but I think it needs to be repeated—that we were building schools in Aripo, Brazil, Blanchisseuse and La Filette and in other parts of the rural areas of this country, to house “douens”, parrots and wild animals. This is how the Member for Diego Martin East described the flowers of this nation. Your children and my children; your nieces and my nieces; your nephews and my nephews.

**Dr. Rowley:** [*Words expunged*] He did not say that! He did not say that!

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Go to the *Hansard*! Read your *Hansard*!

**Hon. M. Assam:** I do not know why the people of this country did not treat him as they treated those people of yesteryear. He would have been drawn and quartered in certain societies for making that remark.

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Words expunged*]

**Dr. Rowley:** Why do you not sit!

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin East, I would ask you not to shout across the floor and call members on the other side [*Words expunged*]. That is against the Standing Orders. Please strike that off the record.

**Hon. M. Assam:** You know, Mr. Speaker, I did not want to revert, but I have to revert. Here is the Minister of Finance. Whether he is elegantly casual or casually elegant, it seems to me that he is decently attired. His decency is being reviled and rebuked by the Member for San Fernando East and the Member for Diego Martin East, yet the Member for La Brea and the Member for Diego Martin East deliberately violate the Standing Orders by calling Members [*Words expunged*]. You see the double standards they have? I want us to take careful notice of this double standard, Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Imbert:** I will come in a merino and straw hat and underwear!

**Hon. M. Assam:** —because I believe that your patience and ability to conduct an orderly session of Parliament during this five years will be severely tested. Already I have seen that the day Parliament—

**Mr. Valley:** It is for a month, maximum.

**Mr. R. L. Maharaj:** There is an offence called treason!

**Mr. Valley:** They should have locked you up and tried you long time for trying to steal an election. That is treason!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please! Press on, Member for Tunapuna.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, at the first sitting of Parliament, when we were sworn in, we noticed the total disrespect that side accorded the Chair. We noticed how every Member of the Government came and shook your hand after he or she was sworn in, and no one from that side did it. I was really surprised and disappointed by some of the Members, not all, because there are one or two on that side for whom I have some respect. I was sadly disappointed by certain people like the Member for Arima and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West who slavishly followed the indecency and incivility of their leadership in not according the respect that we normally have in the Westminster system to a new Speaker.

I have taken note of all of these things. They said I was not going to be here this time, too. [*Laughter*] In fact, the Member for Couva North was only going to—

**Dr. Rowley:** You "tief" in Tunapuna!

**Mr. Hinds:** Thief!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Press on, Member for Tunapuna.

**Hon. M. Assam:** They said the Member for Couva North was only going to have five of the Members sitting back with him, that all of us were going to lose our seats. They said, “Call the election now! Let us go to the people. We will see the last of your faces!”

Mr. Speaker, in 1986 the Member for San Fernando East won by 62 votes. Who thief then, Mr. Speaker? It was the compassion of the Member for Couva North and other members of the hierarchy and leadership of the NAR that spared him. I quoted Shakespeare on that occasion. I said, “Gentlemen, you are making a “mistake.” I said:

“Banquo is dead, but Fleance has fled.

You have scotched the snake; not killed it.” [*Desk thumping*]

It has come back to haunt us because we only scotched the snake. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Manning:** And that is acceptable, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. M. Assam:** I am quoting Macbeth. Of course, some people who did geology never did literature. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, when the former Member for Tunapuna won by 244 votes on November 6, 1995, there was no recount. He won fair and square.

**Mr. Narine:** There was.

**Hon. M. Assam:** The Member for San Fernando East won by 62 very dubious votes. If it had been challenged in court, we would have seen the last of him. [*Laughter*] That was also fair, but today they come and they are charging that we are sitting as an illegitimate government.

The Member for Diego Martin Central, in his usual bombast and unfortunate outcry against the Commonwealth group and subsequently the independent Election and Boundaries Commission, was reported to have said—my language is very clear—that the EBC has been engaged in all kinds of corrupt activities and practices for the last several years including the years when the People's National Movement was the government of this country. You understand? Very serious, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Valley:** Since 1992, and everyone knows it now.



**Hon. M. Assam:** Time will tell. Just as how we sat on these hallowed benches in 1995 and all of them gave us three months to fall, then one year, two years and extended to three, we served all five. Not only did we serve all five years, but we accomplished so much for this country that any other government in history could not have accomplished. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Valley:** Thief!

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, when I was campaigning in the constituency of Tunapuna, I encountered a man whom I thought was abusing me because they said that this part of the constituency is PNM heartland. I am a soldier, so I have to go into the heartland of the battle. I went in and I met this man who was using obscene language. I thought I was the victim of his abuse. It was really Eddie Hart he was abusing. I was amazed.

He was abusing the PNM. He said to me, “Do you know what PNM means? Poverty, nakedness and misery. I had it for 30 years and I will have it no more, so you must get my vote because I am fed up with poverty, nakedness and misery under the PNM!” [*Desk thumping*] That is precisely what they have dished out to this nation for a long time. Poverty, nakedness and misery, and squandered and mismanaged the resources of this country and used their power only in their own interest.

Today, when we have performed admirably, they are jealous of the performance and saying in a very cynical way that performance beats old talk all the time; but it worked. It worked! Have no fear. Performance did beat old talk. That is why we are here, and they are there. [*Desk thumping*] Then, he regurgitates the thing about a deficit. Mr. Speaker, what the gentleman, the Member for Diego Martin East does not understand, is that a budget is a dynamic thing. I have said so over and over in the last five years in this House. Even in the private sector, a budget is a dynamic thing.

### 2.30 p.m.

When you are budgeting you are taking certain factors and conditions into consideration. That is why even in economics, for those who have done economics, whenever you postulate something you always end up by saying *ceteris paribus*. All economists know that. When you postulate you say *ceteris paribus* meaning “my postulation will only be valid if all things remain equal”. *Ceteris paribus*, Mr. Speaker. In economics it is well known. Also, in the private sector when you make a financial forecast, or a plan, you say, “I am making a plan or financial forecast having done an environmental scan and an internal scan. These are the conditions that are present and if my environmental scan, my internal scan, and the conditions that are present prevail, we are likely to produce so and so result, hence my budget is predicated on these conditions and factors”.

They do not know these things. All they know is how to fool people in the constituencies which they have been doing for 30-something years. They have been fooling ordinary, poor people in the constituencies and they have not been able to pull them by their bootstraps and improve their quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I saw it in St. Joseph and I saw it in Tunapuna again. The people who are in the most depraved and deprived financial, economical, educational and social conditions are the ones who say, “Ah born a PNM and ah go dead a PNM”. How sad this is. Those are the people who are saying so—people from the most depraved and deprived economic social, financial, cultural and housing conditions are saying, “Ah born a PNM and ah go die a PNM”. That is because they have engrained into the psyche of the people a culture of dependence. While the UNC was going about governing the country to improve the qualitative part of their lives, they were going about trying to hold on to power by trying to keep people in ignorance and darkness. That is what they did for 30 years or more.

That is why the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for San Fernando East, stood in this House, just before the elections were called, and said, “Laventille, next time is your time”. Imagine that. The PNM has been in power for 30 and then almost four years. The first leader of the party represented Port of Spain South. They always had Laventille, even in NAR’s heyday. Even during that political aberration of NAR in 1986, the PNM held on to Laventille. They have been in Laventille from 1956 to today and they have not improved the conditions of the people of Laventille, but in the year 2000 he came to the Parliament, having said somewhere in Laventille during his walkabout, that he would walk, you know. He said, “If I lose the next election, I will walk” and I challenged him in the House here. I said, “You have started it already, my friend. I hope you will walk because you have already started the exercise”. I see him sitting still. He has not walked yet.

He said that this time is Laventille’s time. He also said that during his three years and almost 11 months as prime minister he was too busy being prime minister that he did not have time for people, whereas this Government has always put people first. [*Desk thumping*] The hallmark of this Government is that we have always put people first. More particularly, we have always put children first. We have always put the senior citizens first. We have always put the people who have some sort of disability and are vulnerable first. That is why our social policy under the last Minister of Social and Community Development did such a wonderful job in demonstrating the care, compassion and putting the people first concept all the time. That is why we won the election. Another reason we won the election on December 11, 2000 was because of our education, social and welfare policies.

I will come to the other policies that made it possible. [*Interruption*] If the Member thinks he is going to draw me into vulgarity he will not. Increasingly I shall lose respect for you without responding.

Mr. Speaker, I was speaking about how a budget is a dynamic thing whether it is in the private or public sectors. Circumstances are changing all the time, particularly as we live in a liberalized, globalized world. Anything that happens in any part of the world impacts either positively or negatively on Trinidad and Tobago. There is no state of neutrality. It will impact on us either positively or negatively and we have to be responding all the time. We have always anticipated a small surplus at the beginning of the year because that is what we aim to do. It is our fiscal policy to have a surplus at the end of each fiscal year; sometimes it was \$45 million or \$58 million, another time it was \$102 million and so on.

If for some reason the dynamics have changed and we have had to respond to what is taking place in the world, but more particularly, to respond to the urgent needs and the imperatives of the social and economic situation in Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the developmental requirements of our people, because we put them first, going into a deficit does not in any way state that the Government has mismanaged this economy. It does not say so. So, if the Minister of Finance in the last administration said that we were going to have a surplus in the budget 1999/2000 and we end up with a deficit, what is wrong with that? The point is we have delivered. That is the important thing. They have been in deficit. I remember during the almost four years they were in office, every year they were in deficit.

**Mr. Manning:** That is not true.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Every year they were in deficit and the then Minister of Finance came every year and increased the taxes. They increased the onerous burdens of taxation on the people of this country.

**Mr. Manning:** That is not true.

**Hon. M. Assam:** The Member can say what he wants because his credibility has been shattered.

Every year the then Minister of Finance not only increased taxes, he increased all kinds of niggling taxes; all kinds of irritants as taxes; all kinds of nuisance taxes the Minister of Finance in the administration under which the Member for San Fernando East was prime minister brought to this Parliament. Not only have they increased taxes and brought more nuisance taxes, they eroded the existing benefits that people enjoyed under the taxation regime and still ended up with a deficit.

This Government has delivered no new taxes. We have decreased taxes, removed some taxes all together and delivered substantially in every area: education, health, sports, social welfare, trade, the law, tourism [*Interruption*] Tobago too. If you see what we gave to Tobago. We gave Tobago infinitely more than any previous administrations under the PNM and the NAR gave to Tobago.

**Mr. B. Panday:** Including education of its children for the first time.

**Hon. M. Assam:** That is right. So, what are they talking about? Oh, we have had a glorious innings.

**Mr. B. Panday:** Look how many roads we have paved since.

**Hon. A. Assam:** In Latin they will say *mirabilis anni* “five of them”. We have had five wonderful years and we have served the people well and they have rewarded us again to lead this country once more. I thank the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank the people of Tunapuna. [*Desk thumping*] I thank the people of San Fernando West for having liberated themselves. As I said on the platform, we were like Simon Bolivar going from constituency to constituency liberating the people in these marginal constituencies from the avaricious grip of the People’s National Movement. That is what we did and the Member is unhappy about it. The Member is behaving bad now because his leadership is under threat. He is behaving bad and wants to cause civil commotion and unrest. He wants to violate the laws and the peace, security and good government of this country by using all kinds of inflammatory and subtle language under the guise of saying that he is trying to protect democracy. He is trying to create mobocracy not protect democracy. That is what he is trying to do; to create and develop mobocracy in the country. Go right ahead my friend. I hope he does not end up like the woman who was carrying the gourd of molasses. When the monkey came after she broke it and she said, “Oh what trouble has overtaken me?”. When he licked the molasses it was so sweet he thought that trouble was sweet molasses. Be very careful.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, a budget is a dynamic thing. We ended up with a deficit and that is the fact. The Minister of Finance has reported it, but we used the money in the qualitative interest of all the citizens in all sectors of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the important thing. In other words, everybody goes to the bank and borrows money. I will tell you that one of the tools that people use to grow their balance sheet is through the liability side. They borrow so they grow the liability side in order to grow the institution. That is how it is done. I can state as a former investment banker that that was a strategy I employed. One grows the

liability side, and by doing so, one grows the assets thereafter. That is the strategy. Therefore, once you go into deficit and the money is used for developmental purposes, nothing is wrong with that. Businessmen do it all the time. They borrow money in order to expand and develop their operations and that is fine.

**2.40 p.m.**

The important thing, Mr. Speaker, is your ability to manage your debt, they do not understand that, and there are certain parameters you have to use. In other words, your debt must not exceed a certain percentage of your GDP, or your deficit must exceed a certain percentage of your GDP, and these are the IMF guidelines which we have been following, and we are within the guidelines. I am sure the Minister of Finance will tell you that we are within the guidelines. So what is wrong with that? He comes today; he knows nothing about finance, although he was appointed shadow Minister of Finance but the emphasis is on “shadow”.

The Member said we have accumulated a debt of \$40 billion in five years; of course, that is highly inflated. It is not \$40 billion. You must understand that our debt is foreign debt and local debt and some of the debts are contingent. In other words, the Minister of Finance gives a letter of comfort to a state enterprise, or to an institution, and you have to include that as part of the debt because it is a contingent liability and the Minister of Finance will tell you that. It is not a real debt because most of these institutions can pay back what they borrow, but the Minister of Finance gives a letter of comfort in order to ensure that the particular institution can access the money from a financial institution. Therefore, all of that when aggregated: letters of comfort, foreign debt, local and so forth, would be part of the national debt because it is a contingent liability, but it is not \$40 billion. The Member comes here today and plays to the gallery. We have published what the national debt is in the last Budget Statement, so I do not know why he should come today and mislead the Parliament, and by extension the national community with his fuddy-duddy, figures, but that is very characteristic of the Member for Diego Martin East. It reminds me of the sermon I heard this morning on EWTN, Channel 10. He is agent of Beelzebub, Mr. Speaker.

Here what he is saying: it took five years to relocate staff, furniture and files of the Red House. Let us assume that he is right, at least we have done it, at least we have accomplished it. We have been able to relocate staff, furniture and files. What did they do in 30-something years? Do you know what they did? They disfigured this beautiful architecture. This piece of beautiful, colonial architecture

was disfigured by the PNM over the 30-year-period and he was the Minister of Works. The Member for Diego Martin East did nothing except to disfigure and change some kind of thing on the Red House because of his superstition. That is why I say he is like Beelzebub—superstition, superstition. So it took us five years, but the point is, we have done so, and now that we have relocated staff, furniture and files we are in a position to start at full speed the complete renovation of this beautiful piece of architecture. That is what we are going to be doing. We did what they were not able to do. They put every conceivable thing in the Red House; in fact, they had no respect for Parliament.

I remember in 1990 when we had this unfortunate incursion into our constitutional democracy, Mr. Speaker—the NAR was in office from 1986—1991. I was invited by the then Minister of Finance to have tea with him; that is how I got caught in this whole matter. Do you know where they used to have tea? They used to have tea in a kind of a library. The PNM was in office from 1956—1990; how many years, 34? For 34 years—maybe before that—they were having tea in a library. Do you know Members had to be standing with their teacups in their hands? I was saddened when I saw that.

Do you know where the Parliament toilets were? They were outside and a Member of Parliament had to compete with members of the public to use the toilets. Do you know that? I am telling you, it is a fact. In other words, they are talking about the institution's, respect and dignity and they show total contempt, total disrespect for the Parliament.

It was in 1995 that something started to happen, or a little before that. It started towards the end of the NAR's regime because the place was devastated and because of that, some money was voted to restore certain things and the upgrading started under Speaker Nizam Mohammed and was continued by Speaker Hector McClean during the administration of the UNC. So during the period 1991—1995 they did absolutely nothing and they are talking about decorum and dignity of Parliament.

These chairs on which we sit, we are the ones who covered them over from time to time. They were fraying at the edges under the PNM. The Public Address System was crackling most of the time, and they are talking about dignity. We are the ones who upgraded constituency offices. We gave them computer, fax, copying machine, staff, air-condition and allowances so that Members of Parliament could have a decent office wherein they can meet their constituents in some kind of atmosphere or environment of decency and comfort. It was the UNC that did that.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are crazy.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I am crazy? I know I am crazy. They talk about the Parliament. They talk about decency and decorum. I think Trinidad and Tobago has gone down in Commonwealth parliamentary history as the first time a Speaker was arrested. I have researched it. The first time in the history of the modern Commonwealth and perhaps the British Empire, too. I did not go as far as the British Empire, but I went as far as the Commonwealth when it started. It was the first time that a Speaker, and a woman, you know, and they talk about the dignity of women. They arrested not only a Speaker, but a Speaker who was a woman and put her under house arrest. The Member for Diego Martin Central told the Speaker: “You could run, but you can’t hide.” They are talking about tradition, dignity, decorum, civility of Parliament and you want to talk about the Minister’s dress offending the dignity of Parliament. These people have behaved in the most outlandish and outrageous manner both in terms of parliamentary language and parliamentary behaviour. These people should be struck down you know.

If God used to work swiftly—but he does not, God is not man, he takes his time—they would be struck down whenever they speak. I do not know how people like the Member for Arima and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West could associate with this kind of behaviour and this gang, because I always thought that there was some semblance of decency in these two Members.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about this Government violating the laws. Do you know that that government between 1991 and 1995 illegally executed a man called Glen Ashby, and they want to talk about decency and being law-abiding. They illegally executed a man under Attorney General Sobion and Minister of National Security, Huggins. The man’s case was being heard before the Privy Council and before the judgment, do you know what they did? In their usual way, in the early morning, before the dawn was broken, they broke the man's neck.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, it is very painful to have to go through all these things, but I think it is important to do so because we have short institutional memories and we, as human beings have even shorter memories. The national community should always be reminded of the atrocities committed by the People’s National Movement, and how they never served its interests, notwithstanding the length of time and the resources they had at their disposal at a certain period in the economic history of this country.

The Member talks about the L'Anse Fourmi Road about which everybody knows. The problem with the school, the problem with the road, the problem with Scarborough hospital, are all the same. It is resistance on the part of certain people in certain authorities who do not want to conform with the various regulations and conditions set down by international financial institutions when they are either loaning or granting you the money to construct capital projects. Everybody knows that. So the delay is not with the central government, the delay lies elsewhere. So to use that as a red herring this afternoon, is the unkindest cut of all, and the Member knows it but he does not care, he would say things to agitate the minds of people in order to get exposure in the newspapers. He has the courage, the gumption and the boldfacedness to talk about the Maximum Security Prison; that is what they fought the Cabinet about. He and his colleague, the Minister of National Security at the time, had fisticuffs in the Cabinet and he wants to talk about the Maximum Security Prison.

When we came into office we had an unfinished Maximum Security Prison. There were so many things that were unfinished like the security gates, the lighting, the library, the infirmary. All these things were not in place and moreover, you had to train people in specialized ways in order to take care of the Maximum Security Prison. So all these things had to be put in place first, and secondly, the recruiting system had to be in place in order to get things going. So, Mr. Speaker, I will dismiss that as pure propaganda.

The Member talks about relief to farmers. I am amazed. No wonder when the Member for Diego Martin West was Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources he did nothing. He was not interested in the plight of farmers at all because agriculture took a nose dive between 1991 and 1995 under the Member for Diego Martin West when he held that portfolio. We, in our own compassionate way, solicitors for the welfare of farmers, but equally so, solicitors for the welfare of the citizens of this country, whereby food security is a critical concept for us, have had devastating floods in all of the food baskets of this country over the last three to four years. What we did when those floods ravished the agricultural products, produce and farms of these poor farmers, was give them some relief. We sent in our agricultural extension officers who assessed the damage. It was not a *vaille-que-vaille* thing, it was not a handout, it was not political patronage. To any farmer who reported losses, we sent in the agricultural extension officer who did a survey of the damage and sent in the report to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources which then collated all the information and sent a note to Cabinet stating the areas and the food crops that



were damaged. The Minister then asked the Cabinet to give a certain amount of money to give some relief to these people to replant their crops, to retill their soil and bring them back into production. That is what happened, Mr. Speaker. Is something wrong with that? He says \$2 million in two years to resuscitate and to rehabilitate the agricultural producers of this country. He is making a song and dance about that?

**2.55p.m.**

One of the most important things is being able to feed your people. There is no country in the world that has become developed and successful that has not had a strong agricultural base. It is the agricultural base that propelled man into the industrial revolution which is now the service revolution and the knowledge-based revolution, but the basis of all of that is agriculture. Every strong country—Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, all of them, because of a strong agricultural base, were able to propel themselves as developed industrialized nations.

China said it could feed itself, a country of 1.3 billion people; India said it could feed itself, a country of close to a billion people. Japan cannot feed itself because they only have a 38 per cent food security level. They are now looking at GMOs (genetically modified organisms) something about which we do not know what the consequences could be; we do not know what are the implications of GMOs but we are looking at all of these things.

We spent \$2 million in two years to give flood relief to the damaged agricultural holdings and crops of farmers in a widespread area of this country, including Paramin, which is in the constituency of Diego Martin East; including Santa Cruz which is in the constituency of St. Ann's East, and they come today to talk about a \$2 million variation of appropriation that the Minister of Finance brought for the consideration and approval of this honourable House.

The Member talked about overseas travel—I hate to have to go into these things but the national community must know—he did not say this is a specialized individual who had to carry all kinds of recording equipment and video equipment that cost \$115,000 to as far away as South Africa. This is TT \$115, 000. If you divide \$115,000 by six you will hardly get US \$20,000. That is what it cost one man to go as far away as South Africa in order to inform Trinidad and Tobago on what was taking place at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in Durban, South Africa.

The Prime Minister facilitated the people of Trinidad and Tobago by spending \$115,000 on this man who is a public servant. But we have short memories. In 1995, when the Hong Kong flu hit the Prime Minister and he came back “bazodee”, like Alison Hinds, he preceded Alison Hinds with “bazodee”. They spent \$4 million on a trip which started in Jamaica and ended up in Hong Kong. When I assumed the portfolio as Minister of Trade and Industry, I got an invoice from Credit Suisse First Boston, for another \$489,000 for additional expenditure that they wanted me to pay. I still have the invoice on my desk [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Bring it.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Bring what, I have time with you? You are of no consequence. You should have won the Government, then you would have had consequence.

Afterwards he wanted to spite the then Minister of Foreign Affairs; he chartered a plane to Haiti because Trinidad troops were in Haiti on a peace-keeping operation and he spent over \$1 million.

[*Hon. Member stood*]

This session I am not going to be as courteous as I was in the last. Every time somebody stood up I gave way but when I stood up, all of you refused to give way. I have a long memory, I am not giving way.

They are talking about squandermania but the books of the Treasury are replete with all of this, and I would like the new Minister of Finance to do some research and go beyond the research that I have done to indicate the kind of squandermania that took place during their regime, not only the four years that he was there but before that. The safaris to Russia and Africa and all of those things. Eric Williams and Conrad O’Brien and all those people he took to Russia.

Anyhow, why are we here this afternoon? I am saddened, as I said in the last session, that I have to go through all of these things because that is not my purpose. My purpose is to come and represent the people of Tunapuna and to ensure that the Government’s national objectives are achieved, to ensure that the responsibilities that have devolved upon me as the Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism are achieved. That is my purpose here, but I cannot help because the records must be corrected and the national community must not continue to be fooled by the Members opposite.

We are here to have a number of expenses either increased or moved from one vote to another where certain surpluses have been identified. This is all dated, these are 1999/2000 estimates. The Minister of Finance came here and during the

Finance Committee Meeting he was very explicit. He went through each Head and said what he wanted to do. He said in the case of \$3.666,998, that he was taking this from the Ministry of Finance, from his own ministry and sending it to the Ministry of Education to pay the rent of the new high school on London Street. Whatever name you want to call it, the name is not important, it is the purpose that is important; then to pay for fees of students at private secondary schools, which is something that we are pursuing. The Government has to start thinking very seriously about the recurrent expenditure over time and its revenue base. We have to be continually balancing the revenue base with the projected expenditure. There will come a time when that revenue base will not be able to yield any more revenue, unless, of course, we engage in rapid expansion of the productive sector and we know there is a time lag.

To engage in the rapid expansion of the productive sector we have to bring in people who are willing to invest, then they would look at the situation and do all kinds of feasibility studies then they go back to their boardrooms, come back to you and ask more questions. They try to get more concessions from you and then when they are satisfied—and that might be two or three years—then they make an investment decision. That investment decision is not cast in concrete; they could always, because of prevailing circumstances, change their minds. Suppose they make an investment decision to put down an aluminium smelter plant and suddenly the economic situation internationally changes, or the price of natural gas changes, they may very well say, we will put that on hold until the economic situation worldwide changes. You may be going into a recession or a mild depression, or whatever it is. They say, hold. We made an investment decision, but put it on hold. That is the reality of life. Therefore you have to be looking at your revenue base versus your projected base.

### **3.05 p.m.**

That is why Government has to go the way of portability of pensions; contributory pensions. Government has to go the way of having a national health insurance scheme—how can we continue to fund hospitals, clinics and health centres in perpetuity? How can we, every year, from the Consolidated Fund pay out public service pensions? That is a charge on the Consolidated Fund. There is no sinking fund; there is no kind of investment of any kind that pays public service pensions. We have to move away from that and change the whole system: portability, contributory in nature, and put it in the hands of financial institutions such as the insurance companies which will now be responsible for doing that by engaging in blue chip—very safe investment—and multiplying the thing over time.

We have to look at education—

**Hon. Member:** Nonsense!

**Hon. M. Assam:** I know it is nonsense. Because you have no sense. You never had sense, so it must be nonsense. You do not understand what I am saying. It is over your head.

You have to look at education. Could Government continue to fund the expansion of education in perpetuity? Government has to bring in the private sector as a partner in the development of education and in the provision of educational facilities and opportunities. That is what we are trying to do.

Health care is the same thing. Can Government continue to fund hospitals in perpetuity—free drugs? No. Government has to have a partnership with the private health care system and bring in this national universal health care insurance. All of these things, this Government, through its initiative, through its innovation, through thinking—not just sitting in ministries and pushing files and papers—through thinking and cerebration, is coming up with these innovative ideas in order to push the country forward into a development trajectory, so that all of Trinidad and Tobago can benefit from the economic policies and strategies of the United National Congress Government, which is going to lead Trinidad, the Caricom and this part of the Western hemisphere into a new type of prosperity, into a new paradigm of which people would be proud and about which every citizen of this country can boast.

They are talking about the airport. He is saying that we are violating the Constitution; we are doing this to the airport. That is going to be a proud monument to this country when that airport is operational later on this year—a monument. You will see. It will bring such great economic benefits that you would not even be able to appreciate them, because you do not understand these things—*[Interruption]* Forget about the date. You see, again, their idea of rebutting things is about a date; the name of a school; where it is situated. They have no understanding of purpose and function and the benefits to be derived. No wonder this country has suffered, you know.

I remember Walter Rodney wrote a book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. I will write a book one day: “How the PNM Underdeveloped Trinidad and Tobago” similar to the one that Walter Rodney wrote, because that is what they did. They had no idea, no foresight, no vision, how to take Trinidad and Tobago forward. It is the United National Congress in the short space of five years that has revolutionized this country, and thank God and thank the people of Trinidad

and Tobago; thank the people of Tunapuna and San Fernando West, that we are going to have another five glorious years and we will score a lot of runs—plenty runs! Try and bowl “we” wicket “nuh”. Try and bowl our wicket! It is plenty runs we are going to score over the next five years.

**Hon. Member:** Talk!

**Hon. M. Assam:** Do you see the names of the ministries? “Enterprise Development”; carefully chosen, not that foolishness that they used to have before, putting a set of things together like crazy ants. “Enterprise Development”, “Human Development”, “Community Empowerment”, “Infrastructural Development”, “Integrated Development”. Oh God, Mr. Speaker, I am telling you, it rings like music. It almost reminds me of some of the classical music that I listen to from time to time to relax me and to de-stress me. It rings like music in the air, these new ministries, and the purpose for which they were put together, and more importantly, how they are going to achieve the national objectives.

We are living in glorious times. We are on the cusp of a new historical development in this country, and thank God for the UNC and thank God for the people of Trinidad and Tobago who have put the UNC in office again. I look forward to serving this country for another five years, both at the constituency level and at my ministerial level. I want to say that I hope that when we come to this Parliament and put forward serious legislation in order to propel this country forward into a new paradigm shift for sustained economic development, that we would have the total support of the other side, particularly the Member for Arima and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. I call on both of them because they are new to the House. But the point is, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has had some experience in the business sector, and the Member for Arima has had experience in the credit union sector for which I am very grateful to her because she has helped the constituency of St. Joseph from time to time. So I am calling their names simply because—this is not being facetious—I am relying on them to guide the misguided among their lot, and that they would raise them once more from the darkness in which they have plunged themselves, into a new era of light and enlightenment, like the 18th Century Enlightenment that the great philosopher spoke about.

I can give you several other instances of where the Minister of Finance has indicated he is taking money from one vote to put in another, where, because of certain developments, we have had to do that. This is nothing unusual. As I said, a budget is dynamic; certain things crop up from time to time and you reach a situation where you have to act and make a decision, and we always act and make a decision in the public interest, putting people first; putting children first; putting citizens, particularly senior citizens and the disadvantaged citizens, first.

I want to thank you for the opportunity that you have given me to speak on some of the points that they have raised, but more particularly, to indicate that notwithstanding the fact that we have had to come for this Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill, we do not want to give the impression that we are starting the new year and the new term with this kind of policy. This policy became necessary because of the kind of dynamics that we had to face during the last five years.

When we came into office, we had a situation where we had to grapple with some of the inefficiencies that we inherited, some of the deficiencies that we were confronted with and some of the lack of policy initiatives, but more particularly, the lack of implementation that we inherited from the PNM. That is why in the last term they were always saying, “we coulda, we shoulda and we woulda”. That was lack of implementation. We had to bite the bullet and implement a lot of these things, one of which, of course, was the airport.

The Member for Diego Martin East, as Minister of Works, spent \$100 million on Project Pride. It is we who had to resuscitate the thing and within the shortest possible time we had to build an airport, a world-class airport, in order to ensure the development of this country, to ensure competitiveness and to project this country into a global economy.

The Minister of Finance has already gone through all of the details in Finance Committee. He has given us all the explanations in his notes that are attached to the Order Paper, and therefore I hope that we will not have, in any subsequent contribution from the other side, any kind of statement that detracts from either the truth or reality or demeans the decorum and the dignity of this honourable House.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Keith Rowley** (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am one of those persons in this House and in this country who thought I had seen and heard the last of the gentleman from Tunapuna. But suffice it to say that it appears as though we will have to endure some more of that, for a limited period—whatever period of time.

Having said that, I want to begin my contribution—even though I had not planned to intervene in this debate, but I must intervene in this debate. I was looking at the television on Saturday and a certain president was being installed. There was a parade in Washington and there was a gentleman with a placard. You know the music that is normally played, “Hail to the chief?” There was a fellow with a placard saying, “Hail to the thief.” I said, “I wonder if he is coming to Trinidad.” [*Desk thumping*]

**3.15 p.m.**

I heard from the other side that, with the little introduction from my colleague from Diego Martin East, it appears as though we are conducting an election campaign even though election is over. However, having listened to the Member who calls himself the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna for the last hour, I want to find out who is in fact conducting an election campaign. I simply say to him that he protests too much. He sounded very unsure of himself, and if the people of Tunapuna sent him here then there is no need to carry on the way he is carrying on. The President has sent him here. We will tolerate him for the period until the President moves him.

However, in the meantime, I draw to the attention, especially of the new persons who now have executive authority over the finances of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, especially the Minister of Finance, that all the “ole” talk that went on just now has absolutely no basis in fact. How does one take a Minister of Government getting up in the Parliament and saying that a former Prime Minister chartered a plane from the national airline for a million dollars, to go to Haiti, when in fact my colleague from Naparima knows that the cost was TT \$70,000? If you do not believe me, ask BWIA how much money they got from the Government. Ask yourself why a Minister of Government would come here and volunteer a lie like that. The Government’s records are there. If he thinks that \$70,000 is too much, he can say that; I cannot argue with that, but when a Government Minister puts on the *Hansard* that the charter cost \$1 million, it makes you wonder.

There was a time in this country when statements from Ministers of Government meant something to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Those times are no more. If they say that he is not supposed to be here because they “thief” the election in Tunapuna, I have reason to believe that. If he can come and lie to the House like that, why must I not believe that he is a thief, too?

Four and one half million dollars for a trip to Hong Kong: I was in the Cabinet. That is not true. It is not true! My colleague from Naparima can enter into the debate and put the people’s record straight. You have to ask yourself why Ministers of Government are lying to the people like that.

He said that we should start this new Parliament with a new approach and a new this and that—and a mouth full of lies. What are we to understand? My colleague for Diego Martin East is not objecting to putting children in school. He is not objecting to a particular building being used as a school. He was enquiring

into the procedure with respect to the expenditure. If you are to spend Government money, we, the PNM, and the country are still saying that procedure matters. What we are still hearing from the Government is that procedure does not matter.

I draw to your attention that it was right here that we told you that if the ex-Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was not made to follow procedure, he would steal the public money and end up in jail. Where is he today? While he is ranting and raving here, and we are enquiring about procedure and he is dismissing it, a former Minister of Government is facing 27 charges for mishandling money in this country. That is only 27 fraud charges with one contractor. The police have not met the other Ministers yet. We are starting with that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin West!

**Dr. K. Rowley:** What is your problem?

**Mr. Speaker:** I do not have a problem yet, but when I do, I will deal with it appropriately. [*Interruption*]

Order, please!

Let me advise you that that matter— [*Interruption*] Order, please! Order, please! Order, please! Order, please! That matter is currently before the court and therefore not allowed. I ask you to refrain from making any discussions on that. You may proceed.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** I want to tell all those who have ears to hear, that I have been in this Parliament for 14 years. With respect to matters that are *sub judice*, I am not dealing with the content of any matter; I am simply referring to what has been published in the newspaper—a fact. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin West, take your seat, please. I have ruled that the matter is before the court and you should refrain from raising it in this Parliament.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** I am not raising any matter. I am simply making my contribution and you go according to the Standing Orders. You can stop me whenever you wish. I am saying that if Members of the Government dismiss the importance of procedure and if they had listened to our call for the need to follow procedure, then today one of their ex-colleagues would not have been covered by the papers the way he is covered. He is on 27 charges.



I am concerned when one of my former colleagues is in that position and another colleague comes here and says procedure is no big thing, and at the same time my friend from St. Joseph and the Prime Minister are saying to the Chief Secretary in Tobago that they will hang him for not following procedure.

I heard the last speaker talk about a new halcyon period ahead of us. I am happy to hear that; I wish it were so. You see, inside this House, the nonsense talk and the stupid talk could pass for Government policy. However, the Minister of Finance is a banker and while I know for a fact that he has no respect for anybody on the other side, I know he has respect for his banking colleagues. That is why when the Member for Tunapuna talked about a new halcyon period being ahead, I know he will dismiss that as sound and fury, a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing. However, when he reads the Republic Bank's *Republic Economic Newsletter*, I know he will be properly informed and will take note. That is why I want to draw to his attention if he has not yet read his December 2000 Economic Newsletter— [Interruption] He wrote it? I want to draw it to his attention. I know eventually he will read it, but I think today is an opportune day, especially after listening to the "Minister of Everything".

He went on to ask what was the problem with a deficit. We have been saying all along that this Government's fiscal irresponsibility is threatening the very prosperity, the very foundation of which was laid by others; and is threatening to give us despair instead of prosperity; disappointment instead of progress.

Listen to what the bank has to say in the *Republic Economic Newsletter* dated December 2000, Volume 9 No. 1:

**Fiscal Balance: Major Imperative of the New Government!**

"While Government was not a major borrower, statutory bodies raised almost \$500 million in the quarter."

That does not cover the other hundreds of millions of dollars that were spent for the elections. It does not cover the election paving. It does not cover the North water project; it does not cover the T&TEC borrowing. This is largely Caroni and friends.

It goes on to say, and I will read this whole paragraph because the country must know what serious people know and what they are saying. This is not the PNM talking about your behaviour. This is the bank.

**3.25 p.m.**

It says:

“The fiscal surplus was achieved as a result of higher oil revenues, consequent on an oil price that averaged US\$29.8 in the third quarter. This improvement will not however prevent a third annual overall fiscal deficit, which indicates that attention to the fiscal accounts must be a major imperative of the new Finance Minister.”

The article goes on to say:

“The approximate US\$6.00 fall...over the last week in the still high oil price, should underscore this cautionary note as should also the jump in total debt service costs from \$2.7 billion in 1995 to \$4.9 billion in fiscal 1999/2000.”

[*Desk thumping*] That is almost \$5 billion. I am telling the people of this country, when we listen to this handful of people talking about performance—they say, “What sweet in goat mouth is bitter elsewhere”—the bitter pill is to come. This is the bank cautioning the new Minister of Finance that, having caused the debt service cost to jump—it is not borrowing, you know, this is money put out to pay to service the debt. It jumped from \$2,700 million in 1995 to \$4,900 million per year.

Mr. Speaker, the bank goes on to say:

“It is noteworthy that for the last fiscal year, an average of US\$27 oil price resulted in \$3.9 billion in oil revenues.”

So what the bank is pointing out is that even with a substantial increase in oil price, and with the Government having that windfall of \$3.9 billion, which no other government has had in recent times, this Government still broke all records in borrowing. They have borrowed this country into a hole and the bank is warning the new Minister of Finance.

It goes on to say:

“If one were to match the oil price to total debt service (external and domestic), then it would have taken an average annual oil price of US\$34 at existing production levels to clear the debt costs in the last fiscal year.”

I am telling the country, while the Government is misleading us, the bank is saying that the way they have borrowed, the way they have spent and the way they have performed, it would have taken an oil price of US \$34 every day in the last year to deal with the kinds of expenditure with which this Government has gotten itself involved.

While the bank says that, it went on and said:

“Debt service which accounted for 33 percent of total government expenditure...is the largest single portion of expenditure.”

It means that for every dollar the Government gets, 33 cents is going to pay the debt; but we had a Minister of Finance here telling us that the debt is going down, “We have paid down the debt; we have reduced the debt; we have a surplus on the budget”. He has gone. I saw him at the University of the West Indies fete yesterday smoking his cigar and hugging his girl. He has gone. The bank is telling us what he has left behind. For every dollar that the Government earns, taxes of the people and other revenues, 33 cents have to go to pay that debt that is left behind; the debt that allowed us to behave the way they behaved. You understand! So the bank is warning the new Minister of Finance, “This is reality. The election is over. This is reality”.

The bank goes on. It says:

“Further, based on new and pending wages and salaries agreements for the public sector, the current bill of \$3.3 billion...”

That is the wage bill for the public sector salaries and wages. That accounts for \$3.3 billion:

“...(22.3 percent of total expenditure)...”

The bank says, this:

“...will certainly expand.”

What the bank is telling the Minister of Finance is to disregard all the foolishness spoken by the Member for Tunapuna this afternoon [*Desk thumping*] and face up to this reality because, while it would have required an average oil price of US \$34, the average actually attained was US \$29. The profligacy, the “t’iefin’”, the squandermania: we have seen no indication that any of it will stop. The bank is warning the Minister of Finance that, “As you plan the budget, those who have to pay themselves, those who have to pay their friends, those who have to perform, this is the real situation”.

I will tell you why the bank is doing this. The bank is doing this because the bank knows what the exchange rate is. The bank knows what fiscal irresponsibility means for the exchange rate. The bank knows what Government revenues are because we were here last October and one of the points we made then is that we have seen Government revenues falling—even VAT. VAT fell from

a high of \$2.1 billion to \$1.8 billion. While the economy was growing by 4 per cent VAT is falling? Then my friend, the Member for Tunapuna, self-styled, comes here this afternoon and, listen to him, “Government has to be cognizant of its revenues”.

This Government is not cognizant about any revenues. They are concerned about expenditure because, through revenue management, there is nothing to come to you. Revenue management is Government money. It is only when they spend it, it is going out, it gets into pockets. How can they be talking about revenue management when, in fact, the record is as it is? It is the same people with a few new faces except, most importantly, a new Minister of Finance. I will tell you one thing. The last Minister of Finance had the luxury of coming into this Parliament as a Minister of Finance of the UNC Government and meeting a sound economy and an economy on a growth path, [*Desk thumping*] so he took the approach, “I will drink champagne, I will lime, I will smoke cigars and I will leave well alone”. He left well alone for five years and the momentum of the economy carried this Government through for five years.

The momentum is running out and has run out. The bank is drawing that to the attention of the new Minister of Finance. So if he thinks that he will come here for five years and meet the same rosy picture, in fact, he has been called to do the surgeon’s job. It is now his job to manage this mess that the bank is drawing to his attention. [*Desk thumping*] I understand that might have been the reason he did not get completely dressed on the way here, but the bottom line is, the Minister of Finance today in Trinidad and Tobago has a quite different job to the last Minister of Finance. I am putting this country on notice that in the very near future a feature of the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago is Government not being able to meet its expenses at the end of the month. [*Desk thumping*]

Even now, the very schools they are boasting about, every single contractor is calling MTS every single day for their money. They cannot pay them. They would not pay them—the same schools they are boasting about. The Minister must get up here now and tell us that MTS does not now owe substantial millions to the contractors who have delivered schools to the Government. The contractors cannot get their money. That is the beginning of sorrow. The bank is pointing that out to the Minister of Finance. The bank knows that when reality begins to seep down to the man in the street—last year there was queuing up for US dollars. They were reporting all kinds of successes. When that begins to happen, this Minister of Finance will have the Herculean task of holding the exchange rate at \$6.30 because the Central Bank may not be in a position to continue to subsidize it the way it has been doing. That is what we are facing.

What this report says is the same thing we were saying in this Parliament since last year, but that was the PNM talking. “We are going into an election. We could pave road; we could pave drain; we could buy old boat in England that the English do not want. We could do anything we want”, and nobody, nobody, nobody would listen to the fact that, is that really necessary? What are our circumstances? The high oil prices did hold out to us the prospect of a new prosperity. That prosperity will evaporate in this debt hole, this debt trap that we have been led into.

I have every reason to believe that part of the discomfort of the Member for Oropouche is that he has seen it coming. He has seen it arrive and he has seen himself placed away from it [*Desk thumping*] because I know he knows. I know he knows exactly what I am saying and if he were given a free rein he would say worse than I am saying now because he knows it. He has been in the Parliament long enough and he understands it. However, they put people there who believe that governance is about impressing a handful of people; governance is about getting rich; governance is about short-term; governance is about immediate gratification. What the last government has done, and based on what he has just said, what this caretaker Government will do is to continue business as usual.

Unfortunately, the fiscal circumstances would not permit business as usual. It would be business as usual for those who are at the trough, understand that, but for John Public out there, when the effects of this begin to come down, when Government’s fiscal irresponsibility begins to seep down, the first arrow in that quiver aimed at the heart of comfort and well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is the exchange rate. All those who were impressed with the offerings of the Government—imagine, in my constituency, the Prime Minister came down to Victoria Gardens, well organized—I suspect my friend the Minister of Finance had a hand in that, because he knows the people, he knows the area. The Minister of Energy had a hand in it.

They came to Victoria Gardens. Do you know what the platform was there, down in Victoria Gardens—dollar for dollar education policy? Do you know why? They would have been informed that in virtually every house in that area there is somebody with a child either abroad studying or about to go abroad or would like to go abroad—something like that. What do they want? It is the Prime Minister himself who said that his policy is to find out what anybody needs because “Once you find out what they need and you dangle it in front of them, you can buy them for \$3.00”. [*Interruption*] The Prime Minister said that. “You can buy them for \$3.00.” [*Desk thumping*] It was the Prime Minister who said that. [*Desk thumping*]

He came to Victoria Gardens. He made no mention of the country's fiscal position that Republic Bank is talking about. In December, Republic Bank was talking about that. He knew that before the bank because he gets the figures before the bank. He knew what the country's finances were. He would have seen the budget documents. He would have seen the loss in Government revenues. He would have seen the annual deficits of his Minister of Finance but "Hold out in front of their noses what they want, dangle what they want and you will get them". So he offered them dollar for dollar and a lot of persons voted on that basis because they believe, "If I have a child abroad and the Government has come and volunteered to me that it will pay half of those expenses, that is something to follow". Even though they despise them for what they are, and their record for the five years, in dangling that personal opportunity, some persons went for it.

Now, listen to my friend here this afternoon. Listen to the Minister who spoke this afternoon. The first Minister, other than the Minister of Finance, to speak in the term after "dollar for dollar", listen to what he had to say. "Could Government continue to fund expansion in education?" So he is concerned about Government's ability to fund expansion in education, yet he was part of the team and he is part of the group that went to Victoria Gardens and told the country that Government will pay dollar for dollar. So, "Wherever your children are, if you spend a dollar, Government will pay 50 cents", but in the first working session of Parliament the Government begins to question whether it could fund the expansion in education.

What are we to believe? Which is the policy? Will the Government really pay an offering of dollar for dollar in US dollars, Canadian dollars or Pound Sterling? If I send my child to the University of Bristol at a ten to one exchange rate to do cosmetology and it costs £200,000, has the Government committed to pay £100,000 of that?

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

Expansion in education, improved teacher training, improved teacher salaries, improved facilities, expansion at the University of the West Indies (UWI) here, and even the advice that we need to create or own national university, because that is where we have to head. The University of the West Indies is a regional institution shared by the rest of the Caribbean, funded in a certain way, but it is only providing us with a certain number of places.

If we are to be the total quality nation of which he talks so glibly, if we are to enter this millennium with confidence to be on par with those who are already in the game, we have to increase that number of persons with tertiary education from 7 per cent to 15 or 20 per cent in short notice. *[Interruption]* No, not that. Dollar for dollar, dangle that in front their noses because that is what they want to hear. Now he is talking about concerns as to whether Government could continue to fund expansion in education and with his foreign Oxonian accent talks about “Government has to bring the private sector in”.

What is the private sector going to bring to give you for free? Of course there is a role for the private sector. In fact, the private sector already runs education in this country because all the church schools are private sector schools. Government pays the salaries and takes care of some maintenance. Very glibly, “Bring the private sector in” as though the private sector will come in and assume Government's responsibility for funding.

Then, when you find yourself in this kind of fiscal situation, he says, do not bother, run a deficit. We have walked that road before. Yes, an argument can be made for deficit financing, providing one plans what one is doing, but if one is just borrowing money helter skelter, “tiefing” half and wasting a quarter, that is not going to help this country. To say deficit financing is something to be taken in stride and anybody who raises a query about it is a PNM stooge or mouthpiece who is advocating that we want to be in office—I will tell them one thing. Whether we are in office or not, they are threatening to make all of us suffer. I know some of them have money to last their great-grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren, but we are going to suffer now. *[Desk thumping]*

We have to be concerned about deficit financing. We have to be concerned about a debt like this, especially when we see them continuing to waste money the way they are wasting it. My friend from St. Joseph, what is wrong with Long Circular Road? Why are you paving Long Circular Road? We have money here we cannot pay! There was nothing wrong with Long Circular Road between St. James and Flag Staff. What are you paving it for? What do you have with hot mix! *[Laughter]*

Before the last election—I drive around the Queen's Park Savannah every Sunday morning at half past five to six o'clock and there was one area in front of the President's House that required a little attention. Because it was a high visibility road and it is a big, wide road that will take a lot of hot mix, my friend paved the whole road, bank to bank. What was wrong with the road? If we had money like it was going out of style and we did not know what to do with the money, then we could say, “Okay, spend money”, but look at our financial

*Finance Committee Report*  
[DR. ROWLEY]

*Monday, January 22, 2001*

situation. When they talk about surpluses, it was the Member for San Fernando East, last year in his budget response, who pointed out to the country that this Government is the only government that borrows money and puts it aside as savings. When they did not spend all the money they borrowed, the rest they called surplus. [*Laughter*]

My friend, the Minister of Finance, as a banker, we hope he understands what a surplus is, what a deficit is, and what savings are, because at the same time of this 34 per cent debt service, debt service during the period of the last government jumped from \$2.7 billion to \$4.9 billion. This is the same government that is talking about saving, opening savings funds. They borrowed money and put it in some oil savings fund. Remember that story? It was \$415 million. They went to the bank and borrowed it and put it away to say it is savings. They are owing \$30 billion and they are paying \$5 billion a year in debt. What kind of cuckoo economics is that?

All of that will continue because these same people are saying to us, like he was boasting this evening, that they now have a licence from the population to continue and the population sent them back, but we will discuss that later on. The bottom line is that they intend to behave the same way, and that might be the reason why the Maximum Security Prison has not been completed, because one is on his way there. [*Desk thumping*]

I see no remorse. I see no understanding. I see the same attitude, the same disrespect for our intelligence. When he comes here this evening knowing that we were in the last two Cabinets ago, the PNM Cabinet, a number of us here, he stands here and picks up the Queen's English, as close as he can get and talks about a billion-dollar lease for an aircraft to go to Haiti, I ask you my friends on the other side, if you wanted to hire a McDonnell Douglas (MD) to go to Haiti, would you countenance \$1 million for that? How does the hiring of a plane to go to Haiti reach \$1 million? Forget the PNM. Ask yourselves why your colleague has to say a thing like that? He believes that when he says that, he will just be continuing.

He talks about the election campaign. What he has done this evening is to continue the election campaign, because the election campaign of the UNC was based on an accumulation of lies, lies and more lies and this afternoon he just continued in the same vein. I do not want to have to go into the whole series of lies he told the country, but he continued in the same vein today, so nothing has changed. Nothing has changed! I understand his requirement to stand here and thank the people of San Fernando West and the people of Tunapuna. He is thanking the ones who came in the maxis. [*Laughter*] One Minister is known as "green band", another one is known as "Tampax".



**Mr. Imbert:** Stayfree!

**Dr. K. Rowley:** So one is “Tampax” and one is “Stayfree”. So he comes here and instead of dealing with the real issues before us, he spends the whole afternoon praising himself and thanking those who came from whence they came and shifted the balance of political result from the PNM and thus, we ended up to see his face again.

Mr. Speaker, he talks about the Red House. I do not believe I heard what he was saying this evening! He goes back and talks about a time when the Red House coffee room for the Speakers was somewhere over there. How does that explain away the fact that a Government that has spent, wasted and stolen hundreds of millions of dollars has seen it fit to take off from the existing work programme, the fixing of the roof of the Parliament building which was not leaking when I came in here in 1991?

Today if it rains, when it rained last month, on many occasions one is going down the corridor and the staff in this building and Members of Parliament are doing hopscotch around buckets and signs all over the floor, “Do not step here” because water on terrazzo is break back! There is a tarpaulin on top of this Parliament building. This Parliament approved money to repair the building and they come here today and tell us that the reason they have not spent money on the Parliament building—but money has been stolen left, right and centre by hundreds of millions of dollars—is because the PNM had a coffee room in the building— [Laughter]

The reason the PNM was sharing a toilet with the public was because in those days, parliamentarians had no fear of exposing themselves to the public. [Desk thumping] So, the PNM Members of Parliament in those days were comfortable sharing their toilet. Today they have to have their private toilet and a security guard in their cars because they dare not let any member of the public meet them in the toilet! [Laughter]

They have this attitude. As the bank points out, higher than normal oil prices. This Government has been fortunate to be in office—these people, I should say, the last government but the same people—when through no action of our own in this country, and we are very grateful to Almighty God for it, the oil prices have remained substantially high and revenues coming into the country had been at record levels. So, to get up and talk about what they did and what they did, they had to acknowledge that they had more resources than anybody else. [Desk thumping] They have to acknowledge that.

If they had more resources than anybody else, as the Bible says, “Unto whom a lot has been given, a lot is expected”, but unfortunately, what they believe is satisfactory performance does not meet the satisfaction of the vast majority of people in the country. It does not do that. That is why today, yesterday, last month, and a few months before, if they were so confident about their performance, we would not have had the whole issue of voter padding in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We would never have had that phrase. The phrase was alien to this country, belonging elsewhere.

Today we cannot pick up a newspaper in this country and not see some person expressing some form of outrage with respect to what transpired here last December. So, spare us the self-praise. I do not know whom the Member represents. He might know whom he represents! They always represented themselves. That much they did very well. [*Desk thumping*]

I got this document from the Minister of Finance who, as he promised, provided some explanation, and we made the point very clear. He was not the Minister of Finance when these things were done. They are trying to give the man basket about how he just came as the Minister of Finance and has already brought this. This is public servants' work! Any Minister of Finance, even the Member for Tunapuna, would have brought this.

The question was, “Tell us where you spent money in the year 2000 with respect to the Farmers' Relief Programme?” A simple question, simple answer. The Minister of Finance answered the question very simply. He said these are the areas, he named them and the amount, and the total was \$2.3 million. Up jumps my friend from Tunapuna who cannot speak the truth. Even though the document is in front of him, he says it is propaganda and proceeds to say that farmers in Paramin benefited from the procedure when, in fact, the Minister of Finance says the opposite. Not a single Paramin farmer got any of the largess! It is all in their constituencies. They used it as a slush fund. We know that. When the document does not say Paramin, do not say Paramin! The people of Paramin did not get it! [*Desk thumping*]

We must demand the truth from persons who carry our offices. No Minister of Finance—I hear since the Speaker gets up in the debate and says he is going to run this Parliament in a certain way. I want to tell him something. One of the things he must do is give the same guarantee—

**Mr. Assam:** Would you give way?

**3.55 p.m.**

**Dr. K. Rowley:** No. Sit down! Since we cannot read, I will read. The question was asked for the year 2000. Clarke Road; Morne Diablo; Penal; Pluck Road; Barrackpore; Debe; Moruga; Caroni; Aranguez, north and south; Barataria; Arouca; Bamboo No. 1 and No. 2, Macoya and Caura. That is the sum total of the 1999/2000 payment. The question that was asked was specific in the context of the election year, because the allegation we are making is that you used that as part of your electioneering. *[Desk thumping]* We were not talking about 1998 and 1999. It is on a specific question and the Minister of Finance answered the question. We were talking about the year 2000. If you are talking about 1998/1999, you are talking your own story. Our story is the year 2000. I guess you will find a document, too, that shows a million-dollar expenditure for the BWIA aeroplane, and one that shows \$4.5 million for the Hong Kong trip. The bottom line is, nothing has changed. We already know that we cannot believe anything any Minister of Government says; in fact, we cannot believe anything any UNC candidate says, because even before election they were not speaking the truth. I do not know why you think we are going to believe you now.

When we talk about procedure, we know why we would like the officials of State to follow procedure because without proper procedures, you create the environment for wrongdoing. If you had proper tendering procedures, proper invitational procedures, then any Minister and all persons involved in the process would feel safe that the process would not be a threat to them. If those who were bidding for government services were allowed to do so, and the system was allowed to work, then all a contractor had to do was to prepare the best bid, submit it, and let the system work and if he or she had the best bid, then that contractor would have expected, and as has happened before, as the system was, that contractor would have won the bid.

There are times when the bids are closed and other considerations that can be explained would apply and we can live with that, the system provides for that. If those procedures were allowed to be respected, then none of us in here should be in a position to go to anybody and tell them, give me 10 per cent for a contract because one does not need to do that. One is prevented from doing that because the process works and I do not have to give you anything. If I win the bid it is my work, if I do not win the bid, too bad. So there is no encouragement of any bagmanism, there is no encouragement of ministerial wrongdoing and the corollary is, when you do not let the procedures work, you are in fact, encouraging wrongdoing by creating the climate. *[Desk thumping]*

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. K. Rowley:** I return to the point, and I am talking to the new faces in the House because much of what I am saying has been said in the Chamber before, but it needs to be said again because I want to draw to your attention, especially the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, that the behaviour of this Government with respect to procedure is not unknown to the courts of this country. The same procedure, or lack thereof, that has been dismissed and pooh-poohed by your colleague, this same attitude in an earlier time, the Member for San Fernando West, as Minister of Works and Transport, where there had been procedure for awarding contracts for paving from time immemorial in this country—tender procedures for award of paving contracts had been in the Ministry of Works and Transport until that Member for San Fernando West saw the opportunity and he decided to have his ministry interfered with by the tendering procedure in such a way as to create the environment, the climate and the situation to have the award of paving contracts go to a particular contractor. He interfered with the tendering process and do you know how it was done? They said that if you are going to bid, the ministry suddenly requires that any supplier of hot mix must have a plant that has a capacity of 1,000 tonnes per day. All of a sudden, all the years, plants with 400, plants with 500—and even if you had plants with 500 each you still do not qualify, you must have one plant with 1,000 tonnes per day. It so happens that the only plant in this country of that capacity was a particular contractor, well-known to the Minister—Coosals. Every other paving contractor in the country was jeopardized and victimized by that invasion of procedure, that amendment of that little procedure. That simple disregard for procedure had the effect of shifting all the State's paving from the other contractors to one contractor. If that had been allowed to stand, then the \$800 million of paving that you have done and are claiming credit for would have gone to that one contractor. That is what they had put in place in the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Fortunately, another contractor saw that his rights had been infringed by this act of the Government, of the Ministry of Works and Transport interfering or disregarding procedure, went to court, and thank God, we still have courts in this country for the time-being. [*Desk thumping*] Jusamco took the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Central Tenders Board to court and there was an injunction.

The roads that you are claiming you are paving should have been paved since last year and earlier, but they could not have been paved because there was an injunction preventing the Government from going through with the contract.

When the matter came up in the court, the Government lost the case, the Central Tenders Board was severely reprimanded, and the judge—if I may paraphrase the judgment—said that no Minister of Works and Transport and Ministry of Works and Transport should have the power to interfere with the tenders procedure to create and facilitate the climate for corruption. That sounds familiar. He went on to say that the Central Tenders Board, the custodian legislator for procedure of the award of contracts, cannot relinquish its responsibility and allow the Minister and the Ministry of Works and Transport to do what I have described, and the courts struck down the contract.

These people are so hell-bent on doing what they want to do, instead of observing the requirement of the court and the law, do you know what they did? They came looking for you and put you in charge of paving in Tidco instead of complying with the law, and I commend you to read that judgment for your own protection. You are a friend of mine, I will give you a copy. I will make a photocopy of it and give it to you. I do not want to see you like Dhanraj. *[Laughter]* I want to see you outside when we meet from time to time and drink something, but do not follow them, they know where they are going.

They deliberately disregarded procedure even after they took taxpayers' money and went to court. You would think that a Prime Minister hearing that a citizen is going to sue or has sued the Ministry of Works and Transport in the way I have described, would call in the Minister and ask him: What is this I am hearing? The Attorney General had to find legal support, serious taxpayers' money, hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' money they used to go to the court to defend the illegality because they had to pay Jusamco's cost and their own lawyers. They are using taxpayers' money to try to defend the wrongdoing in the court. Waste of public money. Even after they have lost the case, they are not contrite, never broken-hearted, they just went in a different direction. That judgment was in last year July or thereabouts, so by September they had put in place the road paving frenzy for the December election, not complying with the court's requirement that tenders for road paving should be handled as per the law under the Central Tenders Board. We are seeing pavings and hearing all kinds of things and all we have to go on is the word of a Minister and Ministers like that, which we cannot take for truth, or we can take it for truth at our peril.

So I commend that judgment for study in the Ministry of Works and Transport because procedures in this country now seem to be a thing of the past. You can have that with shirts, it does not cost anybody anything except that I think there are some instructions to be followed. I remember the wife of a Minister, one of your colleagues came in here—*[Interruption]* The Standing Orders? I think the Minister should read the Standing Orders, maybe he did not know, but the wife of a Minister of Finance came in this House and the press took her to task. She was described in a certain way because it was assumed that there was a violation of the Standing Orders of the dress code. That was a female guest, so if we can do that, set our own example. This Government is saying to us every day in every form or fashion that we are accountable to no one and no procedure will restrain us from doing what we want to do.

That is what they are saying, and when we object they try to describe it in some way as though—I heard him talking about the PNM under-developed Trinidad and Tobago. I leave that for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to discuss among themselves because they knew under-development before the PNM and if the PNM did not exist since 1956 it would have had to be invented because any development of any substance in Trinidad and Tobago was done under the People's National Movement. *[Desk thumping]* Before 1956, there were a few things that the colonial people put there for your basic needs, including the number of persons who could go to high school. How many Clerks IV you need over five years? Six? Well, they trained seven in case one died. That was the education policy.

#### **4.10 p.m.**

How many persons you want in the colonial hospital, 200. Every development in this country that is worthy of mention under that title was done under the People's National Movement and whether you like it or do not like it, you can try to rewrite this country's history but you can never convince anybody in the know. They are trying their best to rewrite the country's history; they want to rewrite the country's financial records, they want to change the files, they want to change numbers because they want to say what suits their purpose. What suits your purpose does not suit the purpose of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I heard the Prime Minister the other day boasting about 300,000 persons voted for them. I will not subtract the voter padding from that, let me grant all that to them, but I want them to reflect on something. When they beat their chests about 300,000 persons having voted for them, understand that there are one million

people who do not want you. This country has 1.3 million people, when 300,000 say yes, it might very well be that another million cannot even stand the sight of you. So we will all do well to restrain ourselves and let humility be the fabric in which we clothe ourselves, and not that nonsense that we heard earlier.

I will say it for as long as I have to, I am not office crazy, I will not thief and kill to get into office. I will do my public duty just as well here as I have done it there. Even before I went to high school I was trained; decency and integrity meant something to me. I am not office crazy so do not think I begrudge your office. Maybe when you were over here, you begrudged others their office but I am demanding that you follow the procedures laid down in the laws of Trinidad and Tobago because I know if you do not follow those procedures, as we had warned you when you created that monster of the last local government minister, that therein was the making of a disaster and if you do not learn from your mistakes, many more of you will find yourselves beshackled and disrobed.

They are in Tobago making hollow sounds about the waste of public monies. Can you imagine this group appointing itself and speaking about waste of public monies? It would appear as though public monies are only wasted if they are wasted in Tobago. They have the unmitigated gall as a group to go to Tobago and argue about misspending of public funds in Tobago. I have no doubt that there has been misspending of public funds in Tobago, but they have absolutely no moral authority to talk to anybody in Tobago. While Tobagonians might have misspent \$50 million, they have misspent \$500 million in one year.

He spoke about the airport and what a monument it is. Yes it is a monument, it is a mausoleum, a monument to theft and graft in a Commonwealth Caribbean country. Every time you see that building—I heard somebody mention that it was supposed to be named the Eric Williams building. Do not put God out of your thoughts and do that. That should be labelled the “shed of shame”. Anybody coming or going will see the “shed of shame”, a monument to wrongdoing, a monument to profligacy, a monument to breach of every procedure laid down, including amending of the National Insurance Board tender rules. They brought it to Parliament unashamedly, and the amendment read “every ‘is’ equals ‘are’”; “every ‘his’ equals ‘her’”; “singular equals plural”. That was an amendment passed in this House by these people because that is the way they will get around selective awarding of the contract to a particular contractor, because Nipdec tender rules specifically said that any contract over a million dollars must have tenders, but since they only had one tenderer and only wanted to give one contractor, they amended the rules to say “is equals are”, so tenders equal tender.

This Government did that to facilitate corruption and they had to give that contract to a particular contractor because the gravy train, the bi-fold door for \$97,000 was in the contract and the glass panelling for \$14 million was given at \$25 million, and as long as the mausoleum is up there we will remind you of your behaviour.

This Government operates on the basis that the people of this country are stupid, so they come to the Parliament to amend the tender rules to say that “is equals are”, granted some of them have failed in their grammatical expressions and their English, where we have “paradigm” and “reputable” and things like that, but that does not cost any money, but “is equals are” cost us hundreds of millions of dollars.

They talk about the public debt, the bank is warning about debt. That warning does not take into account the off-budget items that are yet to come but it does take into account the \$128 million borrowed for that airport project . The Member for Tunapuna got up here this evening and once again repeated a naked falsehood which the Prime Minister has propagated across this country, that the PNM Government spent \$100 million on Project Pride. I am telling my friend from Naparima, who knows that, and some other person who they want to bring as a Minister through the flooring—he was Minister of Housing; he was in the Cabinet; he can tell that there was no money except for drainage to divert the river away to create the site on which the present structure stands. The next time I come to the Parliament I will bring the exact figure. It was about \$5 million, but the Prime Minister and his lackey are walking around telling the whole country, to justify their grand theft, to justify the amending of the Nipdec rule, to give hundreds of millions of dollars to selected contractor friends; to justify that, the PNM did it too.

The PNM spent \$100 million and do not have a post to show; those were his words, a naked unadulterated untruth. They must ask themselves how did we come to this situation where the Prime Minister can see it fit to justify the wrongdoings as pointed out by everybody in this country, by fabricating falsehoods to justify what they are doing. For five years they were in office, bring the documents here, bring the invoices. If they want to restore any semblance of credibility in this country bring the invoices for the \$100 million and tell us who got it.

While he is fabricating that and trying to justify the grand theft at the airport project, up to now he has not seen it fit to let the Minister of Works and Transport of the last Government, who is still with us today, explain to this country who received the \$10 million for a company called OCIC.



**4.20 p.m.**

The company called OCIC received \$10 million paid by the Airports Authority and when I asked what service they provide, up to this day there has been no answer, except that NIPDEC puts a whole-page advertisement in the newspaper saying, "We know nothing about that." And Birk Hillman puts another whole-page ad saying, "NIPDEC enquired about it and we gave them all the answers they required." But \$10 million of taxpayers' money—borrowed money—went to this company. He has not seen it fit to give the country an answer, but he is there fabricating stories about the PNM spending \$100 million on Project Pride and not having a post hole to show for it. But of course, OCIC is a one-man company in Miami owned by a private investigator that does not even have a computer or a chair. OCIC does not even have a chair. Because you know, in Florida where the company is registered, you have to file your returns and even if you do not make any money, you have to file on your asset base. The company filed zero asset base.

A company with not even a computer or a typewriter received \$10 million as part of the airport payment from the pockets of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it was raised before this Government went out of office and there was a deafening silence, except one or two ministers got very jumpy. The Prime Minister, responsible for all of them and all of their actions, does not deal with that. So when today you hear people saying that whoever is before the courts—Dhanraj is before the court for \$2 million—chicken feed! The real moneys, not a word of explanation, and here you have the bank telling our new Minister of Finance that "You are being saddled here with a monumental task to manage this country's affairs because we are in a debt hole."

The debt that the bank refers to, between 1995 and 1999, \$1,028 million of that debt was borrowed to build that airport structure. He says we got nothing for it. Our plan was never to use public money to build the airport. Here you see \$1,028 million to build an airport, that all the plans were laid; the private sector was going to fund the project; the airport revenues were going to pay back the private sector on a fixed return and the building would have come to the government after 15 years for one dollar. So we would have had the building.

Nobody is saying we should not have a new airport building. At least, most persons are saying we should have had a new one. That is not the argument at all. Do not use that. The argument is: What is it to cost us? Instead of costing us over \$400 million, or over \$600 million—as you say you increased the size a bit,

fine—but we did not have to put out public moneys, and you put out moneys we did not have. You put out twice as much as you awarded the contract for, spending moneys that we do not have, moneys that we borrow on a 20-year repayment plan.

A child that is born today would still be repaying that money—would be 20 years old before we pay off the money for the airport building, and during that 20-year period, that child might suffer for not having the same school place and the same university place and the same social services you are talking about, because you have squandered the child's future in that structure. That is what you have done.

Do not think we do not understand it. And coming here and trying to browbeat us and badmouth the PNM in your Oxonian accent or wherever you learnt that, would not stop us from saying to you, “you are a disservice to this country.” [*Desk thumping*] To come here and talk about you have been elected and therefore, la, la, la, la, la, let me tell you one thing: Hitler was elected in Germany, you know. He killed six million Jews and 20 million Russians and millions around the world. Papa Doc Duvalier was elected. How Idi Amin got there, he almost got elected. He did not need to be elected. He just frightened away the whole electoral process like you are trying to do. So do not come here and talk about being elected.

The process itself is under strain and creaking under pressure. Your presence here is testimony to the fact that all is not well with Trinidad and Tobago. We of the PNM have a duty to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that we have a vision of what this country should be. We have an idea of what we can become as a people. Whether we are in the same party, we wear the same kind of clothes, wherever we are, we ought to have a vision, and the PNM has that vision. The people of this country have expectations of what we can be.

You can imagine the pain and the anger in this country when people discover in the not too distant future that after all this period of high oil price and high gas price, and whatever, you come to tell them that, “Hey, your belt might need tightening, because the IMF says our debt burden is 33 per cent and we cannot increase it any further.” It is now 33 per cent. If you borrow more money with revenues being fixed or falling, that 33 per cent will rise to 40 per cent and 50 per cent. Then the IMF will say to you, “You cannot borrow any more money.” When you cannot borrow any more money, there is one thing you would have to do: you will stretch a US dollar like a rubber band, from \$6.30 to \$6.70 to \$7.70 to

wherever you are going to carry it. That is what you are exposing us to. Because once you cannot borrow—you have these fixed commitments and the bank points out that your fixed commitments are large and increasing and likely to go even further—let me read the last line for you again. It says: “All these new agreements based on new and pending wages and salaries for the public sector, the current bill of \$3.3 billion will certainly expand.” The bank is saying that. Your colleagues in the bank are saying that. I am just reading what they have said this week.

Now, if these fixed commitments are there, the airport billion to pay for, the Carlos paving to pay for, when your income is fixed or growing at a lower rate, when you go to borrow money, as you will—because one of the first things, and I am putting you on notice today; you could agree or not agree, the next time I see you in this House, it will be to tell us you are going to borrow money. [Interruption] So far I have left you alone. What are you interfering with me for?

As he reminded me a moment ago, the Attorney General who wants to see all of you in jail, has put in place an anti-corruption fighter. He sits here every week and he hears what we are saying and even though he does not say, “I support you”, he smiles, and I know when he smiles—from the time his mouth straightens when he is smiling, I know it is trouble. [Desk thumping] So he has put some anti-corruption thing in place and he is now in possession of names, dates, places and numbers. The dance has just begun. The music has only just begun. Do you understand? All those who have cocoa in the sun, look out for the Attorney General, because he intends to make a name for himself. He will make a jail for “allyuh”. [Interruption] You just come in this thing, I am warning you, others have done what you are doing; I am warning you as a friend, do not take that position. Others have done that and now they have a position where they are trembling from their knees up; others are trembling from their waist down. So do not take that position. As I say, we are friends; we go back a long time; talk to me outside. We will talk, as my partner from Naparima talks to me from time to time. Did you ever hear his name call in any foolishness? He is only vexed they took away his passport. He is now grounded as Minister of Information. Imagine after a distinguished career in the PNM and a year of just languishing there, he ends up with a piece of Wade Mark’s portfolio. [Laughter] [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Speaker:** The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired. This House is suspended for 30 minutes.

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

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

**The Minister of Food Production and Marine Resources (Hon. Trevor Sudama):** Mr. Speaker, it was really not my intention to speak in this debate, a simple matter, the variation of appropriation, but I thought I would make a brief intervention here this afternoon. First of all let me welcome all Members to this House. This is the first full sitting of the new Parliament in the new millennium and I am hoping that we have a very productive Parliament. This Parliament of 2001—2006 would be a productive one and I am pleading with the Members opposite. I always want to especially welcome the new Members to this House and to tell them that they must be able to identify the right example from the wrong one. We have had three contributions coming from the other side which are really not the examples to follow because the Members who have been here are like bent trees. You cannot straighten them but you have an opportunity, coming fresh into this Parliament, to be able to accept the new standards that we are trying to create in this Parliament. In this new Parliament we should be invoking new attitudes. We should be having a new perspective. We should be promoting a new vision for Trinidad and Tobago. This is the highest debating chamber in the land. It is here that we make decisions for the benefit of the whole country including those who have opposed and those who have supported us. When you become the government of a country, you become the Government of the whole country; UNC, PNM, NAR and whoever it is. This is where we are coming from. The United National Congress Government of this new term intends to take its task very seriously and intends to be the most inclusive government in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, today I implore the Opposition to lift their sights. Look at the higher horizons that we can achieve and give us your support as we go to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

When I heard Member Diego Martin East, the Member for Diego Martin West and the Member for San Fernando East, all I was hearing were the plaintive tones of losers. The people who for five years have been saying the same thing in this House went out onto the hustings and said the same thing and people have spoken. They have been rejected and they should accept that rejection in humility. They have been rejected, therefore, they should look to see how the PNM can reengineer itself; how they could create a new vision for the people of Trinidad and Tobago; how the PNM could restructure its leadership because I think that is critical for the continued survival and existence of the PNM.

I particularly offer these words of advice to the newcomers; the Member for Arima, who I am sure has leadership potential, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East, who I understand was making certain moves in that direction. Therefore, you can rest assured that whatever you do to revive and

resuscitate the PNM you would have the support of this side for the simple reason that for democracy to survive in this country we must have a vibrant and viable Opposition. This is why I am offering them this piece of advice, that you restructure and review the image of the PNM. Review the leadership. "Moribund" is the ship that you have had for the last 10 years. I think you have to look again at that to see whether you can find a future for this party which is an important institution in the history of this country.

I will not deny or gainsay the contribution that the PNM has made to the political and social development of Trinidad and Tobago, but that is a thing of the past. If you are relying on those laurels to propel you into the future I think you are sadly mistaken because when you went onto the hustings to the population they recognized "ole" talk and, as we said, performance beats "ole" talk all the time. If you go to the hustings again with the same "ole" talk you will be rejected again.

The Prime Minister had indicated that this is a Government of national unity and we are prepared to incorporate the views of the Opposition in this Government of national unity.

### **5.10 p.m.**

I know the Member for San Fernando East will never learn. I thought this election would have taught him a lesson. There are some people who do not learn. Hard heads, we call them.

Mr. Speaker, I will deal with a few issues that have been raised by the other side. This is a debate about the variation of appropriation. In the contributions that we have had, that seems to have been forgotten. This is a debate about the variation of appropriation over the fiscal year 1999 to 2000. As mentioned before, when you make a budget, you are really making an assumption of what will happen. If, therefore, those assumptions do not turn out exactly as you want, then you have to vary, you have to restructure, and this is exactly what we are doing here.

Particular issues were raised with respect to relief to farmers. The insinuation was that this Government was being selective of the people to whom it provided relief. That has been the continuing tone of the Opposition for five years. You give relief in areas where there are farmers. You do not give relief in areas that are not farming communities. This relief was provided for flood damage. If there are communities that have not suffered flood damage, they will not benefit from this relief.

In its 34 years of governance in Trinidad and Tobago, the PNM did not find it necessary to provide flood relief to farmers. Mr. Speaker, put yourself in the position of a farmer. Here is someone who is contributing to food production in this country and he makes an investment, many times with borrowed money. He has expenditure on labour; he has expenditure on capital investment. One flood comes—a situation for which he is not responsible—and he gets wiped out. There is no return on that investment. He owes the bank; he owes suppliers; he owes a host of other people and he has no income to support himself. It is a rather grievous situation.

This Government has seen it as a matter of compassion to reach out to these people and to offer them some assistance in their time of need. This is a caring Government and the population out there recognizes this and recognizes that this is a Government that will get resources for them. This is why we went into this virement of funds. No provision was made for relief to farmers and if we were going to provide this relief, there had to be funds sourced elsewhere in the budget. This is what we have done. There is nothing underhand about what we have done. There is nothing surreptitious. This is legitimate activity and the list of the farmers who have benefitted has been provided by our Extension Officers in the various districts.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources did not go down and identify, one by one, the farmers who would stand to benefit from flood relief. So, if you are questioning this list, you are questioning the integrity of the public servants who went out and compiled the list. This is what you are doing, but you question everybody. You question the integrity of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. You question the Constitution. You question the integrity of the basic institutions in the country simply because you have lost an election and you cannot accept your loss.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing irregular about this relief to farmers. It was reaching out to the farming community. Government is actively considering the whole question of crop insurance. When we have it in place, then it would not be necessary to provide relief on an *ad hoc* basis. There would be a system through which relief would be provided for damages caused for whatever reason. I thought I would explain to the country what we have done in that regard.

The other issue raised on this appropriation and the Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting which dealt with these transfers, was travel. Over the last five years we have had this issue raised time and time again. The PNM seems to be living in the past. Today we have a globalized economy. Today, there is need to

interface with other countries in international fora on a continuous basis and, therefore, the need for overseas travel becomes more and more important and urgent. We have to do it on a more and more regular basis, which involves, therefore, more and more financial outlays for overseas travel.

We are no longer an island unto ourselves. We have to negotiate our positions. We have to attend these meetings and influence decisions that can affect the future of Trinidad and Tobago and our economy. We, therefore, need to be out there reaching out, talking to people, getting into trade negotiations, bilateral and multilateral negotiations. All this is taking place because the globalization process is proceeding apace.

My friend, the Member for Naparima, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, will attest to the fact that the demands on his time when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs, became more and more burdensome and urgent because of this whole globalization process. Trinidad and Tobago, though a small country, must, of necessity, participate in order to protect our interest.

So, in the Ministry of Food Production and Marine Resources, other staff, the Permanent Secretary and I have to attend a number of meetings. The Food and Agriculture Organization is the international body to which we belong and to which we must contribute by our presence and, of course, we have things to gain by being members of that body.

### **5.20 p.m.**

We belong to the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture. That is a hemispheric body of which, of course, we are members and we must provide support and receive the benefits. We are members of the International Food and Agriculture Development Fund. We are members of the Community Fund for Commodities from which we also benefit. At this point in time they are funding a project in the subsector of cocoa in agriculture. We are members of the Caribbean Research and Development Institute, a regional body of the Caribbean that is responsible for looking after research on a regional basis. We have to attend meetings of COTED, that is the Council of Trade, Education and Development. That is also regional. We are members of the Inter-American Development Bank, which has funded in the past, and continues to, a substantial amount of development in this country. We are members of the International Timber Organization. That has to do with forestry and so on.

I want to disabuse the minds of the Members opposite that this travelling in which Ministers and other staff are engaged are joyrides. We go out there to play our part, to protect our future, to get benefits and to be able to encourage investment into Trinidad and Tobago. This is why there is need for more and more travel. On this specific issue, the Member for Diego Martin East said the Minister made a trip—one trip cost \$85,000—and he was quoting from this document, \$85,493. I just want to tell this House that that was not one trip. That money constituted five trips.

So that amount that was not really budgeted for or that had exceeded our budget was for travel to Guatemala to attend a meeting of the Common Fund for Commodities; to Barbados; to New Orleans in Louisiana to attend a meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank; to Barbados again at the end of 1999 and to Guyana early last year, amounting in total to hotel and other costs of \$50,337 and tickets cost of \$35,156.

As this House full well knows, I am a man of accountability. I account for everything, including my motor car. I account for my whole life. I have been in public life for 20 years now and for 20 years now my life has been an open book. For 20 years now, whatever I have done can be subject to any kind of scrutiny in this country. So that, my integrity and the standards that I have set for myself are standards that that side could never achieve. In their whole history, none of them could ever aspire to that level of accountability that I have maintained over the last 20 years. So, I made five trips for which we did not have the funding, we had to vire the money and those five trips cost \$85,000. In the interest of furthering the cause, in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, this is what I have done. So I hope I have put the scurrilous mind of the Member for Diego Martin East to rest a bit since he raised this matter.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said about our credibility here, our legitimacy on this side, and the words “stole” and “thief” have been bandied about in this House continuously before the teatime interval. I do not want to get into that at this point in time. All I want to say at this point in time is that a number of years ago, maybe a year or two after the last election of 1995, the Opposition leader made a statement and he was preparing the ground. That statement said—I think it was made in 1996 or thereabouts—that we have had the last fair and free election in Trinidad and Tobago, because, you see, he was envisaging a defeat in the year 2000 for which he was preparing the ground to explain to his supporters and to explain to the country.



If, as they argued, there were irregularities in compiling the list and they had that information in 1996, why did they not take that information in 1996 or 1997 to the Elections and Boundaries Commission and make a complaint? No such thing was done. You know, the Elections and Boundaries Commission produces an electoral list on July 1 every year, which can be scrutinized by everybody, and if they have problems with the names on that list they can refer it to the Elections and Boundaries Commission. They do it on a yearly basis so they have been producing that list annually for the last five years. How come it is only after they lost an election that they are talking about irregularity in the voters' list? However, as I said, I will go into that on another occasion in some degree of detail.

Then they wanted outside observers and we said "No problem in that. Get your outside observers". I just want to read a little from page 2 of the introduction to this report of the Commonwealth Observer Group. It says:

"The presence of a Commonwealth Observer Group at Trinidad and Tobago's December 2000 General Election followed a formal request by Prime Minister Basdeo Panday in February 2000. Once the election date...had been announced, and in line with established practice, a Commonwealth Secretariat Assessment Mission visited Trinidad and Tobago in November 2000 to meet the major political parties, NGOs and others."

This is the fundamental line.

"It reported that there would be broad support..."

That is, from the major political parties and the NGOs and others:

"...for the presence of Commonwealth Observers."

So they accepted Commonwealth Observers and those observers came here and did their work and they went around the whole country. I will go into this in some detail on a later occasion but I just want to draw to the attention of this House what their conclusions were:

"The main conclusions we have reached..."

A foreign objective observer group coming here to observe the general election of the year 2000 concluded that:

- the conditions existed for a free expression of will by the voters of Trinidad and Tobago:"

*Finance Committee Report*  
[HON. T. SUDAMA]

*Monday, January 22, 2001*

That free expression of will:

“...where we observed the process, the atmosphere was peaceful, the voters were able to cast their votes freely and the secrecy of the ballot was assured;”

Of course, that voters’ will was expressed by 305,000 voters who went to the polls and voted for the United National Congress; a free and fair expression of the will of the majority of the voters, people who voted in Trinidad and Tobago. This is what a foreign—[*Interruption*] They do not want to accept this? [*Interruption*] What would they accept? That is my problem with the PNM. [*Interruption*] What would they accept?

**Mr. Valley:** The Member was telling people how Sadiq was moving votes from his constituency.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** I?

**Mr. Valley:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please.

**Mr. Valley:** You were telling people that.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Telling whom?

**Mr. Valley:** How Sadiq—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Telling whom?

**Mr. Valley:** Yes.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Could you tell me whom I was telling that?

**Mr. Valley:** “He tell Dhanraj that, and he tell the [*Inaudible*] ‘Doh tell me that’”.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please. Continue, Member for Oropouche.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Mr. Speaker, what we are hearing from the other side is sheer desperation. They lose, they have no hope of winning anything and all they come here to do is to make excuses about “who tell who what”. [*Interruption*] Was the Member in contact with Dhanraj? [*Interruption*] When? When was the Member in contact with him? Could he let us know? [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** Dhanraj is a pariah now.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to inform the House of the second conclusion they came to:

- “• the results of the election reflected the wishes of the people: the stipulated counting and tallying procedures were followed and the processes for both were fair and transparent;”

[*Desk thumping*] What do they want?

- “• the Elections and Boundaries Commission’s polling day arrangements were admirable and compare well with others in the Commonwealth.”

This is a report of a foreign, independent, objective observer mission that came to Trinidad and Tobago. They do not accept that. My question is, “What do they accept?”

They have impugned the integrity of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. They have impugned the integrity of the observer group. They have impugned the integrity of officers of the Elections and Boundaries Commission—everybody. Everybody in this country—except of course the PNM—is corrupt in Trinidad and Tobago. This is the only hope for integrity in this land, these people, and when we consider their background and their experience, we want to know, are these the paragons of integrity in this country?

**Mrs. James:** I am.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** You are? You are a paragon? I do not know.

**Mrs. James:** I am a person of integrity.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Okay, I accept that you are, you know. I have no reason to doubt that; but you see the company you keep, be careful of that company. Mr. Speaker, I just thought I would make a brief statement on that.

I also want to draw the attention—I would not go into this in any detail but the conduct of an election in Trinidad and Tobago is not the responsibility of the government or a political party. For the benefit of Members, let me just read section 71 subsection (11) of the Constitution:

“The registration of voters and the conduct of elections in every constituency shall be subject to the direction and supervision of the Commission.”

They are in this Constitution. So that when they attack the Elections and Boundaries Commission, they attack the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. Not only are they attacking an established institution, they are attacking the very basis—one of the foundations on which this democracy has been based.

I do not understand if they know the damage that they are doing to the democracy, the damage that they are doing to future elections, the damage that they are doing to this Parliament and the whole representation process by attacking the integrity of a commission about which we are told by section 71(12), in the exercise of its functions under this section:

“...the Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.”

Now, if members of this PNM could come and give us the evidence or provide evidence that the Elections and Boundaries Commission was under the direction and control of some other body or some other individual or some other agency, then, of course, they would show it to the public and go to court with that evidence because the critical thing here, Mr. Speaker, is this: no election anywhere in the world has been without some minor irregularity—nowhere in the world. I do not want to go into the history of the elections under the PNM. None has been without some minor irregularity. The question is, was the extent of that irregularity, however it may have occurred, such as to alter the outcome of the election?

**5.35 p.m.**

The question is, was the extent of that irregularity, however it may have occurred, such as to alter the outcome of the election? When we ask that question, they talk about voter padding. The difference between the UNC vote and the PNM vote was over 30,000 people, almost 35,000 people in this country, and they are going to tell me that irregularity extended to the extent that 35,000 votes in this country were somehow manipulated. This is what this PNM, these sore losers, are trying to tell the country.

Of course, there is a procedure. If they feel there are irregularities, all that a political party does, in Government or in Opposition, is assist voters in becoming registered. That is a legitimate function. A political party does not determine the electors' lists, whose names are on the lists. That is a function of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. It is a function which they have carried out admirably in election after election. Suddenly they lose, because they were expecting to win, and now it is the Elections and Boundaries Commission which they are targeting.

They do not understand the harm they are creating in Trinidad and Tobago by giving the impression, by questioning the credibility of one of the foundation pillars of our democracy and Constitution. They do not understand that. In order to get short-term advantage, this is what they are doing. I want to ask them to desist, Mr. Speaker. All the commissioners who are currently in the Elections and Boundaries Commission were put there since 1998. Is the Member saying that all the commissioners are crooks?

**Mr. Bereaux:** So what if I say so?

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Do you see, Mr. Speaker, what we are up against? It must be pointed out that the commissioners of the Elections and Boundaries Commission who are in charge and control of the election process are put there by the President after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Therefore, in appointing these people, the President exercises the discretion after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

I ask Members opposite that if they are impugning the integrity of the commissioners, are they saying that the President exercised his discretion in a certain way? Are they saying that the President appointed people of questionable integrity to the Elections and Boundaries Commission? I want them to answer that question and I want them to go to the public and tell the public that they said that the President has appointed people of questionable integrity to the Elections and Boundaries Commission. This is what they are doing.

**Dr. Rowley:** You are anticipating a motion.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Your motion has acquired the status of irrelevance in the light of the results of the election. This is a democratic country and he is free to bring his motion and talk about it. His motion is null and void and will have no effect on the representation and the constitution of this House of Representatives. I just thought I would mention that.

Mr. Speaker, this is the route that the PNM is taking. It is extremely unfortunate that when we thought we were maturing as a country and growing as a democracy, we have the PNM coming like sore losers and complaining about everything under the sun and trying to undermine the credibility of our cherished institutions in this country, including the Constitution and the Elections and Boundaries Commission. [*Laughter*]

They are compiling evidence. They wanted a recount. The poll process and counting, as the observer group recorded, was free, fair and transparent, but they want a recount. Every time they recounted Tunapuna, the UNC got more votes. Every time they had a recount, we got more votes and I think that in one of the other constituencies they abandoned the recount.

We have an Opposition that is hanging on to straws. I think their better option will be to accept their defeat and try to play a constructive role in the politics of this country, a constructive role in this House. There is a role for them to play in this; to uphold the democracy; [*Laughter*] to uphold the representative status of this House. There is also a role for them to play. There is also a role for them to come up with constructive ideas.

They went to the polls and they said not one positive thing in the whole five weeks or more of the campaign last year. Could they tell us what they said positively? What is their vision? What would they do to enhance the prospects for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to empower them, to bring more happiness into their conditions of life? They said not a thing. It was all corruption and more corruption; nothing to which this population could hang onto to say “Yes, the PNM is offering something. It is offering something with which we can identify”. There is no such thing coming from the PNM.

The population voted for us because they not only saw a party with a vision, a party that has told them where they want to take Trinidad and Tobago, but a party which has performed; which has, in fact, walked the talk. That is what we went to the population with. This is why, like some spoilt children, they are making all sorts of noises about the results of the elections and failing to take on their new role in the Opposition for the next five years and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, that, I think, is something to which I had to respond, because except we get this problem out the way, we do not want—but it will not happen in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is not Guyana. I think that they will be making a big mistake if they think that they can bring people out on the streets in order to try to bring down the legitimate government of Trinidad and Tobago. I think they are making a sad mistake because people are not going to come out onto the streets in a cause which is hopeless, in a cause which has no merit.

People of Trinidad and Tobago are smarter than that. They are not going to get them to come out to try to disrupt the work of a legitimate government and try to undermine this Government. That will not happen. Furthermore, I think that the security forces in this country are well alert and well prepared for any such eventuality, because the security forces are duty-bound to support the legitimate government of the country. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Valley:** It must, first of all, be legitimate!

**Hon. T. Sudama:** They are going to the courts and this Government awaits the decision of the court. It does not interfere with the judicial process to which they have access. We will await that decision. Apart from the judicial process, they have no other recourse, and when those judgements are made, that is the end of whatever recourse they thought they had in order to unseat the UNC Government.

Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of this term, it is important that we set the record straight. It is important that the legitimacy of this Government is firmly established and that it would not be questioned and not brought into any kind of disrepute by whatever the Opposition may wish to say. That, we have made very clear. We have the majority of the population, the majority of the voting population, on our side and there is a very foolish statement made by the Member for Diego Martin West that we have a population of 1.3 million, and if we have only 300,000 on our side, then we only have a minority of that.

I have never heard such nonsense in my whole life. The other million comprises a large section of the population below the age of 18 years, and a large section of that is supportive of the Government of this country. Even a large section that did not go out there and exercise their franchise is also supportive of the Government of the country. Who supports them? Their support is a dwindling quantity and that will continue to be what it projects itself to be under the present leadership. That will be a dwindling quantity.

I expect, perhaps, in the next coming months or years to see a challenge to the leadership of the PNM. After 1995 there was a challenge by my good friend, the Member for Diego Martin West, which was dealt with in a certain way. I do not think he was very happy about the way that challenge was dealt with, but there is going to be another challenge which will come very soon from those in the PNM who are very disturbed and very disgruntled with the present leadership of that party. That is all part of the democracy because the leader has said that if he lost another election, he would walk. He did not say to where he would walk. It could be that he walked to the toilet and came back to his seat. He has lost another election and we will see what he will do.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make a few remarks about the economy.

**Mr. Speaker:** Before you make those remarks, your speaking time has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Mr. Speaker, we have had a long discourse from the Member for Diego Martin West on what is happening to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and its fiscal position. He is free to say what he wants but I have not known him to be an economist, although that does not mean that one cannot make economic pronouncements. He spoke about the deficit, about a balance, and about prospects for the Trinidad and Tobago dollar.

Mr. Speaker, we must be very careful when we talk about prospects for the Trinidad and Tobago dollar, its strength and its stability, because if we put in train—heaven forbid—a process which causes the Trinidad and Tobago dollar to slide, it is not only the Government which will suffer; it will not be only the PNM which will suffer; it will be the whole country. I want to warn the other side. Let them be very guarded about what they say about the prospects for the Trinidad and Tobago dollar. We are all in this together. What I want to bring to the attention of this House is that this economy has experienced growth for five consecutive years and they want us to believe that it was some momentum established before 1995.

**5.50 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the secret to the growth of this economy is that we have been able to attract investment in Trinidad and Tobago like never before. That is how we were able to establish the growth, like never before in the history of this country, from 1996—2000. We have been able to attract foreign investment and in fact, induce local investment into the economy to the extent that we were able to create 70,000 additional jobs in this country, continuous period of growth, and of course, we have kept inflation low in Trinidad and Tobago and maintained the strength of that growth because of the management of the economy. So that while they are arguing and talking about prospects for the dollar, the international reserves of this country have been increasing by leaps and bounds and, today, we have the highest level of international reserves this country has ever had in the longest period of time except during the period of the oil boom.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about high oil prices. The oil prices have been high in the year 2000, not before. I recall the oil prices in 1998 dipped to almost \$9 a barrel or thereabouts, so that the oil prices from 1996 to now have been variable. We have experienced some very high prices in the last year, but in the previous years we were able to manage our fiscal position on oil prices which were not inordinately high. So this question that we have been managing because of a windfall is a lot of rubbish being propagated on the other side. I am saying that this whole issue of deficit and surplus has to be taken in a certain context. You cannot talk about deficit in one year, you have to take that deficit over a period of time and see what is happening with the stabilization of the revenue over time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that they are talking about a fall-off in revenues. What we have done is to engage in a high level of public sector investment in infrastructure. The case of the roads, the case of the airports, we are developing the seaports, we are developing the infrastructure, the public sector



infrastructure which, when you develop it, then the economy is going to benefit as a result of that, and from that, increased economy and increased revenues which you will get. Then, of course, you will be able to finance your fiscal position and meet your debt obligations. This is what we have done: we have laid the basis for the growth of the economy over a period of time by an unduly heavy investment in public sector infrastructure of which the airport is one part.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I wonder if the Member could tell us what are the Government's projections for the use of the total capacity of the airport? When is that likely to come about, and what are the projections for the use of the airport until it reaches its full capacity utilization?

**Hon. T. Sudama:** The Minister of Transport would offer you that explanation, but with the growth in the tourist trade with Trinidad and Tobago becoming the hub of commercial activities in the Caribbean with more people coming to Trinidad and Tobago, and establishing the airport as a hub as a transit point between North and South America and Europe, we have envisaged that within the next five years or so, we would have the airport coming on stream and making a substantial contribution to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. So the \$1 billion that you are talking about which we have expended, we would more than retrieve that through the operation of the airport as a critical element of the infrastructure of this country.

Mr. Speaker, you know it is the same old story. We would have built an airport, we would have spent less money on an airport; we would not have burdened the taxpayer with any money and so forth for building an airport, but you know four years elapsed and they could not build an airport. As the Prime Minister said, they could not put a post at Piarco. In four years' time they could not have done that, but we did it and created an important element of the infrastructure of this country if we are going to take Trinidad and Tobago forward. So this is a forward-looking Government, a forward-thinking Government. We embrace the future because we plan for it and this is what I would urge you and your party to do, otherwise you will be lost in the political wilderness for a very long time. Even if your expenditure is a bit high and you borrow money, but you are applying that money in investment, in infrastructure, which would redound to the benefit of the country, that would mean that more private sector investment, both foreign and local, would be encouraged in the country because one of the constraints to development is an inadequate infrastructure. So when you see the expenditure pattern, you will see, what in fact we have done.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, if you borrow, borrowing itself is not a bad thing if you borrow and expend that money in such a way that you are able to service your indebtedness: that is very critical. Your capacity to service your indebtedness is very important. It is not the amount you borrow, it is: Are you borrowing in a way that promotes the development of the economy in which we would get higher levels of revenue which would then be utilized to service your debt?

What has happened to us in the year 2000? Unfortunately, due to maladministration of the PNM government a lot of our debt-servicing has bunched in the year 2000: the repayment of capital, repayment of interest and so forth have bunched and this is why it appears unduly large in the year 2000. However, once we get over that hump, then the debt-servicing is going to reduce and for the next four or five years, that servicing would be below \$2.5 billion. That is the projection. The reason for this one year and, really, you cannot take this and look at it in one year, you have to look at it over a period of time.

We have to deal with the bunching and see how we can accommodate that but of course, in consequent years, in the subsequent years 2001, 2002 and 2003, that debt-servicing is going to be reduced and that is the projection that we have. So I think that a lot of hysteria is being aroused and particularly by the Member for Diego Martin West. He is very good at hysterical statements. He makes them in this House and tries to persuade the population, and with all the hysteria and "ole" talk they could not win the last election because people are not taking them on and the support they are having is gradually eroding as you can see what is happening in the core PNM constituencies.

The UNC is making inroad after inroad, we are growing from strength to strength in their core constituencies because people are understanding the role that we have to play. They are understanding that this UNC Government means business, they are understanding that this UNC Government wants to include everybody in the development process; they are understanding that they cannot afford to go with people without a vision and who are losers. The time for that has gone. The time for relying on ethnic support and the time for making all sorts of outlandish statements and wild promises has passed. Their core support is being eroded. The Member for La Brea got away by the skin of his teeth in the last election. That support is being eroded so why not see the light?

I urge the Member for San Fernando East to see the light. After they have lost an election, they come here and attack the electorate. They attack them, they denigrate their perception and so forth, because here you have the Member for Diego Martin West saying the reason they got so many votes is that we dangled this promise of dollar for dollar and people were taken in. Are you saying that the people of this country are fools? Is that what you are saying? You have lost the election, you cannot come to terms with that and not only do you attack the Elections and Boundaries Commission, the Government and the Constitution, but you are attacking the electorate now and saying that the electorate are fools and they believe in lies and propaganda and you expect to win elections in that way.

Mr. Speaker, I see no hope from their performance here today. I thought that maybe they would have learnt something in the last election, they have not learnt anything. They come in the same old-fashioned business as usual, attack upon attack, but offering no new vision for the people of this country. If you were given—heaven forbid—the chance to run this country again, what would you do for the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Not a word on that.

They talk about education and tertiary education and so forth and I think the PNM should be ashamed to talk about tertiary education in this country. We are at a level where the percentage of a certain age cohort between 18 and 30 years who have had tertiary education in this country is 6 per cent after 34 years of PNM rule, when developing countries have a percentage to the tune of 20 and 25 per cent of that age cohort who have had access to tertiary level education. Here you are boasting after 34 years of PNM rule that you are able to muster 6 per cent of the population in tertiary education. What is more, is that you try to undermine—and I agree there is only one sensible thing the Member for Diego Martin West said this afternoon and that is, we have to establish a University of Trinidad and Tobago, simply because UWI is a regional institution and, of course, we have only so much influence in a regional institution. We have to establish a university to serve our own needs and priorities. I am in full agreement with that sentiment, however, you do not do that by undermining the regional institution and this is what the PNM did over the four years they were in Government from 1991—1995. They would not pay their dues to the University of the West Indies and when we got into office, the arrears to the University of the West Indies was to the tune of \$300 million.

**6.05 p.m.**

He had the gall to come here and talk about UWI and tertiary education.

Mr. Speaker, I am not in any way ruffled by what was said by the Member for Diego Martin West nor the Member for Diego Martin East. He never says anything sensible anyway but the Member for San Fernando East never ceases to amaze me. We have the start of a new parliamentary term, of a new millennium and all he could get up and do is to talk about the attire of the Minister of Finance. He could not say anything about his vision for Trinidad and Tobago; what the PNM would do about governance of this country; what they would do about strengthening Trinidad and Tobago; what they would do about the empowerment of people; what he would do about reducing the inequities in the system. It shows the level of the mind of the Member for San Fernando East. When I was going to secondary school there was a Latin phrase—I do not know how many people in this House know Latin, but there was a Latin phrase, *parva parvos delectant* which means ‘small minds delight in small things’. When I heard the Member for San Fernando East that Latin phrase came to my mind. If the Attorney General wants me to put that in writing for him as part of his education in Latin, I would be happy to comply. I understand in the old days when one studied law you also had to study Latin but I think that has gone out of the window. Small minds delight in small things and, unfortunately, that is the view I have of the Member for San Fernando East.

I thought he would take this opportunity at the first sitting of this House to set the tone, particularly for the new Members like the Member for Tobago West; the Member for Arima; the Member for Point Fortin and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. He did not and that gives me an idea of where this Opposition is going under that leadership. I cannot see it going anywhere because it is a leadership that does not inspire anybody, particularly its own supporters.

Mr. Speaker, all these matters raised by the Member for Diego Martin West are without substance. When he spoke about the economy, he did not understand what he was speaking about; when he spoke about the elections process, of course, it is sour grapes that was motivating him; when he spoke about all those other issues that he brought into this debate—this is a debate on the variation of appropriation, about transferring moneys from one Head to another Head; where there was a shortfall, where there was a surplus, and we explained. The Minister of Finance went to great trouble to explain the nature of this shortfall and how we are dealing with it. We thought when we came here this would have been a rather short debate and that we would approve this Variation of Appropriation Bill, only to come here and hear all kinds of irrelevancies spouted, particularly on the question of who won the election and an attack on the integrity of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

This UNC Government is here to stay for five years, and I believe the quicker the Opposition understands that, the quicker they come to terms with that fact, the better for them. If they are living in the world of unreality, I want them to come down to reality. The court is not going to help in this. The electorate has decided, they have spoken, they have given their judgement on the PNM and the capacity of the PNM. Accept that judgement. The judgement of the people is the highest judgement in the land. Thank you.

**Mr. Nathaniel Moore** (*Tobago East*): Mr. Speaker, I am one of the new ones to this House. I have been in the other place for some four years and I have gained the reputation of the silent one or something of that sort but I do not want to spend too much time on that. From what I have heard this afternoon on this, my first sitting in the House of Representatives, and in spite of what I read in the Standing Orders, I think that one can stand here and say anything in any way. Of course, I have heard people coming from this House into the Upper House say that they like the atmosphere in the Senate and that they wish they could stay there, so you can imagine having spent about four years there how I feel about the standard of conduct in this House. I wonder what the younger folks are saying. The Standing Orders do not permit me to say that we have wasted a lot of time, perhaps I may be irrelevant if I say that, as much of what I heard this afternoon I dub as total irrelevance.

I do not have any problems with the Variation of Appropriation Bill. I think I understand the case of Tobago because I had asked about the meaning of a sentence in the report. Of course, it defied understanding until I got some sort of explanation from Tobago. So I have no problem with that, what I have a problem with is some of the boasts I have been hearing. For example, one Member stood here, I think it was the Member for Tunapuna, and said that Tobago got so much more funding under the UNC Government than under other regimes. I was sitting right across there when these things were being discussed. What I want to say about that statement is that it is just an emotional statement.

We were told some time ago that Tobago received some \$1.8 billion and we were given the impression that that was a lot of money but I told audiences elsewhere that that was not much money. They think we are people who do not know anything about money and they illustrated by saying if you are on a planet and you drop one dollar every day, how long you will live to drop one. Emotional. Those figures work out to no more than 2.55 per cent of the national budget; it is the same thing, the difference is that budgets are bigger now, therefore, Tobago got a bigger amount in terms of dollars.

**6.15 p.m.**

Percentage-wise, what is it? It averages out to be about the same thing. So we do not want to hear this boast and I would not want to hear that again, because I am not sitting over there now, as I was the last time. So we do not want to hear that kind of thing and we do not go and tell our people this kind of thing in the field, because we have already told them that that is only emotion.

Concerning the link road from L'Anse Fourmi to Charlotteville, that has been around all the time. I want to have friends all about and I do not want to say too much about that, but I am quite aware of the fact that there was some kind of appraisal done on the project and that the European people who wanted to finance the project do not want to finance it anymore, because, perhaps, some of them are consummate environmentalists, or however you want to call them. They are more concerned with the area between L' Anse Fourmi and Charlotteville than the areas, perhaps in Luxembourg and Paris, and some of those other places.

The point, really, of essence to me, is that if the Europeans did not fund the road, then it is our area and we could fund it, except we agree with them that it was not environmentally safe or economically sound. But if we wanted to build a road for Tobago to relieve a dangerous situation we have in Tobago—like if a part of the Windward Road is broken away, one part of the island may be cut off from the other because we may not be able to move quickly by alternative routes—my view and the view of many people here, I am sure, and most of Tobago, is that the project is one which is worthy of attention and should have been attended to long ago.

We, as Tobagonians, sit there and see money spent less worthily in many more places. But in typical style, you are holding up the project for bartering or bargaining, so that “if you do not behave yourself you do not get it.” We want you to understand that the people in Tobago are real people, like those here and whom I meet about the streets when I come to Trinidad. They are real, real people; people with good brains too, you know. If we reflect our minds, we would know that—real good brains; people like those who have been heading the public service down here from up there, and people who have been heading parts of the security, and so on. They are real people with real brains and they, too, have hopes; they have aspirations and they would like to see something good happening in the country where they live.

We do not intend to be irresponsible about funding or anything of the sort, but we heard the idea about mismanagement or misspending. Personally, I am wondering where this misspending went on in Tobago. I know the actors came there talking things about “ADDA, Ringbang, Ringbang, ADDA” and so on, which would actually attract the children. But in seriousness, if we talk about misspending of funds in Tobago, what are we referring to? Is it the roads that were built, the Providence Road into Les Coteaux and eventually to Moriah? Why do we not talk about the Plymouth Road? Are we thinking about the Easterfield Road going to the dam? Is that what you are speaking about? Where did the misspending go, into the schools? The Belle Garden School, the extension, the Golden Lane one, the Scarborough Secondary, the Signal Hill with the tech/voc wing or the one in Roxborough? Where were the funds misspent?

You are speaking about \$1.8 billion, I am told, for both recurrent and development funds in Tobago. The development funds did not meet the \$.8 billion, you know. So what are we talking about misspending? Are we talking about the repairs that were attempted on the Solomon Hochoy Highway? Is that what we are talking about? That was not in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Are we talking about what was spent for the Miss Universe Pageant? But that did not happen in Tobago. The rice that never reached, was that in Tobago?

When you sum up all those with what is massive overspending on the present airport project, which continues, to me, in my simple primary level of thinking, it does not amount to much. Even if you talk about \$12 million which was spent on ADDA, which we made an attempt to recoup, what attempt was made to recoup, say, the money lost in the rice deal? [*Desk thumping*] Can anybody tell us what attempts were made to recoup that? Today there is a court investigation and we are seeking settlement in terms of the ADDA. The Ringbang is investment still to come. It is no less dignified than the Miss Universe Pageant.

The point I am trying to impress upon us intelligent people is that we must not fool or try to deceive ordinary people who go about their daily business into thinking that a massive amount of money was spent in Tobago and misspent, and the people in Tobago are frivolous about financing Tobago’s business, and that we, here, in the bigger isle, especially sitting in this seat, were more solicitous of the good of Tobago than the Tobagonians. That is not so.

Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, as I said, I have to be very brief, but I should say these few things to give an indication of how we think in Tobago of the childish view they have of us as Tobagonians, and to tell them, please, do not continue harbouring that kind of mentality. They are not going to fool us with a few trinkets and dramatic words and blindfold us to come to see if they can tie us up.

*Finance Committee Report*  
[MR. MOORE]

*Monday, January 22, 2001*

Thank you for allowing me to speak these few words. My time is far overspent and I do not live here. This is one of the setbacks. I live in Tobago and I will have to try to find my home in Tobago to assist in whatever happens there, to prevent further deception of my people and misleading of the population.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds** (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you very much, hon. Members. I am proposing to make a contribution to this Motion before us: *Be it resolved* that this House adopt the First Report (2001 Session) of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates, 1999/2000.

Before I get into the meat or the substance of what I propose to deal with in respect of that Motion, it behoves me to make a few comments on some of the matters raised by the other side and to put some sense or a better interpretation to some of them.

The Member for Tunapuna, I think, had quite enough this evening. I think he was properly dealt with by the Member for Diego Martin West, in particular. Even in my friend's absence, I want to compliment the Member for Tobago East on his maiden contribution; a short but very solid contribution. I particularly liked the way he wound up, as he headed off to Tobago and, as he put it, to ensure that his people would not be tricked and trapped by the deceivers who have invaded the island of Tobago. As I talk about that, many people in this country, in my humble view, were tricked and trapped by those deceivers on the other side. I make no apology for saying that, but there are those of us who will not be bought and who will not be moved. We will do what we have to do to ensure that that kind of conduct is put to an end.

**6.25 p.m.**

We are not proposing to make too much of this, but a contribution was made about the attire of a certain Member of this House and the Member for Tunapuna, not surprisingly, found that there was nothing wrong with that and, in fact, if anything was wrong it was about the contribution made by the Member for San Fernando East on the matter. However, I remember the Member for Tunapuna standing here some time ago and chastising the media for writing Ministers' and Members' surname referring to them as "Panday" and "Assam" and not putting "Mr." before it. Again, a question of decorum and the way we treat the standards of this House, but his behaviour does not surprise me today because he sings loudly and well for his supper in the proverbial or in the metaphorical sense.



Of course the Member for Couva North exclaimed when he heard the Member for San Fernando East but that, too, does not surprise me because it was reported in the newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago, around the time of death of the former President of Guyana, Cheddi Jagan, when the body of the deceased was lying in state in Guyana, the Member for Couva North, as Prime Minister of this country went to the viewing attired in a casual shirt, a jeans and a pair of sneakers, with an Adidas bag over his shoulder—as the newspapers had it. Our Prime Minister. *[Interruption]* Yes. Yes, that was reported and it has never been refuted. I was not there and I am only making reference to what was reported. Also, there was a photograph, I am advised, accompanying the article.

It does not surprise me that they find no problem in the matter thus raised, but nothing that comes from the other side really surprises me. I make it quite clear, in keeping with the position taken by my party and for my own part, that I consider the Government to be an illegitimate government and I am determined to treat it as such until that wrong is corrected. *[Desk thumping]* That is my position. I consider that the people of this country, notwithstanding what the Member for Oropouche had to say—it does not matter. I do not depend on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for anything. Fortunately, I make my own way in the world. I am a poor man. I grew up poor, I struggle and will continue to struggle, but with pride, honesty and decency. *[Desk thumping]* I do not have to burrow my head. So, when you hear me use coarse and angry words, they bring me no joy. I know that my conduct in this Parliament today was not exactly what I myself would like it to be but I am vexed, according to the saying, and I do not intend to deny it. I am vexed and coarse. Understand that. That is my position.

Notwithstanding all that the Member for Oropouche had to say, I read the *Daily Express* of Thursday, January 18, 2001, where the Attorney General, the Member for Couva South, made a big statement about observing the law and the Constitution but he has had nothing publicly to say about the dastardly behaviour of voter padding. I am sure, as investigative as he is, informed as he is, he must be aware that a wrong was perpetrated against the people of this country and an election was stolen. So, when the Member for Tunapuna spoke today I could not hear him. I cannot respect his election as the Member for Tunapuna and I make no apology. So, too, the Member San Fernando West, and others. They have come together and perpetrated a crime and massive fraud against the people of this country and they are talking about denial.

I heard the Attorney General again yesterday, at some religious function—sometimes I am sincerely tempted to listen seriously to him because I have observed him for the last year to a year and a half; I have seen him go to the churches; I have heard him say that he wants to go to the churches and he wants to make peace with the Almighty God as we all should—that public officials should put aside rancour, hate and discord and all those things and become better human beings because he understands that one cannot be a good anything unless one is first a good person. As mere mortals we all strive to be good people. I would like him to find the spirituality and strength of character to stand up and tell his Government what was done is wrong. He knows about it. Then we will know, but he does not have the strength.

He told his staff at the Attorney General's department, his family and close friends, that he had come to an end with politics. He was going home. He told them that. If he wishes to deny it he can do so, but God is listening. Here he is again, and I saw him on the campaign defending the voter padding, telling people that they can vote as long as their names are on the list and that they are there to defend them. The Attorney General knows the truth.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** We are debating a Bill.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** I know we are debating a Bill.

Mr. Speaker, my attention was drawn to an article, again in the *Daily Express*, and I am in a reading mood today. I feel like reading today, so I am going to read; and I have a bit of the President's address to this House to read as well later. I read in the *Daily Express* of August 11, 1998, where a minister, one Roger Clarke, Jamaica's Agriculture Minister:

“...described his fellow countrymen as the ‘wickedest set of people on earth’.

Clarke, speaking at the funeral service of policeman Collin Gordon, who was killed while on an undercover assignment, lamented the high rate of crime in the country, the *Observer* newspaper reported.”

He is quoted again:

“ ‘We have departed from the ways of righteousness. We are sinners now more than we have ever been. We have become the wickedest set of people on earth’.

He added that while there was a proliferation of churches on the island, ‘the more people preach is the wickeder we become,’ Clarke was quoted as saying.”

When I saw this coming from a minister of government it struck me because sometimes you hear people saying, Mr. Speaker, that God has no place in politics. I have heard people say that God has no place in politics and if you stand and speak as a politician about God, people write—and I have seen it—and they say you assumed the role of a preacher. It is not that. When I read the words of this minister I heard a man who was in anguish; a man who was crying about what he was seeing around him in a society of death, murder, wickedness and mayhem, as we are now seeing in Trinidad and Tobago; as we have been seeing for a while. In the last couple weeks, since the beginning of the year, there have been 19 brutal, senseless, in most cases, murders.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am having difficulty relating what you are saying to the Motion that we are debating. So, except that you can come back to the Motion, I would have to ask you to guide me in terms of what you are saying as being relevant to this Motion.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** I was just talking about treachery, dishonesty and wickedness and the tricks and the fact that that Government is an illegitimate one and that they are the worst crime that has been put upon this nation. That is all I was saying. I was also answering some of the comments made by the other side.

Look at one of the untruths we heard this afternoon. Imagine the Member for Tunapuna, who should not even be here—illegitimately here as he is—got up here this afternoon, demonstrating his absolute ignorance, continuing to mislead the people of this country, talking about universal secondary education.

### **6.35 p.m.**

This is a matter that we have dealt with here before. As the Member for Diego Martin West correctly pointed out, their campaign was based on a lot of lies. He expressed surprise that we might continue the campaign here today, when in fact he is the one who is doing it because he perpetuates the untruth.

We were talking about the model school—that school that houses 587 children in the building that I asked about in the committee stage that preceded this debate. He raised the question of the model school. His Cabinet colleague, the Minister of Education, told this Parliament in the other place that the children in the model school are those who made anything between zero and 30 per cent in the examination and who needed remedial treatment before they could engage in a solid secondary curriculum or programme.

She thereby admitted that at least those 587 children are not in a secondary school *per se*. Some may be in the Excelsior Building on the Beetham which was converted from a primary school; many are in the so-called Form I Specials that they have established in the Junior Secondary Schools, but they are not pursuing secondary education programmes. They are doing a year or two of remedial work, just as was done with the post primary system, before they go on to the secondary curricula proper. So, to be boasting untruthfully that they achieved universal secondary education is a lie and I have said so several times. What I am repeating today, I am repeating simply to demonstrate that the Member for Tunapuna continues with the untruths and they will not stop.

While we are on the question of the model school, the Member for Tunapuna said today that many of these children, because of the situation that hitherto prevailed, were left on the dung heap—a word that he got from the twisted tongue of the Member for Couva North.

He was saying that hundreds of thousands of children fell on the dung heap—10,000 children a year under the PNM fell on the dung heap. He used the words “dung heap” today. In my view, that whole side is a dung heap. He said that those children fell prey to drugs, early and unwanted pregnancies and crime, but he disregarded the fact that almost daily in the newspaper we see that it is now necessary for armed security guards in secondary schools. They are not those they said fell on the dung heap. They are the ones in secondary schools at all levels. A girl was raped in a school a couple weeks ago.

Therefore, the question of crime, early pregnancies and drugs among the young in the school population has nothing to do with whether they went to secondary school or not, there are other reasons for that. So if I allow the Member for Tunapuna who sits in a Cabinet that shapes policy to mislead himself like that, then he will ask himself the wrong questions and when he asks himself the wrong questions, he must arrive at the wrong answers. I want him to be careful how he deals with these matters.

I had the opportunity to read what was recorded in the *Hansard* about the statement that they went on the campaign trail with, purportedly made by the Member for Diego Martin East. My understanding of the statement was that he was commenting on the places where they built these schools. He never said that the children were “douens” and wild animals; he asked whether they were building them. He was making the point that those areas may not have the number of children to justify those schools. [*Interruption*] That is all right. I am not bothering with you all. You are illegitimately there. I will ignore you.

While we are talking about those schools— [Interruption] I know. We understand. You are running the country down, and the disrespect and dishonour you see in this Parliament from the day the Parliament was inaugurated is as a result of what you all brought to it.

Hon. Members, I had asked, in Finance Committee, a few questions in respect of that same model school on Sackville Street, now called Ibis High School. As I use the word “Ibis”, I remember one of their close friends is now before the court for slaughtering and eating the Ibis. That too must be *sub judice*, but I read it in the newspaper. One of their friends was shooting and eating the national bird.

Anyway, they now call it the Ibis High School. [Interruption] I have a problem, you know. You have become the Government’s—and I use the word again in a metaphorical sense—hatchet man. You “hatcheted” Jack Warner. You are just taking instructions. You continue.

I was speaking about the model school and I specifically asked the Minister of Finance to provide this Parliament, to make sense of what is happening, with the name of the landlord from whom the Government, through the Ministry of Education, rented that facility on Sackville Street.

I notice they were careful to tell me who the agent is—NEALCO. However, it has not been revealed who is the owner of the building. This is something that we want to know. What is the secret? I have also asked for the Government, in the spirit of accountability, to provide this House with a copy of the agreement entered into between them and the landlord. The Government is quiet about that, too. There is no copy of the agreement—and they talk about transparency. No agreement! What are they trying to hide?

I noted here from the figure—they had to tell us because I asked and at least they decided to tell us—that they are spending \$150,000 a month in rent for that place on Sackville Street to house 587 children—children they decided should go into the model school. They are paying \$150,000 a month, a total of \$1.8 million a year; and for the two-year lease agreement, \$3.6 million.

To make matters worse, hon. Members, after taking these children and placing them in that institution, they then decided to do last what they should have done first—have these children tested for audio, speech and sight defects. The Minister shamelessly told this country that upon those tests they were shocked to discover that 50 percent of the 587 children had problems with their sight—either long or short-sighted. It means that those children may have been underperforming in the

primary schools, not because of any mental deficiency or incapacity to learn *per se*, but because they probably could not see the blackboard, whiteboard or the notes, as the case might be. [*Interruption*] You hear the response? So 10,000 of them could not see well and you told me 50 per cent.

**6.45 p.m.**

I would not reply to the Minister, you know. I would just leave her.

The point I am making, hon. Members, is that they have now discovered that they had sight deficiencies when, if they had had the children tested before, they would probably have realized that a pair of glasses or contact lenses could have rectified the position and they probably would not have made under 30 per cent; but that is the way this Government behaves; determined it was to spend, as I am told—because she did not tell us the cost of repairs on that building. I am told and she is quoted in the paper as saying—and this is the *Trinidad Guardian* of September 3, 2000—the hon. Minister is quoted as saying that they spent \$7 million to repair somebody else's building.

When we hear that Government says \$7 million, we could almost be certain it is really \$15 or \$16 million they are talking about—taxpayers' money. We do not know on whose building they spent \$7 million. She does not want to tell us, because I asked her and she did not reveal it and she says, and I quote from the same article:

“‘At the end of the day, the initial outlay will be about \$7 million,’ ...

This sum is far below the estimated \$25 million Government has spent on each of the ten secondary schools built under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme...”

Now, she is comparing the establishment of a brand new school owned by the Government to a repair of \$7 million on somebody's building—no doubt maybe a friend—for two years and, you know, they talk about performance and prudence, but she now throws this figure of \$25 million at us and we must accept it like the gospel and we must accept it—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** I think this hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant has been in this House long enough to know that you refer to a Member not as “she” but as “the Member”, okay. You have said it at least half a dozen times but I think you are going on; so would you please refer to the Member of the House by the constituency which she represents. Thank you.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** The Member for Siparia—well, how do I continue the sentence? I must use the word “she”. I have difficulty. If I say “the Member for Siparia”—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I gave you my ruling. If you are going to defy what I have said, there are Standing Orders which deal with that kind of behaviour in the House. I am saying you refer to the Member as “the Member for Siparia”.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** So I cannot use the pronoun “he” or “she” in this House?

**Hon. Member:** Take your seat.

**Mr. Speaker:** Let me repeat it one time again if you did not get it the first time. Take your seat. Take your seat.

**Mr. Bereaux:** You have to say, “Would the Member please take his seat”, not tell him so.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Would the Member take his seat? I have ruled that you will refer to a Member in this honourable House as the Member for the constituency which he or she represents and you are trying to not comply with my instructions. I want to remind you that there are Standing Orders, and I am sure you are well aware of that, that control this sort of behaviour. You may proceed.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** [*Interruption*] Of course I won my seat. I got 11,335 votes. I increased my vote by 1,500 on this occasion, notwithstanding the filthy machinations—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Assam:** You want to know if it is a friend we rented the building from. Do you know who we rented the CSO office from?

**Hon. Member:** Rahael.

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

**Mr. F. Hinds:** We must accept this figure of \$25 million, but you know—[*Interruption*] Yes, it—hon. Members, at the beginning of this Secondary Education Modernization Programme, the Member for Siparia went to Cabinet [*Desk thumping*]*—yes, you all are just a—well, you know my feelings—went to Cabinet with an original estimate of \$138 million for 10 schools, \$13 million*

each. In less than one and a half years, in typical UNC style, that figure moved from \$138 million to \$245 million. So when the Member talks about 10 schools at \$24 million or \$25 million each, there is a jump, from the original estimate of \$13 million to \$25 million, of approximately \$12 million, and we must accept that. However, we understand why.

The same Member for Siparia tried to get rid of the contract manager, Watson Construction Limited and, without tender, tried to bring in the MTS which falls in the line—well, the line Minister is the Member for San Fernando West—and Tidco, the line Minister or the man who you hatcheted is Mr. Jack Warner. So that they were determined to get the building of these schools from under the prudent management of Watson Construction Limited so that it could be dealt with by Minister Sadiq Baksh, the Member for San Fernando West as he now is, and Jack Warner in Tidco as he then was before he was hatcheted by the Member for Tunapuna on the instructions of the Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Bereaux:** “Nah”, Couva South.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** I am so sorry, Couva North, possibly Couva South. So suddenly we are talking about \$24 million. I would like the Minister, because we are told—a birdie told us that to justify this steep, almost 100 per cent, increase in the cost of a school and in the cost of the project, the Prime Minister told his colleagues that it was because the architects increased the size of the schools. I would like—if the Minister enters this debate she must really explain to us, even if they put on two or three extra rooms on a building, how could it double the cost? Then they talk about performance.

I still would like to know who is the owner of the building. I am told that the building was offered to the Government, because the Minister of Finance tells us here that when they were dealing with the lease agreement, that was foregone because they are now engaged in discussions for purchasing the building and I would like to know very clearly whether the money that has been expended thus far, the \$7 million and the so-far \$1.8 million for the one year under the lease, or the \$3.6 million for the two years under the lease, will be incorporated in the purchase price, because the Government was offered the building for \$12 million. So I want to know clearly whether that is the state of affairs or whether, in addition to the contract price of \$12 million, the \$7 million and the \$3.6 million would have gone a-begging in typical UNC style. I want to know these things. These are simple questions and we look forward to simple answers.



Hon. Members, part B of the response, because I asked specifically whether someone having passed, according to them, for these schools, these schools are mandated to offer all their services at no cost to the students or parents, because they have been telling the people of this country that all the children “passed Common Entrance”. As one woman said, just like the Government—you know, they are trying to get losers into the House; whether you pass or fail you could be a Minister—[*Interruption*] a Common Entrance Government as one lady so aptly described them. I wanted to know specifically—[*Interruption*] yes—whether those schools are allowed or mandated to offer all their services freely, because, after all, if a child passes the Common Entrance Examination for a secondary school it is not usual that they have to pay for courses.

The Minister comes here and, no doubt against the background of the Education Act, section 22—section 22 of the Education Act is quite clear, you know. Under the side note “Prohibition of the imposition of charges or other requirements on pupils”—I would not bother Members to read all of it but what it says in essence is that schools are not permitted to impose fees or other charges for programmes that they run in the particular schools. The Minister of Finance told us in the document we got that, in fact, the schools are mandated to offer all their services at no cost.

Well, I have in my hand here a document brought to me by a bewildered parent from a school in Diego Martin, and I am unwilling to mention the name of the school because this is a very vicious Government and they go witch-hunting. We have seen it. We saw forensic auditors tell this Government certain things—which firm was it, Peat Marwick—in the NFM rice deal, and when that forensic accounting unit told the Government what it found, the next thing you know, they were rewarded with a dismissal from all other State contracts—that Government. So I am refusing, but you can trust me, hon. Members. I have a document where a student was made to pay \$455 twice, in a school that she was supposed to have passed for in Diego Martin for programmes run by the same school.

When I contacted the principal as a concerned citizen, as a legitimately elected representative of the people of Laventille East/Morvant, [*Desk thumping*] the principal told me that they offer certain courses and, in fact, they charge money for them and right now they are in discussions with the Minister. The Minister has been promising them to rectify this situation and to pay for all the fees, but that has not yet been done. So that there are children in some of those schools that they have “passed” for, according to that Government, that illegitimate time-saving Government; that, in fact, schools are still charging the children and so far, at least, the Minister has done nothing about it; but they talk a lot about performance.

I heard the Member for Oropouche talking about overseas travel and trying to justify their wanton expenditure on travels up and down—the Prime Minister, the most travelled Prime Minister in our country’s history—and the Member for Oropouche was attempting to justify it. He spoke in terms as though some of the organizations to which he claimed Trinidad and Tobago belongs, it is as if we only joined them in 1995. They were always there and we were always party to most of them, if not all, and he tried to justify it. I remember them criticizing PNM travel by ministers in government. It was good for the UNC but “it ain’t good” for the PNM. So today he tries to justify it.

It has come to our attention—and they could check it if they want. In the Ministry of National Security—and it was noteworthy that during the campaign crime was such a major issue, they having come on a platform of dealing with crime. Mind you, I told this House that 11 of those murders were in my own constituency and eight of the people involved, eight of the victims, were people with whom I actually interfaced as a Member of Parliament, not as a friend, at least in most of the cases, but there are Members on that side who are close friends with all kinds of characters in my own constituency; however, we will hear more about that in due course. All that does not surprise me.

The Ministry of National Security is responsible for the police service, the army, the coast guard, the investigating agencies and the security forces in this country; so crime falls within the ministry’s purview. So I am dealing with the Ministry of National Security. I am told they had a vote for \$700,000 in the last budget and, between September and December 11, every single cent of that vote for overseas travel in the Ministry of National Security was totally utilized. We heard not a word from the Minister of National Security accounting to the nation during the campaign. He has slipped quietly off the scene just like the Minister of Finance with a cigar in the newspaper as you heard earlier today, hon. Members—[*Interruption*] former Minister of Finance. Well, I am, you know—former Minister of Finance. He never came on the platform to account for his stewardship. He has simply gone laughing his way into early retirement, no doubt being able to look after his affairs better than those of us who still labour and toil as poor people: but that is okay.

**7.00 p.m.**

My Bible tells me, “I have seen the wicked spread like a green bay tree and then wither like a herb at noon day” and I am not afraid. At the opening of the Parliament here I looked across the floor to the Member for Caroni East and I

made a comment to you and he told me that, “All yuh will stay there for five years”, and I told him then as I tell you all now, when one is dealing with truth and dealing with God, as we strive to do, and when one behaves in the way that we behave, unlike the way they behave, eternity is our time, time is on our side. Five years is nothing in the context of eternity, so go ahead with your five years.

**Mr. T. Sudama:** Eternity will pass you by. Have yourselves a ball for the time being.

**Dr. Rowley:** Like Dhanraj did?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Like Dhanraj did, of course, as I am being reminded. I hope that the words the Attorney General used yesterday—I believe that he means them. [*Interruption*] I am saying categorically without apology, I believe that he meant them, but it is easier to say than to live and to practise. I have seen him try to improve his public image. Sometimes I had to be reminded that 2000 years of history would not be wiped away so easily, according to Bob Marley. It is not easy.

The Member for Tunapuna quoted Macbeth today and I can quote Macbeth too, Lady Macbeth, when she had an apparition and she spoke about the dagger. I can quote Macbeth, but I would not go there. I am not surprised at the conduct of this Government. It does not surprise me. That is why I am angry, because I see what is happening in our society and I know that we are supposed, as politicians, as national leaders, to provide leadership.

We are talking about education and expenditure on education and an appropriation of the budget to deal with education, be it model school or otherwise, and I said I am in a reading mood. The *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday, October 23, 1997 made very interesting reading complete with a picture of Minister Sadiq Baksh. He went to a graduation exercise at the ASJA Boys’ College and he is reported to have told those children, our young flowers who we pretend to be so concerned about—in 1997 he told them that character, not knowledge, is power. He said that nothing can be more powerful than character; not riches, not scholarships, not status, not authority. He said that all of those things are frail and flimsy before character. He said further, the world is too full of hypocrisy and mere lip-service. That they were graduates and adult citizens of the future who must change the world and make it a better place in which to live.

I heard the Member for Oropouche say today that the real question about voter padding is not that there was not voter padding, but the real question is whether the amount of voter padding could impact on the election outcome.

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

**Mr. T. Sudama:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the Member is misleading the House. I never used the words “voter padding” in my contribution. I said irregularities; minor irregularities in elections over time.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** In any event, I have heard that nonsense argument before. When I heard it, I heard it on the radio. In fact, I heard the standby Member for Ortoire/Mayaro say at the beginning of this, “In any case, what about the numbers. That is only 252”. I heard him say so. I was in the car with my son who just passed his Common Entrance Examination, an impressionable 12-year-old, and I said to him, “Son, you could be charged for robbery of one dollar as you could be for one million dollars. It is the deed, the act of robbery that is critical”. One case of voter padding encouraged by the Government is one case too much.

**Mr. Assam:** One lie is one lie too much.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** You should not talk about lies, Member for Tunapuna. You have comprehensively demonstrated to be an unmitigated liar today and you should hush!

**Mr. Speaker:** Member, I want to advise you to address your remarks to the Speaker, please.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Under the Ministry of National Security, I see here at page 12 of the Schedule, Head 22: Ministry of National Security, an increase in their allocation for repairs to vehicles of \$700,000. I have a document in my possession. I found it in my mailbox. I do not know how it got there.

**Mr. Assam:** Lie again.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** That document revealed that the firm that provided the Government with the lease maintenance arrangement for the Cherokee jeeps was called upon to repair one of those 999 Cherokee jeeps—and they are close friends of the Government; everybody knows that. Bedfellows! They were called upon to repair the transmission that went bad in one of those jeeps. In fact, the car I now drive is valued at about \$112,000; a 323. Upon completion of the job, the repair firm sent the Police Service, “Motor Pool” as they call it, indirectly the Government, National Security, a Bill for \$95,000, to repair a transmission.

**Mr. Narine:** Platinum.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Just put \$17,000 more and they could buy a whole vehicle. A platinum transmission, as I am being prodded to remember, cost \$95,000. That is the kind of obscenity for which taxpayers in this country must pay. It is simple. I am proud to be associated with what I have met on this side when I came to be a parliamentarian for the PNM. I am very, very proud.

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

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by a further 30 minutes. [*Mr. H. Bereaux*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. F. Hinds:** I am very proud, as I was saying. I was called by Radio 104 a few days ago, Thursday, to speak in an hour-long programme on the question of integrity in public affairs, morality in public affairs. I jumped at the opportunity, especially when I was told that one Dr. Roodal Moonilal of the UNC would represent the other side. When I got there, they were in disarray because he did not show. They tried to get one Unanan Persad, he did not show. They tried to get others from the UNC, none of them!

I was wondering to myself why they would not want to come to speak about morality in public affairs. Why would a government and all its friends not be willing to come and speak to the nation about an important matter such as morality in public affairs? I went and I said what I had to say. It is unfortunate that none of them came. I understand why, in my own mind, they cannot watch us with a straight face and defend their dismal, dishonest record.

**Mr. Assam:** One must pay one's debts to be moral in public affairs.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Go outside and say it. I have already dealt with that in this House. I am a poor, hardworking man and I will struggle to do the best I could. I am not rich like you all. I do not have money to put in a Swiss bank and the Bahamas. No United States agency has to investigate me for some swift shipments of money out of here. I do not have any friend called Dhanraj Singh—UNC's Dhanraj Singh—who, to my mind, represents the ethic and ethos of the UNC and the rest have not got caught yet.

Dhanraj Singh is the UNC and the UNC is Dhanraj Singh. They cannot disassociate themselves from that. Now I will quote Macbeth. They could try to wash their hands of the blood as they like. Dhanraj Singh is them and they are Dhanraj Singh! He came out of their bosom, and you, Member for Tunapuna, are here on the basis of the ethic that led him to where he is because you are here illegitimately as well. You are also a beneficiary of foul, unfair means.

When I speak to people in my constituency, including only yesterday, I told a group of 45 young mothers, because we were dealing with the crime situation in Laventille, that a lot of mothers and women contribute in a small way, sometimes unfortunately, by unwittingly allowing their children to enjoy things that they know they could not ordinarily earn. So, when one's child comes home with something he did not work for, send him back!

I know that they have looked at some of their colleagues on that side and have seen who came to this Government a mere five years ago, now have three and four jeeps and big cars and houses. "Break down house, build up more house." Pressure! That is why Government means survival to some of them. I have lived without that and could continue.

I heard the Member for Tunapuna, in the course of this debate, speak about the first time a Speaker was arrested in the history of the Parliament. Yes, that might be the first, but this Government is a government of many, many firsts. Some sordid firsts! The Member for Couva North was the first Prime Minister of this country to have come to office and become Prime Minister with five serious criminal charges around him, including two for attempted rape and three for indecent assault. That is a first! Two Members on that side, before they even became Members of Parliament—it might be *sub judice*, so let me not say it.

**Mr. Bereaux:** It is not *sub judice*! They have sworn to false declarations.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Of course. Do not forget the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. We have information—and he must stand up in this House and deny it—that in 1995 he personally approached somebody on this side offering the Ministry of Education—when the Member for Tabaquite was already the Minister of Education—and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, to a Member on this side to cross the floor along with other cash inducements. He went and knocked on the Member's door to cause a Member to cross the floor for inducements. Let him stand up and deny it! He cannot get up. That is why they cannot go on Power 102 to talk about morality in public affairs. We are not talking about private affairs, that is your business. Who wants to dance with Balroop could dance with Balroop, that is your private business, we are talking about public affairs, a principle with which we have lived. Every time they talk, you hear about John O'Halloran and Francis Prevatt and when I investigated the facts of those matters, the story has been misrepresented. Even today I heard the Member for Tunapuna talking about that and about moneys that were recovered and, as I understand it, some firm called Sam P. Wallace gave an undertaking to the Government that they would—*[Interruption]*

**7.15 p.m.**

Sam P. Wallace gave the Government of the day \$12 million but got them to agree to take over all their liabilities in Trinidad and Tobago which totalled \$49 million. It is a “fast” one, and without any admission of corruption against the same John O’Halloran. Those are the facts, but they have been rewriting the history of this country and there was a time when we may have sat quietly and let them continue, but that “ain’t” so again. I could go on with some more ignoble firsts, and I use the word “ignoble”, it may not be a proper grammatical English-known or constructed word, but Bob Marley used the word “ignoble” and I like it. I could highlight a number of the first times. The first time I heard about voter padding in all my life was in this election, the first time, but we would come to that at a later stage. I would not bother with that at the moment, do not worry about that.

Then in Appendix 1 of the note we received from the Minister of Finance, I had asked for a list of all the private institutions to which our children were sent and I got a list of 22, and so far, according to this, the amount paid is a total of \$931,000. There is no indication as to whether it is a month or a year but that is the kind of figure at which we are looking. So they are now paying for places in secondary schools, something that was done in order to accommodate all the children, according to them, all the children passed the Common Entrance Examination.

Hon. Members, I find that the questions that I had asked were not specifically answered and I still want answers to those questions particularly with respect to the B. H. Rose Building. *[Interruption]* I have no trouble, this is the second time I have been elected to Parliament. I have no trouble, I had a life before and I certainly would have a life after and I do not have anything to hide. I am sure about one thing, that at the end of the day, whether we like it or we do not like it, our merciful Father will direct all of us, and at the end of the day, he will bring sanity to all the madness that has taken place and is taking place.

As I conclude, I place on record that I was particularly impressed, exhilarated even, by the position in that address to this honourable Chamber on Friday, January 12, 2001 which was delivered by His Excellency, the President of our Republic. I was absolutely impressed, because what he said, in effect, is what I

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wish I could say all the time. We have been elected by the people in 16 constituencies and they want us to come here and represent their interests, and we must, but for my personal part, like the President, I will simply leave you all in the hands of the Almighty God, fearlessly. I would leave you all in the bosom of the Creator at the foot of the cross as it were. I would leave you all right there. I think he did an excellent job. As he said and I quote, with your leave, hon. Members.

“I do not propose to add to the words of blessing, to the invocation of blessing and the adoration given by our spiritual leaders. I accept their words of spiritual guidance and their words of wisdom. It is in this atmosphere I ask that we lift our hearts and our spirits to the God whose supremacy this nation acknowledges and we seek his guidance by prayer, all of us. As we leave this historic opening ceremony and go our diverse ways, let us remember that the supreme God is available to us for our guidance in all our actions and all our thoughts.”

I commend those words in particular to my friend, the Member for Couva South, who has been hovering around these hallowed Chambers for some time past. I wish you well, I know that you are very influential in your Government and your Cabinet, exert more positive influence, otherwise Trinidad and Tobago is doomed to chaos and confusion.

Hon. Members, I thank you.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with other hon. Members in wishing your good self and all of us who have joined this Chamber the best for the year 2001, but in doing that, I think many of us sitting on these Benches are struck by déjà vu because it seems that all the comments, all the whining and complaining that we heard today are the same things we have sat here and heard for five years coming from the other side.

Mr. Speaker, they took the same thing out onto the campaign and the platform and they did not convince a single member of the public, that is why we are on this side of the House and they have remained on that side of the House. Therefore, I trust when I listen to the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant—I notice that he has become very spiritual and started praying, at one point he even sounded as though he was preaching to us. He reminded me so much of a man who had come to his end and was making peace with his maker, with his God.



Mr. Speaker, the one word that really symbolizes and places clearly the thinking and feeling of the PNM when they deal with the children in this country is the word that has been used by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant today when he said of our children writing the Common Entrance Examination, that we said they all passed and we were doing the same with losers, he was placing our children of this country as losers; that is what he said, Mr. Speaker. The analogy of the children of this country being losers and that has been the hallmark of the PNM's education policy under the Manning regime, definitely under the Manning Cabinet. They looked at the children as being losers and failed to make any provision whatsoever to deal with the future of those children. That is why when this Government, the Panday Administration, took up the battle on behalf of the children of this country, as Minister Assam said, put children first, they could not understand it, and it is very sad that up to now when all the children are in school, they still fail to get it, they cannot get it right. They still come here casting aspersions, making it appear that in some way this Government was corrupt, or operated in an under-handed manner in placing children in schools. So it is the question with the B. H. Rose Building.

The Member wants to know who the landlord is. Unfortunately, we had passed this brief to the Ministry of Finance and perhaps through some oversight they did not include the specific answer as to who was the landlord. The landlord for the property is B. H. Rose Limited, the rest of the procedure is set out in the answers given to you in this honourable House. This was the question that the Member asked. B. H. Rose Limited is the landlord of that building.

I am saying that they failed for all these years and when he is talking about the Minister of Education dealing with the sight problems, when we tested the children in the schools we found that 50 per cent of those children had deficiencies in their vision and we took steps to address those problems. He is still saying the school is a primary school, it is post-primary school, it is not a secondary school and that has been their failure all along. He says, in the same way we have placed them into institutions, we are giving them remedial training, I ask him: What did they do? What did the PNM do when, every year, thousands and thousands of children were left out of the school system totally. What did they do? They did not even give them vision testing to determine whether something was wrong with their eyesight, they did not give them hearing testing. They gave them no testing whatsoever and they cooked up the greatest deceit on the children of this country that we have ever seen by saying that children passed the Common Entrance Examination and children failed that examination.

Mr. Speaker, it was deceitful to say that a child under the PNM had failed the Common Entrance Examination when the truth of the matter was not a question of failing or passing the examination, it is that they, as a PNM government failed to provide a place in a secondary school for the children. That is the only failure. There was no failure on the part of the children, the children are not losers. So when you look at the statistics and their own task force report you will recall that famous White Paper. I have had recourse to that White Paper so many times because it comes back to what Minister Assam said and what we knew when I said it was déjà vu for the past five years. We are back here, hopefully enough, not the same, but it started the same. They knew, they wrote, they had everything on paper, but the Minister reminded us we used to call them the “coulda”, “woulda”, “shoulda” government because they had it on paper, but implemented nothing. So it is in relation to provision of secondary school places.

In relation to providing school places, the White Paper, Task Force Report set out very clearly the great imbalance there was, the great deficiency in the provision of the secondary school places, but before I go into that, still in relation to what has been said by the Member for Diego Martin East and Member for Laventille East/Morvant in relation to that B. H. Rose Building, Mr. Speaker, if I had to do it all over again, I would do the same and place those children out of this Port of Spain area in a school, the Port of Spain Model School—whatever they want to call it—the Ibis High School, I would do it again if I had to do it again.

**7.30 p.m.**

So when he raised the issue about procedures, the Member for Diego Martin West was very vociferous in saying, “I told you so, if you had listened to us and had followed procedures and so on the former Member for Pointe-a-Pierre would not be where he is now in relation to the court and charges in the court”. This is the first time in the history of this country that the law is taking its course where there have been allegations of misconduct on the part of a government official. No one on this side identified any of the persons on the PNM benches, who over the years, it has been alleged, were corrupt. It was their own Member for Laventille East/Morvant, his conscience probably bothered him, who identified O’Halloran and Prevatt and all the others. Throughout the history of the PNM all the allegations of corruption, not one thing did the PNM Government do to deal with the issue of corruption at the level of high office. It took a UNC Government for that to happen.

What further did this Government do to show its commitment? You remember what we said in 1995—those who do the crime will do the time. We meant it then and we still mean it. We did not just talk that talk, we walked the walk because it was this Government again, for the first time in the history of the country, that put into place a package of legislation and the mechanism to deal with corruption from the highest to the lowest. They did not do a single thing while they were in office. When we started with integrity legislation—the Attorney General just reminded me that since 1976 an integrity commission was to be put in place, the PNM remained in office from 1976—1986 and it took the NAR to begin to put integrity legislation into place. After that, it was back to when the UNC came into office. The Manning regime did nothing with respect to integrity legislation which had been proposed since 1976. If he was so concerned about corruption and so on, what did they do with integrity legislation when they were in government? It took this Government during the last five years to revise, revamp and strengthen integrity legislation.

It was the UNC Government, in the past five years again, that passed a law for the setting up of the parliamentary committees. Mr. Speaker, you may recall that; you were a Member of the House when we set up the parliamentary committees so we can bring from the highest to the lowest in public office to answer. Accountability and transparency, those are our watchwords and if there are those who fall out of that loop the law will deal with them.

The Freedom of Information Act—it was again the UNC Government that put that piece of legislation into place so that members of the public can have access to documents, to information within the public sector, in the purview of the ministries, in the state agencies. Again transparency and accountability. So when the Member for Diego Martin West accuses this Government of breaching procedure, and tells us “I told you so, one of you are now on charges”, I say that is because of the thrust and the commitment of this Government to integrity, to transparency, to accountability, to fairness and justice.

What about justice in this country? Those on that side preach all the time to us about justice in this land of ours. What about justice? As far as I know the law has always been the presumption of innocence. A man is innocent until proven guilty. I do not know if they have condemned persons. They talk about voter padding, they talk about Minister on charges and so on. I do not know if they have taken upon themselves the roles of judge and jury and executioner but I know, and the right thinking persons in this country know, first of all that a man

is innocent until proven guilty. Mr. Speaker, if you have done the crime, this Government will ensure that you will do the time. We hold no brief for anyone, we have put the package of legislation in place. The Prime Minister always told them, if they have evidence of corruption, bring it, we are not afraid.

I come back to the B.H. Rose building. There is nothing in the Ministry of Education or nothing for the Minister of Education to hide with respect to the B.H. Rose building. If I have to do it again, I will do it again to make sure those children are placed in that school.

**7.40 p. m.**

So, first of all, he says that the Member spoke about a plane that was chartered to go to Haiti. The *Hansard* is there, you know, and that *Hansard* we will return to when we talk about the Member for Diego Martin East. We will have to put to rest, once and for all, that “douen and parrot” talk from the Member for Diego Martin East. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant said he gave his understanding. We do not want his understanding; we need to know what was in that *Hansard* when he called the children of this country “douen and parrots”. Even today he says, “lie” again, when the Member mentioned it.

So a plane to Haiti was chartered by the Member for San Fernando East when he was in government. He says it was a lie when the Minister said \$1 million; that it was only \$70,000. You see, they do not listen. Or if they do listen, they do not understand. Because what the Member said was that they chartered a plane and they went to Haiti and it cost \$1 million. What do you understand from that, Mr. Speaker? That the charter cost \$1 million? Or the charter and the going and the trip and everybody else? That is what the Member said, \$1 million. They chartered the plane and they went and it cost \$1 million.

The Minister spoke about others. He spoke about when they went to Hong Kong and about the cost of that whole jaunt, from Jamaica to Hong Kong and back. Those were the days of the hiring by faxes and so on. Hong Kong flu, he called it.

The Ministers spoke about the farmers. He got up and said again, implying we only do things in our constituencies. So the farmers only got money for Penal and for Moruga and all these other places, and when the Member said, Paramin, he said, “lie”. He said the document does not have Paramin anywhere in it. I do not understand, again, if it is they read and do not see, but page 12 of the document circulated in this Parliament very clearly says, Paramin, Santa Cruz, \$97,724.54.

**Hon. Members:** What year?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** It is the 1999/2000 fiscal year. That is the year we are dealing with, the 1999/2000 fiscal year. Read it! The document is there. We have come for a variation of appropriation for the 1999/2000 fiscal year. Here is the document. They asked us how did we spend this money; who did we give it to? Were those not the questions when we were in committee? Which farmers did we give it to? Look, it is there! Paramin, Santa Cruz, \$97,724.54.

**Mr. Assam:** And they are trying to make me out to be a liar. Dangerous people, PNM! Wicked!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** You see the attitude with the losers; “children are losers”; it is the same attitude with the “douen” and the parrot, “children are losers”. The schools in the countryside are for parrots, “douens”, wild animals, “lappes”, anything except for children.

They knew all along from their White Paper, that Task Force Report, the national average in this country from the Common Entrance Examination, was 70 per cent; that is to say, 70 per cent got places under the PNM; 70 per cent went on; that was the national average. But when you broke it down according to districts, it was very, very biased; very skewed. When we examine those statistics, as we will do, we will see from where that statement of the Member for Diego Martin East came. I just want to ask him, between now and when we speak again, to look at the *Hansard* of June 9, 2000—the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin East. I will read it for them eventually. And look for September 4, 2000, the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin East. He did not say, “douen” and parrot once, you know. He did it in June of 2000. So let us say he made a mistake and used the reference, “building schools for “douen” and parrots”, the hon. Member repeated in September, months later, the same kind of description for the schools that we are building.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way just for me to move the Motion for the Adjournment. She is still making her contribution.

I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to tomorrow, January 23, 2001, at 10.00 a.m., when we would hope to complete this debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.45 p.m.*