

Papers Laid

Friday, February 02, 2001

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 02, 2001

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 1999. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Housing Authority for the year ended December 31, 1986. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Housing Authority for the year ended December 31, 1987. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
4. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1980. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
5. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1981. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
6. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1982. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Papers 2 to 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

7. The Cinematograph and Video Entertainment (Amdt.) Regulations, 2001. [*The Minister of Communications and Information Technology (Hon. Ralph Maraj)*]

**ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION
(GENERAL ELECTION 2000 PROCESS REVIEW)**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Basdeo Panday): Mr. Speaker, elections for the Tobago House of Assembly have been duly completed and control of responsibility for the THA has been transferred to the party winning the majority of seats. To all appearances and from all reports, the Elections and Boundaries Commission's conduct of the THA poll ensured a free and fair election [*Desk*]

thumping] and an accurate rendering of the people's will. We know not whether this will restore the credibility of the EBC and its officers who have come recently under savage assault from certain quarters.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present to this honourable House a review of the process pertinent to the conduct of the general election of December 11, 2000. This review was forwarded to the Prime Minister by the Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission a short while ago—short meaning today. The Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission has advised as follows: annual list of electors. The process starts with the annual list of electors, which is a list prepared by the registration officer of all persons duly registered as electors in the registration area. This list is a public document open to public scrutiny, investigation and comparison.

The annual list for the year 2000 was made available for public scrutiny at all the commission's registration area offices on July 1, 2000. It is this list that formed the basis for the preparation of the preliminary list and the final voters list which was used on December 11, 2000. The preparation of the annual list of electors is done under the system of permanent personal registration and in accordance with the registration rules as contained in the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01. Under the rules, persons wishing to be registered are to make application to the registration office of the registration area in which they are resident.

Persons attend the various registration offices to do the following:

- (a) apply for registration;
- (b) correct any errors in names and dates of birth;
- (c) apply for the renewal or replacement of identification cards;
- (d) change their place of residence or address; and
- (e) change their names.

The registration officer had to process the transactions above and also do the following:

- (a) cancel the registration of persons who he was satisfied are dead;
- (b) put on his list the names of those persons who had been previously registered and had now attained the age of 18 years and still live at the registered address.

On July 1, 2000 the number of names on the annual list of electors stood at 938,030.

The preliminary list: a period of electoral registration was directed by Proclamation by His Excellency the President to commence on October 3, 2000. The President, by Order, declared the annual list of electors as revised and existing as at September 27, 2000 to be the preliminary list for the purpose of the electoral registration. This preliminary list comprised 943,610 names. During the period of electoral registration—October 3, 2000 to October 11, 2000—the list was posted at two places in each polling division in every electoral district.

Members of the public were invited to examine the list and to go to their registration area office, or a temporary registration office established for that purpose, to do the following:

- (a) to have registrations done for persons who had attained the age of 18 and had not yet applied to be registered;
- (b) to change their place of residence or address;
- (c) to change their names; and
- (d) to inform the registration office if they had been registered but their names did not appear on the list.

Then came the revised list. The revised list of electors of November 20, 2000 stood at 947,477 to which were added 212 names which were contained in a supplemental list to correct any errors or omissions. This resulted from the following transactions that took place affecting the preliminary list of electors:

Preliminary List	—	943,610
New Registrations	—	2,317
Deemed Electors	—	3,757
Deletions	—	<u>2,207</u>
Revised List	—	947,477
Transfers	—	4,163

The last countrywide exercise to update the nation's electoral list was done in 1985 and the commission has plans afoot to have another one done in the near future. To do so, it must be provided with the necessary funds.

Mr. Speaker, that is the end of my report of the review of the process employed in the preparation of the voters list for the December 11 general election. It is a straightforward accounting of how the EBC approached and discharged its duties in the conduct of the general election. I trust, Sir, that this

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will bring relief to the commissioners and officers of the Elections and Boundaries Commission from the unrelenting battering on the commissioners and its officers by persons who appear to have no intention of respecting the will of the people as expressed in the last general election.

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

**ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION
(PUBLIC COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY)**

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: Straight from a victory in Tobago.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj: I thought the victory was Orville London's victory. That is the kind of victory you should have.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas under the Constitution, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have asserted their belief in a democratic society; and

Whereas the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) and an accurate and acceptable Voters List are essential ingredients of the democratic system required for the conduct of free and fair elections; and

Whereas, following the recent elections, there is considerable disquiet and anxiety in the country with respect to the role of the EBC and the state of the Voters List which was utilized during the General Election of December 11, 2000:

Be it resolved that this honourable House call on the relevant authorities to take steps to review by way of a Public Commission of Enquiry, all the actions of the EBC in the preparation of the preliminary and final Voters Lists which were used on December 11, 2000:

And be it further resolved that this House agree that the Government provide, through supplementary allocation, all the necessary financial and other resources to effect an immediate, comprehensive, nationwide voter registration exercise, inclusive of a new voter identification system:

And be it further resolved that this exercise be completed in the shortest possible time with a view to having improved procedures and a revised Voters List available well before any other national election becomes due in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that when you were in the PNM you would have read *Alice in Wonderland* and you would have—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Let me caution the Member.

Dr. K. Rowley: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Take your seat. Leave the Speaker out of your debate and his past allegiances. You will proceed with the Motion. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, what is done cannot be undone, whether you like it or not; but whether or not you have read *Alice in Wonderland*, some of us did and my friend from Naparima will recall the phrase, “it gets curiouser and curiouser”. When I saw the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago get up this afternoon on Private Members’ Day when there is a Motion brought by the Opposition to deal with a problem which the entire country has—and I want to read the Motion for you, Mr. Speaker.

This Motion has been filed in this House—available for a number of days. It would have been available to those who gave the Prime Minister that statement to read this afternoon. The Motion says:

Whereas under the Constitution, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have asserted their belief in a democratic society; and

Whereas the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) and an accurate and acceptable Voters List are essential ingredients of the democratic system required for the conduct of free and fair elections; and

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EBC (Public Commission of Enquiry)
[DR. ROWLEY]

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That is the Motion before us, Mr. Speaker, and it is in that context that I find the Prime Minister's interjection here this afternoon very curious; seeking to head off what he believes is an uncomfortable debate on the content of this Motion.

I want to say something. This Motion is seeking to get information for the public and the same way the EBC could have given the Prime Minister that statement to come and read here on Private Members' Day, it would have done well to have had that information coming from the EBC published in the newspapers for everybody to read [*Desk thumping*] instead of giving it to the Prime Minister to come here to try to give the impression that all is well, there is no problem, and, since he says so there is no problem, and since we say there is a problem, we are to be accused of all kinds of nefarious activities.

1.45 p.m.

We will not be deterred, because I have come here today to talk to this Government. If they do not want to talk to us inside this House, they will talk to us outside this House. If they believe that by coming here and reading a statement talking about the preliminary list and the voters list—this Motion is not simply asking about a preliminary list and voters list. We are asking further details; we are going behind that.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know where you were—because you moved all over the place—when the World Bank made a comment recently that the official statistics in Trinidad and Tobago require attention because they were—and I am paraphrasing here—unreliable. We have raised the matter about economic figures in this House. We have raised it to deal with the Central Statistical Office (CSO) data, and the World Bank checked on what we were saying. In their report on Trinidad and Tobago they stated that one the things that the Government must address is the inaccuracies of official data.

Let me draw to your attention what I am talking about: listen to the *Review of the Economy* presented in this House last October by the Government. There is population data in Appendices 9 and 10, and the source of that data, as said by the Government, is the Central Statistical Office. According to the CSO there are 338,099 persons under the age of 15 in this country, as of the year 2000. Mr. Speaker, 15 years and over, 930,700; that gives you a total of 1.268 million.

According to the official statistics laid in this House by this Government, by this Prime Minister—who comes here to tell us that he has a statement from the Elections and Boundaries Commission that all is well and ignore the rest—persons 15 years and over, 930,000. But the EBC is telling us that we have an electorate of 947,000. We know that to be a qualified elector in this country you must be, at least, 18 years old. So how in God's name could you have 930,000

persons in the country over age 15, but you have 947,000 over age 18? [Laughter] Primary school children would not require a Prime Minister's statement to tell them that something is wrong, and radically wrong, with the EBC. [Desk thumping]

I have spent quite some time going back with the official figures. Let me just show you the problem we are dealing with: we have 930,000 electors, according to the *Review of the Economy*; 947,000 qualified to vote on December 11, but the official figure for the country is 930,000. We know that 15 plus cannot vote, 16 plus ought not to vote, 17 plus ought not to vote, only when they are 18 years. When you go back to all these figures in the *Annual Statistical Digest* for the various years you will see how many persons fall into the various categories of 15 plus, 16 plus and 17 plus, and you will get an average figure of about 25,000 to 30,000 persons in each of those groups.

In fact, there are about 90,000 people in that 930,000 who ought not to be on the electors list. Mr. Speaker, 15 and over, 930,000; you must subtract from that 930,000 the 90,000 persons who are between 15 and have not yet attained 18 years, who ought not to be electors; you end up with 840,000. Thus, the maximum size of the voters list—assuming that everybody is registered who is older than 18 plus—is 840,000. Immediately you see, without going to do a university degree, without being the Prime Minister, or without going gray, that the electors list of Trinidad and Tobago is out of whack by 100,000 people.

I have not taken into account the thousands of persons in that 840,000 who have migrated from Trinidad and Tobago and by virtue of the fact that they live abroad, do not qualify to be on the electors list, because the law says that to be on the electors list you must have lived here for, at least, two months before the election day. Therefore, you must subtract from the 840,000 the tens of thousands who live abroad and do not qualify to vote. You must also subtract those persons who were missed by the registration process. Under no circumstances should the list of electors be larger than 840,000, or even 800,000, because if you say that 40,000 migrants live abroad you are looking at about 800,000.

Mr. Speaker, what I am raising here is nothing new. I remember making these points in a debate in 1991 when we debated an Elections and Boundaries Commission report in this House about the inaccuracies. We in this country have not had a problem with official interference with the EBC, therefore, persons in this country, while it was known that the list was largely not very accurate, did not really treat it as a national crisis until now, because persons had not sought to use the electors list in the way it was used in the last election.

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Before I move on, Mr. Speaker, I want to convince you of the nature of the problem we are dealing with, with the Elections and Boundaries Commission. When you do statistical derivations based on the officially published figures, you will notice that the list of electors really should be about 56 per cent of the total population. When you extract those persons who are under 18 as per the official figures and you apply those to the real figures of the total adult population, you really should be seeing an electors list of about 56 per cent.

If you take the EBC's figures and you work backwards and say that that really is about 56 per cent of the population, then we should have a population approaching 1.8 million. We will find out very soon. The Government should be in a position to say very soon, because we have had a census recently. The Central Statistical Office should be in a position about now, or in the very near future, to tell us if, in fact, the population is in the order of 1.7 or 1.8 million so as to justify an electors list of 947,000.

On the other hand, if you use the derivatives of the published figures over the years, if you go backwards to the older figures, and you take the point of about a 56 per cent derivative, you can sit and calculate them because the figures are published all the way back. If you go to the Parliament library you can get all these digests and see what the population was back to 1980, as I have done. You would see that the electors list is really about 56 per cent of the population, because the young ones are not qualified to vote. What does that mean? What does it really mean?

It means that if we have an electors list that is so inaccurate, the very system that we use to choose our parliamentary representatives and, by extension, our government—that system of first past the post—is dependent on who votes and equally important, where you vote, because we have perimeters for constituencies. Whereas in another system of public relations “once you vote it does not matter where you vote”, in the first past the post system, where you vote becomes very important, because the seats are determined on a location by location basis.

Therefore, if the population votes outside the areas as determined by the Elections and Boundaries Commission, as determined by constituency boundaries, then the very system of determining parliamentary representatives could be undermined by that very single action. Persons must vote within the constituencies where they have been registered, otherwise the first past the post system becomes nonsense. Mr. Speaker, we see that there is a problem of the EBC's list measuring up or standing scrutiny against the real population list.

What then does that mean for the integrity of the process? This Motion asks that there be a Public Commission of Enquiry, the reason being that we want to ensure that when seats are determined in this country, the population—not a handful of functionaries who benefit by being in Government—should have confidence in the process, and the outcome must be satisfactory to all.

We had an election in Tobago last week. The National Alliance for Reconstruction was in power for 20 years; last Monday the people went to the polls and voted the People's National Movement into office. [*Desk thumping*] The National Alliance for Reconstruction has no problem with that, because they are confident that that was the people's will. I am afraid that is not the same in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] The wider population does not have the confidence that the security of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, its agents and its operations have been secure and escaped the corruption and pollution of the UNC operatives. That is the problem!

When we want to restore that confidence, which we must do as quickly as possible, I am asking for a Public Commission of Enquiry so that in full public glare we can find out what happened, how it happened, how we can take steps to prevent it, and insofar as we are able to identify the culprits, if there are culprits, that such culprits be identified and punished, if we are to preserve the integrity of the electoral process. The electoral process is the key to stability in Trinidad and Tobago: peace, good order, social and economic stability.

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw to your attention some of the findings that we have made on this side of the House; the PNM. We are a political party 45 years old last month. On January 24 the PNM was 45 years old. I take this Motion very seriously, as I speak on behalf of the PNM, because we have had reason to believe that there was something very wrong with respect to the security of the electoral process. We have had a number of contacts with the EBC before the election and the details of those contacts will be made available to this House in due course, but post election when we saw the results and the performance on election day, we made it clear to the country that we were dissatisfied, and we had concerns about certain developments in the country on election day.

Even before election day we made it known to the Elections and Boundaries Commission that we had concerns about certain things. I want to give you a few examples of what we are up against. I have a letter here from the constituency of St. Joseph where the PNM had reason to write to the EBC, in accordance with the law, to make objection to names on the list. We heard the Prime Minister saying just now that part of the process is that people come to the Elections and

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Boundaries Commission offices and do certain things. One of the things that as a political party we had to do was to scrutinize the list and file reports to the EBC about discrepancies.

I want to make it abundantly clear that I will not this afternoon be saying that the EBC as a whole, or the EBC officers, in total, are corrupt and have been corrupted or uncooperative. I am not saying that at all. In fact I am saying the opposite. There are a large number of people in the EBC, all public servants, who are beyond reproach and are quality public servants. The board of the EBC itself, its officers, we have no personal problem with them, but they have a responsibility to secure the electors list. Insofar as the list has not been secured, if there is blame to be attributed, then they cannot escape unscathed, to use the word of the Member for Couva North.

2.00 p.m.

We can say without contradiction that elements within the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) at the level of functionaries of the commission had been uncooperative to say the least, and we are going so far as to say that there are individuals within the EBC who have allowed their offices to be used by operatives of the UNC to damage the electoral process of Trinidad and Tobago, and only a public inquiry will bring the facts out so the public can see what is going on.

Let me give an example of the kind of reaction we have had from the EBC in a critical election, where on November 30, the question of voter padding had already been in the public domain. Many persons had already been arrested. The very said EBC had sent 250 names to the police because they were of the view that such persons had broken the law and police action was required. Then we wrote to the EBC from St. Joseph and the letter says:

“I wish formally to notify you that the P.N.M Candidate...is objecting to the registration of the persons mentioned below... In accordance with section 63(3) of the Registration Rules made under S. 161 of the Act, we list the following persons...”

All these names, approximately two pages of names—I have not counted them—about 100 names were sent to the EBC as names of persons, which our exercise in the field showed were persons who did not belong to the constituency and the polling divisions they were registered under, and we were objecting to their names being on that list. The EBC did absolutely nothing about it and those persons, most of them, voted on election day; not that the EBC checked the list and replied and said it found the objection to be frivolous.

Mr. John: That would not change the price of cocoa.

Dr. K. Rowley: It might not change the price of cocoa for you, you could pay for any cocoa, but for John Public who wants his or her vote to count, it will change the price of the integrity of the electors list. [*Desk thumping*] When the Elections and Boundaries Commission receives an official complaint of about 100 names as a sample of persons who should not be on the list and nothing was done about it, the Minister tells me that would not change the price of cocoa. In a situation where seats are being won and lost by a few hundred votes, he says it would not change the price of cocoa. I am not talking about the whole constituency; I am talking about just six out of 40-odd polling divisions. Out of these, we were able to verify those 100 names, and we gave the names and addresses of persons who should not be on the list—the EBC did absolutely nothing about it.

We went further in Tunapuna and carried out an exercise there in five polling divisions out of 29, I think. We did detailed examinations of five and our information is that 368 persons—not with the best effort could we find them in the constituency of Tunapuna. That is only a sample, but, interestingly, in Barataria/San Juan, where you may recall on the day the EBC made the announcement—contrary to what the Prime Minister said that persons come to the EBC, I noticed he mentioned everything else except transfers. The EBC's letter to him said that persons are required to come to their office to conduct business—and he listed a number of business reasons. He said change of addresses, that is transfers. People come to the EBC to do that, that is not true at all. People were not going to the EBC to conduct transfers; they were being done by the Member for San Fernando West. He was in Southex Mall, where a booth was erected, with thousands of transfer forms and people were being invited to come and apply for transfers there. Large numbers of transfer forms were being taken to the EBC's office, so what he said this afternoon is not correct. Individuals were not going to the EBC and that is why my Motion asked that the procedure used by the EBC must be examined in public. We have the names and addresses and we went through a sampling of Barataria/San Juan and I will give an example of what it shows.

In Jojo Lane, 19 out of 68 persons—search high and low you cannot find them.

Dr. Khan: They are PNM voters.

Dr. K. Rowley: They are PNM voters? In Goose Lane, 18 out of 67 electors, jump high, jump low. We hired private security to try to find these people after the party could not find them; we hired commercial security officers to find them and they could not be found. On Persad Lane, five out of 47 could not be found. In Panchoo Lane No. 1, 16 out of 45 could not be found. In Mehilal Trace, 14 out of 48 could not be found; in William Street, 16 out of 92 could not be found; and I want you to notice something, these numbers just happen to measure to the size of a small or large maxi-taxi. On Farouk Lane, only a private car, five out of 50 could not be found. Doolay Lane, seven out of 38 could not be found; Solomon Street, eight out of 47 could not be found; on Boundary Road—

Dr. Khan: PNM area.

Dr. K. Rowley: In Boundary Road, 31 out of 87 could not be found; El Socorro Road, 46 out of 98 could not be found; Calcutta Street, PNM area too, 11 out of 54. [*Interruption*] So if the whole of Barataria/San Juan is PNM area, what are you doing here? [*Laughter*]

If every street I call, you are shouting “PNM area”, how you got here? That is the point I am making. You would notice that regardless of the size of the number of persons on the street, the missing component just measures up to a maxi-taxi size: 24, 16 or 5. The point is that the Member for San Fernando West, the granddaddy of it all—because you may recall we went through San Fernando West in a similar manner and I want to read for you a few of the comments that go with the names and addresses we have. I would not call the persons’ names because we are going to the police with this as it would require the police to find these people, to find where they live now because we know they voted in San Fernando West. If the police is allowed to do their job and find any of these people living anywhere except San Fernando West, then under the laws of Trinidad and Tobago such a person ought to be arrested. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member is saying it is where they register. I will only refer to a few of them and the comments, and these are the comments. This person has never lived at Church Street and still lives in Oropouche. Next person, never lived on Church Street, still lives in Oropouche, never lived there, still lives Oropouche; Oropouche, Oropouche, Oropouche and as you go through this list, you get the impression that there was an epidemic in Oropouche and persons in Oropouche left en masse and decided the place to live was San Fernando West. There was a refugee problem in San Fernando West.

San Fernando West, an area which has probably the least likely accommodation to treat with an influx from Oropouche, persons from Oropouche suddenly decide that the place they want to live is in San Fernando West and it is all here: names and addresses, first-time registrants, and some from Fyzabad too. You see there is one “fella” who does not live on Soogrim Street, he has never lived on Soogrim Street; he still lives in Oropouche and is well known to the candidate. He previously lived on Farrel Street but is in Otaheite now. These are just samples, series of samples. All of a sudden the whole of Oropouche, Madras Road, Mayo Road, Esperanza Road, Fifth Company—they all want to live in San Fernando West. Bermudez Trace, Calcutta, Mulchan Trace, they all want to register for the first time in San Fernando West. They are all registering as first-time registrants in San Fernando West, but their real addresses are here outside San Fernando West. They are transfers to San Fernando West.

Interestingly enough, if all of these transfers were made into San Fernando West to meet what the EBC had met there when they had apportioned the constituency, then there would have been a little problem because San Fernando West would have bulged a bit. So an interesting thing happened on election day. I was in my constituency when I overheard my supporters making arrangements for a maxi-taxi to carry people to San Fernando and I asked why. The answer: because they were carrying them home. These were PNM stalwarts who went to vote in San Fernando West only to find out that their names were not on the list. When they checked with the EBC they discovered they were registered in Diego Martin West, a constituency where the PNM has 74 per cent of the votes; 14 people out of San Fernando West into Diego Martin West, but they came and voted because they wanted to cast their ballot and we had to send them back to San Fernando by maxi-taxi and when they came out they were replaced by people from Oropouche. That is what happened in the last election and I am not telling you what they told me. I am telling you what the figures show and the incidents on that day and I want to ask you if the Elections and Boundaries Commission is to do its job and to secure the electors list, how could that happen? If it has happened, what this Motion is saying is that we need to find out how it happened to ensure that it does not happen again.

A very interesting thing also turns up here. As I spoke earlier on the population size and the voters list, one of the interesting things we saw between the period 1995 and the year 2000 is that the total population was growing at .53 per cent per annum, but the 18—19 age group was growing at 12.93 per cent per annum, 24 times the national rate. The only way that could have happened is if 18 years ago there was a population explosion in Trinidad and Tobago and the number of births then was 24 times the current rate. I checked it. I went back 18, 19, 20 years ago and the figures are all there. No such thing ever happened in this country.

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2.15 p.m.

How then do you explain a situation where all of a sudden in this year we are having this expression—and interestingly enough at the same time Government's own documents showed the 15 to 18 year-old group had a significant decline. I do not have the time in the presentation of my Motion to go into all of these details but I can assure you a Public Commission of Enquiry where the relevant questions are asked in the correct atmosphere to get the correct answers from the persons to whom the questions should be put, will show that there is a whole lot more than meets the eye and these things require explanations.

The Minister of Works and Transport abandoned his office in Port of Spain and went to San Fernando for almost nine months claiming that, of all the other candidates in the country, he had this mission. He abandoned his office, notwithstanding the fact that he was paid by taxpayers still—we knew he did that because he told the country that—he went to San Fernando and opened up an office and we ended up with a significant portion of Oropouche registered in San Fernando, both first time registrants and transfers, way above anything we have seen in this country.

We have evidence of 17 year-olds being registered as first-time registrants in San Fernando West. Are we to sit down and call him honourable gentleman? Applaud the victory? Applaud the Government, when it is there for all of us to see that the ruling party got access to the process in a way that allowed persons to vote outside of the perimeter of the constituency in which they live and, therefore, undermined the first past the post system? If Oropouche persons voted in San Fernando West and they then end up with a majority of votes in San Fernando West and they form the Government, then they got the seat by fraud and they are a Government by fraud. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Maharaj: I am tired of hearing—

Dr. K. Rowley: You will hear it until a bolt of lightning strikes you from above. If this country takes this lightly and jokes with them—this Party has moved us into the realms of those countries where election means nothing. There were times in the communist era, where in Soviet Russia, they had an election and the ruling party got 99 per cent of the votes, but the whole country, nobody wanted the government. All over the world there are governments, and in case they do not understand—I know some of them do not understand, but some of them do, and one of the persons who understands is my Friend, the Member for Naparima and a lot of what I wanted to say, he has said so I simply want to attach myself to his comments and the rest of them had better listen to what he has said. I was not here when he spoke, but I got the *Hansard*.

I am just presenting to this House samples, sketches of the voter padding that was organized by the UNC. One thing about voter padding, it is probably the only crime where the persons who conduct it leave a last address and a forwarding address; it is the only crime I know where you give your name and address before you commit the crime and after you have committed the crime you can be found by the police: that is voter padding. Voter padding is not if you lived somewhere and you moved and you go back to where you had lived and voted. That is not voter padding; that happens all the time and we have accepted that in our system to a certain extent, you mean no criminal act, you go back where you are registered to vote..

Voter padding is when you take a decision to go to the Elections and Boundaries Commission, knowing that you live in Oropouche and you sign a transfer form saying that you live in San Fernando West, and you never lived there and still do not live there, but you are doing that for the purpose of electing a certain character. That is a criminal act for which some persons have already been arrested. So the Prime Minister comes and reads something the EBC gives him, and the messenger comes and reads it from his boys; and we must all sit down and keep quiet. I want to draw to his attention that while he was saying that there are thirty-odd persons before the court charged with criminal conduct; there is a list of 200 in the hands of the police.

I really want to ask, at this point, if they are happy and comfortable that the EBC, having looked at these persons' applications, came to the conclusion that their applications are a matter for the police and it has been in the hands of the police for weeks. It seems as though the police are unable to act. These hundreds of names I have here are names and addresses of persons in the national community who were encouraged in criminal activity by the UNC and they are all exposed to police action. The Member for San Juan/Barataria is shaking his finger at me.

When the EBC realized what was going on, they stopped the third party registration and issued the instruction that no person may be transferred unless they come in person. My Friend from San Juan/Barataria was the first to ask: "How could they do that? I have 200 names here to go in to the EBC." He had 200 names of transferees by his own admission, but the EBC said those 200 persons must go to the office.

Dr. Fuad Khan: On a point of order. The Member for Diego Martin West is saying that I had 200 plus names and that is an untruth.

Mr. Speaker: You were specifically referring to the Member for San Juan/Barataria having in his possession a number of names to be transferred and in fact, except you have the evidence, you are imputing motives to the Member, and as such I am asking that you refrain from so doing.

Dr. K. Rowley: I was simply referring to a newspaper article which quoted two UNC candidates—

Mr. Speaker: You are disputing my ruling on that matter. You specifically said the Member for San Juan/Barataria had in his possession a number of names, you were specific about it and I have ruled and you are arguing with my ruling. Proceed.

Dr. K. Rowley: As soon as the EBC issued the public instruction that no person would be transferred unless they came to the office in person—and that was to deal with the bulk registration where members of the UNC were taking hundreds of transfer forms and carrying them to the EBC and having those transfers effected—two persons on the EBC slate, one of whom did not manage to win his seat, were reported in the newspaper to have been upset by the EBC's ruling. Both of them said to the public that, "we are affected by this because we have right now 200 names" and the constituencies involved were San Fernando East and San Juan/Barataria and that was published in the newspapers. They were aggrieved by the EBC's ruling and they said they had 200 names to be transferred but the EBC said it cannot be done like that, they must come in person.

2.25 p.m.

I come back to the point I was making. My friend from Naparima had this to say. He described voter padding as unclean. "One of the most dastardly acts one can ever commit in a democracy, to pad a voters list and to win an election by surreptitious, illegal, unlawful means." He emphasized it and he said: "That is my position." I want to ask him today, in the face of what—I can give him a copy and he could go down there himself and look for these people. These documents with these names, these are people who have been encouraged to take part in voter padding, that unclean act. Is he still of the view that it is surreptitious, illegal and unlawful?

He made it very clear: "At least they got no instructions from the Member of Parliament for Naparima." At least he made himself quite clear on the matter, because he wanted to have nothing to do with it. He points out to the country and says this: "...it is a dangerous course to embark on any course of action which will lead to an erosion of the democratic system and the democratic process". He

is right, because what we have seen here in these constituencies and the samples I have referred to there, that is exactly what that means, an erosion of the democratic process where people are allowed to vote in a constituency where they do not live.

When an organization organizes that—of course, if you want to believe that all these persons of their own volition suddenly decide to run from Oropouche to San Fernando West, then you will come to the conclusion that it is not a conspiracy; it is simple individual action. So something must be happening in Oropouche. Oropouche has had flood over the years; they never ran to San Fernando West. They have had pestilence, they never ran, but as soon as the former Minister of Works and Transport goes down to San Fernando, all hell breaks loose. Oropouche becomes unlivable and they want to live in San Fernando West. As my friend from Naparima points out, “that is an erosion of the democratic process”.

He went on to say: “...the corruption of democracy is not a sudden occurrence; it is a slow corrosive process”. We have seen it, slow and corrosive. It happens incrementally. This report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission for the 1995 election has, as one of its contents, a list of the kinds of transfers that took place in 1995 in the period of electoral registration: Number of Transfers: External—that means from another constituency into Barataria/San Juan—53. But all of a sudden a candidate gets up and says, “In one day I have 200 names to transfer in 2000.” So in a five-year period, whereas before, the normal transfer would have been about 53, you have 200 in one day! And this whole list here for San Fernando in 1995, it was happening incrementally. It was 157, because San Fernando West was targeted a long time ago, and when you look at the rest of the constituencies, you will see: Transfers: 10, 7, 17, 21; San Fernando West, 157; and by the year 2000, 2,000 transfers—and I am supposed to accept that and call you honourable gentlemen!

My friend from Naparima had this to say: “It is important for us all to be alert.” In the PNM we thought we were alert. We were not sufficiently alert. We thought we were looking at transfers. We never looked at first-time registrants; we never looked at persons going to Oropouche, recruiting youths and registering them as first-time registrants in San Fernando. We did not see that. However, he says, and he is right, we have to be alert: “It is important for us on this side to continue to keep our eyes open; it is important for those on that side to keep their eyes open; it is especially important for the Parliament to keep its eyes open.” Now, the Prime Minister comes today to try to cloud the Parliament's eyes. A

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motion before us—to tell us we have a serious problem with the Elections and Boundaries Commission and voter padding in this country, and while his colleague from Naparima is saying it is important for the Parliament to keep its eyes open, the Prime Minister comes with blinders, trying to read some nonsense to give us the impression that our statements are without substance and the matter is null and void, and do not worry, all is well—self-serving comments. You understand?

He went on to point out the possible consequences. He says: “...when democracy is corrupted, the peace and the prosperity of a nation are endangered. We lose our freedoms. Our institutions break down. You see it happening.” These are his words! He is talking to them. “You see it happening.” And they sit there, as long as they get the office; as long as they get what goes with the office, they do not care if the country goes to hell in a handbasket! You understand? They do not care! As long as it serves their purpose.

He goes on: “What happens when a reign of terror begins?” We have seen the reign of terror beginning. “Individuals disappear.” Well that will come. “They are jailed.” That will come. “They are assassinated.” That is happening. Ask Hansraj Sumairsingh. Ask him. “These are the implications for a breakdown of your democratic traditions.” These are not my words; these are the words of the Member of Parliament for Naparima, a man who still has some modicum of morality in him. [*Desk thumping*]

He goes on to say: “If the vote is stolen, it is denied or corrupted, a great sin occurs.” What I am saying here this afternoon is that it has been corrupted; it has been stolen and a great sin has occurred in this land! And he says, “when that happens, the people can become enraged”. He has it down pat! “The people can become enraged”. All of those who believe that the tally on election night that says all is okay—if you believe that there are not people in this country who are enraged by your actions, you live in cloud “cuckooland”. Carry on. He says: “Stealing an election is wrong, and if an election is stolen in Trinidad and Tobago, the wrong must be put right.” I look forward to how he votes on this Motion.

When I say that there are individuals within the Elections and Boundaries Commission who were quite willing to facilitate, I do not want to call any names in here, but a public enquiry, which would ask the right questions of the right persons so that we can get the proper answers, will determine for the population exactly what happened. How did it happen that all these transfers of Oropouche people could have taken place into San Fernando, without raising a red flag in the institution where we believe the security of the system was a top priority? How

did it happen? Did somebody in there facilitate it? Did the Elections and Boundaries Commission accept transfer forms photocopies? Because I know while some officers were doing their jobs and saying, “No, we are not giving you transfer forms, especially in those large numbers”, that the ruling party's operatives made photocopies in San Fernando West and persons' names were transferred on those forms, and when they came to the EBC, certain officers said, “No, we are not accepting those transfer forms and photocopies”, and certain other officers said, “Accept them”.

A public enquiry must tell this country what happened: who did what, when and where. [*Desk thumping*] When the results were in, even within the period of the counting, when there was a count in Tunapuna—there is a two-stage objection under the laws of Trinidad and Tobago—when the first stage of the objection was made in Tunapuna and the PNM indicated that it had problems with some ballots and it was now under law and it was going to appeal to the Chief Elections Officer, to my horror, the Chief Elections Officer made a public statement saying, “There has been a recount in Tunapuna and that is that.” Even though the law says, even after a recount, if you are still not satisfied, you can now appeal to the Chief Elections Officer who, without even seeing the nature of the complaint, was reported in the media as saying, “There has been a recount in Tunapuna and that is that.”

Then he was in an interview in the *Independent* newspaper talking to Clevon Raphael, and as far as he was concerned, absolutely nothing was wrong. It was the perfect election. It was the perfect voters list; it was the perfect outcome of the election and he did not understand what the PNM was talking about.

2.35 p.m.

He is now quoted in the article headlined, “Electoral list to be overhauled”. After he was saying nothing was wrong with the list, and he could not understand what the PNM was talking about, and that we are sore losers.

“The Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) intends to undertake a complete overhaul of the current electoral list, in light of questions being raised since the December 11 general election...”

This was said by Chief Elections Officer Howard Cayenne.

Mr. Speaker: For the record, can the Member state the date, page and newspaper he is quoting from?

Dr. K. Rowley: The *Trinidad Guardian*, January 17, 2001, page 5.

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I am saying that this is not what we want under these circumstances. We cannot try to fix this problem without first understanding what caused the problem in the first place and, even further, what is the very nature of the problem. I mentioned San Fernando West, San Juan/Barataria and Tunapuna. I am not talking about other areas because this question of voter padding was an all-encompassing exercise.

You see all these poll cards? In my own constituency of Diego Martin, these poll cards came to me in droves because people who wanted a good showing in Diego Martin West, so they can claim a ministry after they lose, were encouraging people to come and vote in Diego Martin West. The poll card was the fly in the ointment! We should have known that something was radically wrong when, all of a sudden, tens of thousands of poll cards were turning up all over the country without owners. Of course, we had TTPost that was standing by and I am absolutely confident that they would have done an excellent job in delivering poll cards but they were not given the opportunity. The distribution of poll cards was done in such a way so as to ensure that they were thrown away. There were many reports in the newspapers of poll cards in “graps” being dumped all over the place, because somebody had an interest. The poll cards were the smoking guns!

These were the smoking guns because these people are registered in locations where they do not live and if the courier service, TTPost, delivered them, then they would have exposed the individuals. I have had numerous persons in Diego Martin West calling me to tell of poll cards that came to their houses with their family name but those persons were unknown to them. Do you know what those who organize the scam did? If they found persons outside the constituency who favoured them, they attached those persons’ names to similar names in the constituency of choice. That is what they have done. So, the poll card goes to a home for John Harry, but the Harry family never heard of John Harry. They were all over the country. Do not take my word for it. Talk to people in the country. Talk to the media. That is why we are now hearing about the Elections and Boundaries Commission intending to do—

If anybody in the EBC is happy with a voters list of 947,000 voters but a population of 930,000, who are 15 years and over, I cannot rely on them to clean a list. Then there are the newspapers. I know the Members opposite do not like

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newspapers, but they inform the public. Here is a national newspaper, the *Sunday Mirror*—you do not have to be in love with the editor or the journalist, you have to pay attention to what he has worked on and what he is reporting—stating:

“Officials of the Elections and Boundaries Commission are concerned that as much as 30 per cent of the electoral list for Tunapuna...has been ‘padded’ by activists and operatives of the ruling United National Congress (UNC).”

And they quote a source from the EBC which says these are “very unusual circumstances”.

“And these fears were duly confirmed last week...”

That week was the week of November 5, 2000. The paper is reporting that after EBC officials expressed concerns to the newspaper about massive voter padding in Tunapuna. The newspaper is reporting. As such it says:

“And these fears were duly confirmed last week, when this newspaper did its own investigations and discovered that several persons who had applied for transfers, were not all living at the new addresses...

We found that people who were residing in Couva South...”

A whole street in Couva South ended up in Tunapuna and as a result we have to endure this.

Members do not have to only take my word for it. The newspaper goes on to say:

“Our investigation...”

Not the PNM.

“...took us to a home at...Maingot Road...”

The report describes how the husband said, “I know these three names. They are my wife’s family from Barrackpore”, but they are voting in Maingot Road, Tunapuna to send who is now the Member for Tunapuna to the Parliament. When the wife was confronted she said she did not know them. They voted in Tunapuna! They live in Barrackpore and they chose the Member for Parliament for Tunapuna. That is what my friend from Naparima was saying, that that is the corruption of the process; that is the undermining of the process; the erosion of our democracy. The best thing about it is that there are people in our jails, today, for lesser offences but the beneficiaries of this criminal conduct are here saying, “Call me honourable Sir”. [*Desk thumping*] They will have the temerity in this

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very House to stand up and cast aspersions about criminal conduct on the parts of other persons in our national community. They will make laws in here to jail people for stealing apples in HiLo, but they are here as a result of the criminal conduct of persons who broke the law. [*Desk thumping*] That is why this Parliament must act! If this Government wants to redeem itself in any small measure, it must support this Motion and let us immediately get on to rectify the problem of the voters list at the EBC. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing short of a public enquiry as to how this could have happened will be a catalyst for what happened on December 11, 2000. If this country relies on the platitudes of those within this Chamber to refute my arguments then we do so at our peril because what do I expect those Members to say? What do I expect them to say? We are here already.

When they had the Guyanese problem there was a very strong statement in the streets of this country, and Guyana, that the Guyanese election was rigged in Trinidad by operators of the UNC. When that comment was made they nearly went berserk here because there were persons in Guyana who were objecting to some of the things that went on there. However, Guyana's name was mud for a long time. It is like the prostitute that was raped when they said, "Okay, you are a lady of the night, therefore, you cannot bring a rape charge". Guyana was a pariah so voter padding in Guyana? No, no, no. Then they went to court and two years later the court in Guyana ruled that the electoral process was so corrupted and abused that the election itself is deemed null and void in a court of law. However, hear what the beneficiaries say, "The business of government continues as normal". Do you see any parallel with this? While the court, having heard evidence from about 360 witnesses, ruled that the election was null and void, the president said, "So what? The business of government continues as normal".

So, while I show you here examples of the massive voter fraud that took place in San Fernando West, I expect the Member for San Fernando West to get up and tell me, "The business of government would go on as normal". What is normal to the UNC is not normal to decent people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

2.45 p.m.

I have no doubt that when I sit, my Friend, the Member for Tunapuna and Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism will say to disregard whatever I have said. [*Interruption*] Do you hear already? He is the Minister of Enterprise—and who does not like it could lump it. That is his attitude. When that is said understand that from time to time there would be people in this country that will have cause to appeal to their morality and circumstances.

Scientific polls were taken before the election and not one of them showed the UNC winning the five marginal seats. Even a poll by God would not have shown it. Do you know why? If one took a poll in Tunapuna or Barataria/San Juan, it would be only the persons who live there and not the padders. Those who came in to vote on election day would never have been caught by the poll, otherwise long before the poll would have shown the UNC in the lead in the marginal constituencies. The polls did show that in some instances it was neck and neck or the UNC behind. On election day the maxi-taxis came by the 12s and 24s and the UNC won the five marginal seats. We are supposed to be so stupid as to say, how lucky these “fellas” are. How great thou art. How “tief” thou art!

My organization, the People’s National Movement did not want to sit and say, “we know all yuh tief.” We know that they have disgraced this country, the party and Parliament. We went out. We hired commercial persons. We used our resources. We pounded the pavements and went into electoral areas. We went into polling divisions and did the very thing that we expected the Elections and Boundaries Commission to do. That is, if a person applies for a transfer, it must be determined that there is proof of some kind. If anybody could decide that people could vote anywhere, as my Friend, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro said in the newspaper—I have land in Radix so I could vote there. The law says that a person has to reside there for at least two months before the election. Even though one has land in Radix, it does not mean that one could vote there. The system is so structured that if one has to vote there, one must reside there.

I have land in Mason Hall, Tobago. I was born there but I cannot vote there. I “fraid” police. I have a moral underpinning to my behaviour. [*Laughter*] They say what the law says does not matter as long as it suits their purpose. To them the law is an inconvenience. It is what works for them. As long as they have power and money they can do no wrong, or so they think. If anybody likes them and wants to vote for them, or if their interest would be served by them when they are in power, they could vote in their constituency. The law says they could like them and want to vote for them, but they must live in that constituency for at least two months, otherwise they would be committing a criminal act.

A number of unwitting citizens have been encouraged by this ruling party to commit a criminal act so that this handful of individuals can return to the corridors of power. That is what happened in the last election. We in the PNM have a duty to ensure that other persons do their duty. The first duty we have is to ask the police to investigate every one of these individuals. If the police is going to serve this country in the way that it should, then a proper squad should be put in place in north, central, south or wherever to interview every one of those persons, because a criminal act was committed by every one of them.

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Look at criminal acts of different types! There are criminal acts of incest, robbery and so on. This criminal act gave us the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker: The Member has two more minutes.

Dr. K. Rowley: As I said, we do not have the time to go through the details one by one. As my Friend, the Member for Naparima pointed out, it does not happen overnight like that. The public would be interested to find out that this conspiracy of voter padding was funded by the Treasury. Would you believe that? It was funded by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. Our investigations have shown that the key mastermind and brains behind this were high-ranking officials of the ruling party associating with high-ranking officials in Maritime. That is the same company this Government gave \$69 million of taxpayers' money which was used to fund the Party Administrative Support Unit (PASU). After having access to the database of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, persons were employed on a full-time basis to manipulate it. The Commission of Enquiry will show whether or not the EBC can tell the country without fear or contradiction that its database was not penetrated by unauthorized or authorized persons with mal intent. Taxpayers' money was used to fund this fraud.

When Maritime got the money under the guise of taking up the Winsure portfolio, we thought it was Winsure, the sales insurance company. We did not know it was Winsure for the UNC, to make sure they win. Now, we will find out that. When the PNM went to the EBC and told them that they were of the view, based on information they had and what they were seeing, that unauthorized persons had access to the EBC's database, the Commissioners were astounded and went into denial. There were those in the EBC who knew how close we were to what was going on.

When one looks at what has happened, one would see that the entire country's database and geographic information system were put to use on this matter. There was the overlay of the streets and the databank of the names. One man can sit at a computer and manipulate it to put a voter anywhere he wants to put them. That is how PNM voters can be moved from San Fernando to Diego Martin, put people by the 16s and 14s in Barataria/San Juan and on election day, it would be known exactly who to put on the maxi-taxi. Then, they can determine all those who are dead and all the dead men can vote because they know all those who are dead.

2.55 p.m.

You take steps to ensure that a ballot is cast in their name and only a Public Commission of Enquiry will bring the details out for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want go any further on this matter at this time. I simply want to ask all those with a conscience on the other side—I know one person has one—he expressed it already, and those of us on this side are asking in light of the information in the public domain, in light of the anxiety and loss of confidence in our Elections and Boundaries Commission, in light of evidence in the possession of the police with respect to criminal conduct on the part of officials, in light of investigations being done by the police with respect to conspiracy to commit electoral fraud and on behalf of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago who would like to have confidence restored in the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the electoral process, I am calling on this honourable House to ask the Government to institute a Public Commission of Enquiry into the operations of the Elections and Boundaries Commission as it led up to last general election.

Seconded by Mr. Kenneth Valley.

Question proposed.

The Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Let me thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to join in the debate on the Motion that was piloted by the Member for Diego Martin West, which I will not re-read as you have already done so.

Before I get into some of the details of the Motion, because I think it is particularly important for the young students in the public gallery who have come here, I am reasonably sure to be enlightened and to be educated, and as serious legislators it is our responsibility to ensure that we do so whenever we come to this Parliament to conduct the serious business of the nation, and the serious business of the nation impacts particularly and significantly on the lives of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. We talk glibly much of the times but we do not go to the sources and to the documents that are relevant and pertinent to the types of debates and arguments that we put before the House. We quote newspapers and independent surveys and clothe them in some kind of authenticity and we place an imprimatur on them as if they are the source of truth like the gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

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Indeed, we have to be very careful with the kind of source materials we have been fed here this afternoon by the Member for Diego Martin West. To say the least, they are quite suspicious if not totally misleading and inaccurate. But what I would like to do with your kind leave, Mr. Speaker, is to use some of my time to read the relevant parts of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago which is the supreme law of the land.

If one looks at Part IV which deals with the Elections and Boundaries Commission, section 70, which I will read for the benefit of this honourable House, but particularly for the benefit of the public gallery and the young people who are present there, says and I quote:

- “70 (1) Trinidad and Tobago shall be divided into thirty-six constituencies or such other number as may be provided for by an Order made by the President in accordance with the provisions of this Part and each such constituency shall return one member to the House of Representatives.
- (2) Not less than two such constituencies shall be in the Island of Tobago.
- 71 (1) There shall be an Elections and Boundaries Commission for Trinidad and Tobago (in this Part referred to as ‘the Commission;
- (2) The members of the Commission shall be a Chairman and not less than two nor more than four other members.
- (3) The Chairman and other members of the Commission shall be appointed by the President,...”

I want us to understand that.

“...after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.”

So that the Commission is a presidential appointment giving the Commission that important role in our society and ensuring its independence from political interference. I emphasize that it is very important for all of us to understand that, including our young citizens in the gallery. So that when we get up here and accuse the Government of voter padding, fraud and of being an illegitimate Government, and for so sadly accusing the Commission of being corrupt, or members or elements in the Elections and Boundaries Commission’s staff of being corrupt, it clearly shows that it is merely sour grapes, because the People’s

National Movement won elections from 1956—1986, 30 continuous years, in which for several years there was the voting machine and people complained about the voting machine.

The very President of the Republic today, led a no-vote campaign in 1971 to show his disgust and the disgust of other elements of the society against the fraud that was suspected that the People's National Movement had perpetrated on this country as a result of the introduction of voting machines. They won six general elections consecutively and then they won again in 1991 but no one ever did complain of fraud, corruption, voter-padding, incorrect list, too much on the list, too little on the list, under-15 on the list, over-16 on the list, under-19 on the list, there was no such complaint. They just won a resounding victory on January 29, 2001, mere hours ago and there is absolutely no record in the newspapers of any speech made by members of the People's National Movement that the conduct of that election was suspect. Not a single whimper from any one of them and it is the same voters list, the identical list, a list that has not been revised since the last general election which the People's National Movement won in the most recently concluded Tobago House of Assembly Election, 2001. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

You shut your mouth. You had to run from Tobago and come to Trinidad. They beat you, they ran you out. You were rejected in Tobago and you had to come here and find solace in Diego Martin West, so shut up. You are a Tobagonian and had to run or they ran you but I will come to you in a little while about this morality thing you are talking about, hoisting yourself on some moral petard as if you have this moral authority to speak to castigate anybody on this side with respect to morality. I was reading about your first leader in the newspapers—

3.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin West, the Member on the other side listened to you during your contribution and did not interrupt. Will you please refrain from interrupting the Member during his contribution? [*Interruption*] I caution you. Press on!

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I proceed to read the supreme law of the land.

“(4) A person shall not be qualified to hold office as a member of the Commission who is a Minister, a Parliamentary Secretary, a member of the House of Representatives, a Senator, a temporary member of the Senate or a public officer.”

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This is very important; it shows the independence of this Commission. It is extremely important; totally insulated from any kind of influence, particularly political influence.

“(5) Subject to the provisions of this section, a member of the Commission shall vacate his office—

(a) at the expiration of five years from the date of his appointment, but is eligible for re-appointment; or”

So, there is a prescribed term.

“(b) where any circumstances arise that, if he were not a member of the Commission, would cause him to be disqualified for appointment as such.”

So he will also vacate office.

“(6) Three members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum.”
[*Interruption*]

Of course, he must do that because he does not even read the Constitution of the country. That is why he gets up and talks so much nonsensicality all the time.

“(7) Where there is a quorum, the Commission shall not be disqualified for the transaction of business by reason of any vacancy among its members, and any proceeding of the Commission shall be valid even though some person who was not entitled to do so took part therein.

(8) The Commission may regulate its own procedure.

(9) The Commission shall be provided with a staff adequate for the efficient discharge of its function.”

That is precisely what this Government has been doing since we assumed office on November 6, 1995. We have been giving increasing resources, financial resources, technology resources, people resources, accommodation resources. They were in the Salvatori Building, which was thought to be totally inadequate and they have now removed to more salubrious accommodation at the top of Frederick Street.

So we have given the Commission everything. We have given them the resources to introduce new technology on voting day so that people would not make a mistake when they stamp automatically an “X” on the ballot paper against the name of the candidate for whom they wish to vote.

“(10) The salaries and allowances of the staff of the Commission shall be a charge on the Consolidated Fund.”

That is very important. It is just like a judge. In order to insulate them and give them independence, a judge’s salary is a charge on the Consolidated Fund. So the commissioners are like judges—independent. Parliament cannot change it.

One of the reasons for this is that they cannot be influenced by the fear or threat that this Parliament can alter their terms and conditions. It is not possible. To say that they have been influenced and corrupted is totally unjust and unfair because you cannot influence them; you cannot change their terms and conditions. It is a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund. I want him to understand.
[*Interruption*]

You keep quiet because you are a bush lawyer!

“(11) The registration of voters and the conduct—

Mr. Hinds: You are a thief!

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I object.

Mr. Speaker: Will the Member for Laventille East refrain from shouting such things across the floor. [*Interruption*] That is not the way we conduct business in the House and that is not the way we will conduct business. You can rise and ask the Member either to give way or move a point of order. I am cautioning you to refrain from behaving in such a manner.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I am objecting because he called me a thief and I want it expunged from the record. That is the kind of misbehaviour he, who is supposed to be a professional, engages in.

Mr. Speaker: That aside will be expunged from the record.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am a lawyer duly qualified and called to the Bar at Middle Temple in England and in Trinidad and Tobago. I equally ask that the suggestion that I am a bush lawyer be expunged from the record.

Mr. Speaker: I agree with the Member. I think that that reaction to the Member should be withdrawn. Will the Member please withdraw it?

Hon. M. Assam: Certainly, I am too magnanimous not to follow the ruling of the Speaker. I intend to conduct myself in the highest parliamentary tradition, not like that side. I will always respect the ruling and direction of the Chair, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*]

All of us were born in sin—original sin—because our parents were born in sin. The Member does not even know that and he pretends to be a Christian. If he wants me to give him a Bible lesson, I will give him that, too.

I continue quoting the Constitution:

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

In other words, candidates, politicians, ministers, nobody has any influence; nobody has any responsibility; nobody has any input in the conduct or direction of an election, except the Commission. [*Interruption*] I am coming to that, have no fear.

The Member spoke for 75 minutes, nobody interrupted him. I sat here as quiet as a lamb. I did not interrupt one second of his contribution in order to give the Member for Diego Martin West an opportunity to develop a case, which he failed miserably to do. Now he wants to interrupt me.

“(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.”

This is independence again enshrined in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, the supreme law of the land. It goes on:

“72.(1) The Commission shall, in accordance with the provisions of this section, review the number and boundaries of the constituencies into which Trinidad and Tobago is divided and submit to the Prime Minister and the Speaker for presentation to the House of Representatives in accordance with this section reports either—

- (a) showing the constituencies into which it recommends that Trinidad and Tobago should be divided to give effect to the rules set out in the Second Schedule; or
- (b) stating that, in the opinion of the Commission, no alteration is required to the existing number or boundaries of constituencies in order to give effect to the said rules.”

That is what happens in accordance with the Constitution. The report is laid in Parliament and nobody ever questions the Elections and Boundaries Commission on this matter even though when one looks at the boundaries over the last several years, many people have wondered how the boundaries were cut. Nobody has ever questioned them. We accept their recommendations all the time because we want to ensure their independence.

“(2) Reports under subsection (1) shall be submitted by the Commission not less than two nor more than five years from the date of the submission of its last report.”

That is precisely what happens routinely.

“(3) As soon as may be after the Commission has submitted a report under subsection (1)(a) the Minister designated by the Prime Minister for this purpose (in this section called ‘the Minister’) shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an Order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report, and that draft may make provisions for any matters which appear to the Minister to be incidental to or consequential upon the other provisions of the draft.”

3.15 p.m.

That is precisely what the Leader of Government Business does routinely when the reports are laid in the House for everyone, including the public.

“Where any draft made under this section gives effect to any such recommendations with modifications, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives together with the draft a statement of the reasons for the modifications.”

This has happened because there have been modifications over time to constituencies—moving a polling division from one constituency to another constituency in order that the number of voters in a particular constituency meets the parameters set out in the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act—and that is done all the time.

“Where the motion for the approval of any draft made under this section is rejected by the House of Representatives, or is withdrawn by leave of that House, the Minister shall amend the draft and lay the amended draft before the House of Representatives.”

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Well, I have tried to do the research but I have no evidence that any such amendment has taken place in this House, because they have always accepted what the EBC has done.

“Where any draft made under this section is approved by resolution of the House of Representatives, the Minister shall submit it to the President who shall make the Order in terms of the draft; and that Order shall come into force on such day as may be specified therein and, until revoked by a further Order made by the President in accordance with the provisions of this section, shall have the force of law.”

As I said, I do not believe that this has ever been applied.

“The question of the validity of any Order by the President purporting to be made under this section and reciting that a draft thereof has been approved by resolution of the House of Representatives shall not be enquired into in any court.”

Again, it shows you the pre-eminence of this body. It cannot even be enquired into in any court and that is the kind of insulation and independence that the Elections and Boundaries Commission has, contrary to whatever allegations are being made against it by the Members of the Opposition because it suits them today. They are sore losers. They have been defeated, they cannot take their defeat and they are blaming everybody under the sun for their defeat. I think that if their mother and father were on the commission they would be doing the same thing. The leader of that party, the Member for San Fernando East, lost in 1986 but we gratuitously allowed him to take his seat under the guise of the spurious figure of 62 votes by which he won, such was the compassion that we showed.

Section 73 addresses the system of balloting.

“The election of members of the House of Representatives shall be by secret ballot and in accordance with the first-past-the-post system.”

Therefore, when I heard the Member for Diego Martin West say today that he knows who voted where and when, I was in a state of complete shock, Mr. Speaker. As far as the Constitution goes, the system of balloting for any election in this country, whether it is a Tobago House of Assembly election, a local government or a general election, is by secret ballot. How does the Member for Diego Martin West know who voted where? I want to know how he knows that. *[Interruption]* How does he know?

“For the purposes of subsection (1), the votes shall be cast in ballot boxes of a design calculated to ensure their efficiency and reliability.”

[*Interruption*] Do not worry with them. I am not worrying with them. He says I am an embarrassment. You see the point goes over his head. It is very easy to do so because of his stature. [*Laughter*] He does not understand it—very clearly.

Now we go to Chapter 5, “Executive Powers” but, Mr. Speaker, I will not go on. I think I have read enough to indicate—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Read the whole thing.

Hon. M. Assam: No, no, no, I am not going to. I do not want to educate you further. I want you to take some time off and do the reading for yourself. You are too lazy. You want to come here and be educated by the Member for Tunapuna. I am not going to spend too much time educating you.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come back now to the Motion because it is important to look at the wording of the Motion after I have given you the legal perspective of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. It says here that:

“...the people of Trinidad and Tobago have asserted their belief in a democratic society;”

That is perfectly correct. It is in the preamble to the Constitution. We have asserted our belief in a democratic society, and I hope the Members opposite are, in fact, asserting that belief because, when they get up to speak, both in the Parliament and in public, it seems as if they want to subvert that same democratic belief that they are espousing in this Motion. So you cannot be speaking from either side of your mouth at the same time. You must steadfastly hold to and practice that democratic belief, and it must be manifest in everything that you say and everything that you do, Mr. Speaker.

He goes on to say:

“*Whereas* the Elections and Boundaries Commission...and an accurate and acceptable Voters List are essential ingredients of the democratic system required for the conduct of free and fair elections;”

I could not agree more; but you know, Mr. Speaker, the Elections and Boundaries Commission publishes its electoral list and every citizen, every voter in this country, is entitled to inspect that list. It is not a private or a secret list, similar to the list that the Member for Diego Martin West had to encounter when he was trying to run for the leadership of the party. They would not give him a list of the

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membership of the PNM so he was in the dark and he did not know either the people who were eligible to vote or the people who were the proper delegates. It is not that kind of list, Mr. Speaker. It is not a secret list. It is a list to which every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago has access and, therefore, when that list is published, anyone can question it; and too, they have had several meetings with the EBC before the elections. They said it.

They said they met—in fact, where is the secretary of the PNM? The secretary of the PNM stood in this House and said they met with the EBC more than once. What were they meeting about? Was it a tea party they were having with the EBC? I thought they went to discuss serious electoral matters and issues, and I am sure a serious electoral issue would be the voters list and the correctness and accuracy of the voters list. What did you do when you met with them? You had every opportunity to because there were lists published. There were corrected lists, there were revised versions, there were all kinds until, I believe, the last list published was around—it was some date in September of 2000 when the final list was published, well in advance of the election.

If you were a vigilant party and want to claim that you are alert, instead of trying to quote and distort what the Member for Naparima said to suit your own purposes and put a spin on it as you are wont to all the time, you could have gone to the EBC and said, “This list of electors has under-18s on it”, or, “This list of electors is inflated”, or, “This list of electors does not reflect the composition of the population”; because he quoted a figure of 56 per cent of the entire population that should be on the list. I want to know where he got his figures in this statistical digest from which he quoted. He did not say what year or what month or the source of the statistical digest he was quoting, Mr. Speaker, which is very important. When any Member gets up in this House, he must name the source and the date of the source. He never said it but he is trying a sleight-of-hand, you see, as if the Member for Tunapuna would allow him to escape.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, statistics are a very dangerous thing. When I was at university, one of the first books I read when I was doing statistics was, *How to Lie with Statistics*. You can do anything with statistics. In fact, a very good example is Florida. Florida is supposed to be a healthy place, extremely healthy. They say the death rate in Florida is the highest in the United States yet still it is a healthy place. The reason is very simple. Most of the old people go down there to convalesce and they die, so the mortality rate is highest even though it is a very healthy place. They go there as a resort but the mortality rate is highest simply because so many old people retire then go there to live.

Similarly, in statistics you have to look at the base. I am giving you a lesson in statistics. You have to look at the base. If my salary is \$100 a week and I got a 10 per cent increase, many people will say that is a nice increase; but if my salary was \$1 per week and I got a hundred per cent increase, “I only gone to \$2, you know.” If you said to somebody, “You know, he got 10 per cent increase but I got a hundred per cent increase”, you have to look at the base, Mr. Speaker. So when you talk about statistics you cannot talk about statistics *in vacuo*, you have to talk about statistics as they relate to the various factors and parameters that you wish to analyze.

So do not come, Member for Diego Martin West, and try to pull the wool over this side’s eyes—highly educated side—and, more particularly, try to mislead the young minds sitting in the gallery, many of whom, I am sure, may be A’level students doing maths, add maths and advanced maths. You cannot fool them either because the young people of this country are bright, brighter than most of you. [*Desk thumping*] So do not come to me with your statistics at all. Where did you get these statistics? I agree with you. You should have checked and rechecked the list so that, by the end of September when the list was final, you would have been satisfied that it was a completely sanitized list. In this way, when the People’s National Movement was defeated on December 11, 2000 it would not come and cry—you cry babies, you little people.

The next time I come into this House, Mr. Speaker, I will come with a nipple and a bottle with some milk and, as they cry, push the nipple into their mouths to keep them quiet. [*Laughter*] That is what they need—a lot of cry babies, you know, and bleeding hearts. That is what they are because they cannot stand defeat. They were in the driver’s seat for 30 consecutive years in this country. Every other party struggled in the wilderness for 30 long years but nobody ever challenged them, you know. So nobody ever said, “Chief”—and, you know, that is what they say. They try to impugn the integrity and the character of people and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is always calling me a thief, but let him go outside and say so. He already cannot pay his debts. He will be further indebted to me. Let him go outside and say I am a thief.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I think on a point of order the Member is imputing improper motives. All of my debts I meet on a monthly basis like every other poor person in this country. I am not a thief, I never stole government moneys and I never stole any election. I want the Member to desist from that or he too should go outside and say it.

Mr. Speaker: I did not interpret that as the Member saying that you stole, so therefore it is not a point of order. Press on, Minister.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is the other thing. They cannot stand defeat but they like to criticize this side and when you give “jus’ ah lil’ jab”, they cannot take it. They want to “t’row cuff on” people here and uppercut and all kinds of things, you give them “ah lil’ jab”, they cannot take it. Boy, they are so thin-skinned! They never had “boy days” but again, “Ah go bring mih nipple and mih bottle ah milk next time fuh yuh.”

Mr. Hinds: “Why yuh four wives lef yuh?”

Hon. M. Assam: I was following Eric Williams [*Laughter*] but, you see, “I mind all ah dem and put dem in house”. Williams never did it. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] That is the big difference. A big difference, “eh”; a man of integrity, boy. That is a big difference from your leader.

Mr. Hinds: You must be a headache to live with. The women ran. [*Interruption*]

Hon. M. Assam: So that, Mr. Speaker, they had every opportunity to look at the voters list and they did not do it, so do not come and cry foul today or be a cry baby today if you did not do your job. It shows how moribund the PNM has become, how the machinery is creaking and that they are totally bankrupt and unable to even be in the Opposition far less to be in the Government. They are a disgrace to be in the Opposition—totally leaderless.

Now, he said:

“*Whereas*, following the recent elections, there is considerable disquiet and anxiety...”

Mr. Speaker, who is exhibiting disquiet and anxiety? It is only the losers, you know. The losers are doing so and certain other elements—and I am not going to call the other elements’ names today, but only the losers and certain other elements may be exhibiting these characteristics of disquiet and anxiety because there is absolutely no disquiet and anxiety in this country. This country is moving inexorably to higher levels of prosperity and of development and the momentum to continue the work continues.

3.30 p.m.

I do not know what they are talking about. What considerable disquiet? He should have described it. I would have thought that if somebody came here with a bill that has 36 clauses, he or she would explain every clause. Similarly, if you come here with a motion that has one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight paragraphs, you should explain every paragraph in that motion. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Educate them man; educate them!

Hon. M. Assam: Exactly! You explain everything. You do not come here and throw a bill before this House and think you will get away with it because your name is “Dr. So and So”. Do you think that you are Dr. King Jaja or something and you will get away with it because you have a Ph.D.? No Sir! You have to earn your spurs in this House. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

You must explain everything and not write emotive language that would further inflame certain elements in the society that are susceptible to inflammatory language. Do not come and do that; explain what you mean by “a considerable”. What percentage is it? Is it 5 per cent, 10 per cent, 30 per cent, 40 per cent or 100 per cent? How did you arrive at these figures? Where are these people located? What do these people do? There are many people who would do nothing except create mayhem and mischief in the society saying that they are disquieted and anxious. Who are they? [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*] What do you mean by anxiety and disquiet? Nice words but explain what you mean with respect to the role of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

The only few people I heard abusing the Elections and Boundaries Commission is the Member for Diego Martin Central and others. I have not heard other people abuse the EBC, and certain other elements. The Motion continues:

“and the state of the Voters List which was utilised during the General Election...”

What was the state of the voters list? As I said from paragraph two, you had ample opportunity to scrutinize, to sanitize, to protect, to protest, to erase, to modify or to make all kinds of representation to the Elections and Boundaries Commission; to do everything possible to ensure that the voter list was to your satisfaction. [*Interruption*] Go ahead; I will let you talk.

Mr. Hinds: Is the hon. Member saying that even in light of the fact that one had the opportunity, nothing corrupt could take place with the voters list? Let me ask you a question, I will take my seat after. Is the hon. Member aware that you could go to the Licensing Office now and get a certified copy of a motor vehicle you wish to purchase signed by the Transport Commissioner, and the information on that certified copy would be absolutely misleading because employees of the Transport Commission could tamper with the records electronically and, therefore, the output would be corrupted? Is the Member thinking that that is impossible?

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I allowed the Member for Laventille East/Morvant to make some intervention, because I thought he would have been helpful in assisting me with my contribution on this Motion, but, alas, what he said there was totally irrelevant, and certainly not analogous with anything in respect of the Motion. [*Desk thumping*] I often wonder when you go to court what you do. [*Laughter*] How do you plead your client's case? I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, as I have been saying, and I am re-emphasizing, they had every opportunity to deal with the voters list. If they failed to do so, it is not our fault; it is not the Elections and Boundaries Commission's fault; it is not anyone's fault. It is their fault.

"Be It Resolved that this Honourable House call on the relevant authorities to take steps to review by way of a Public Commission of Enquiry, all the actions..."

Again, I would have thought that the Member for Diego Martin West would have helped us and the public gallery, particularly, the young students in the public gallery. Who are these "relevant authorities" that he wants us to call upon to take steps? Who are these "relevant authorities"? I do not know; we are in the dark. Who are these "relevant authorities"? Who is responsible for appointing public commissions of enquiry? Who are the "relevant authorities"? He never told us!

Who are the "relevant authorities"? We are? When we wanted to appoint a Commission of Enquiry into the administration of justice, they said that we did not have the power to do it. They forgot! "Yuh forget" they brought a motion here, Mr. Speaker, in the name of the Member for Fernando East? Do you remember that? They have short memories, but I always try to remind them, because they are suffering from amnesia, very conveniently.

When we brought a motion here for us to establish a Commission of Enquiry into the administration of justice, they said that we had no power to do it; we could not do it. [*Interruption*] That is right; we were out of order, we could not do it, but now the Member for Diego Martin West is saying that we are the authority; but in the last session we were not the authority. So who are the relevant authorities? Please, please clarify beyond a shadow of a doubt who are the relevant authorities that must take steps to appoint a Commission of Enquiry.

What actions is he talking about? He has not said what actions of the Elections and Boundaries Commission he wants inquired into. I would have thought that he would be wording his Motion with a certain degree of specificity. Mr. Speaker, you cannot have a motion that is so vague and worded in such improper, vague language that it renders the motion nonsensical, meaningless! What actions does he want them to inquire into?

I thought that he would have stated who is the relevant authority and he would have said, “I want them to inquire into the following areas,” as we did when we wanted to inquire into the administration of justice. We said that we wanted them to inquire into A, B, C, D, E and F. Is that not right, Mr. Speaker? That is what we did, because we have bright people on this side; people who understand procedure, but he wants the relevant authorities to inquire into the actions of the EBC! What actions of the EBC?

Does he mean that the EBC did not provide soft drinks for the presiding officers on election day? Does he mean that the EBC did not provide enough paper for them to write on? When they went to the toilet there was no toilet paper? What actions does he want them to inquire into? Does he mean that they did not have the keys for the padlocks or that they were not well lubricated so they had difficulty opening the padlocks? What action does he want? Or when they opened the padlock the hasp pin and staple—that is what they call it—was so tight that it broke the fingernail of the lady presiding officer? What actions does he want us to inquire into? I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, I am totally baffled, I am in the dark because of the vagueness, because this Motion is really, as the courts would say, frivolous and vexatious; an abuse of process. All they are trying to do is to damage the hallowed institutions of this country, which they were part of fashioning, because they were in the driver’s seat for 34 years. They were the ones who brought in the 1962 Independence Constitution and Act 4 of 1976 which is the Republican Constitution, and they are now trying to damage and tarnish the sacred and hallowed institutions of this country, of which the Elections and Boundaries Commission is one of the most important. That is what they are trying to do with a set of vague nonsensicalities in a motion on this green paper.

He calls himself a seasoned parliamentarian. He boasted on the last occasion when he was here, “I have been in Parliament for 14 years!” Is that what he learnt? Well, he learnt nothing; he is a poor student. [*Laughter*] I would have failed him; he is a poor student as a parliamentarian. I would have failed him for the way he worded this Motion.

When I was in the government exhibition in sixth standard many years ago in Nelson Street Boys’ School, I was able to frame a motion better than this, because we used to do civics. [*Desk thumping*] I am serious, Mr. Speaker. We used to do civics under the great Sidney Joseph Didier, one of the great teachers, one of the great pedagogues of this country. We used to do civics and frame motions, and I

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was able to frame a motion better than this when I was in sixth standard at Nelson Street Boys' School. A big Ph.D., 14 years as a parliamentarian and he cannot frame a motion—[*Laughter*—and he wants to come here and parade on people, and talk about morality!

Everybody on this side is stupid according to the Member for Diego Martin East, and everybody is a fool, a thief, a this and a that, according to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. Everybody is laughing at everybody, according to the Member for Diego Martin Central. Everybody on that side is laughing at those on this side. It is so sad that “monkey cyar see he own tail”. It is a serious matter when monkey “cyar” see his own tail. [*Laughter*] I would like some of them to look into the mirror; I think they would be horrified as to what is reflected in that mirror.

Mr. Speaker, I still do not understand the Motion, paragraph four: what actions, who are the relevant authorities and so on. Of course, he talked about the “preparation of the preliminary and final voters list”, which, again, I referred to in my earlier comment. They had an opportunity to make input, both in the preliminary and final voters list, but they are negligent. Do you know why? Do you know what is hurting them? They take the people of this country for granted; you know what I mean.

As I have said in a previous contribution, they feel “ah born a PNM and ah go dead a PNM”, so they take that for granted. It does not matter what kind of negligence and non-performance they engage in, there are certain sections of the population who will continue to vote for them. Do you know what hurt them? When H. O. B. Wooding, Chairman of the constitutional commission recommended some form of proportional representation, the late Dr. Eric Williams stood right here and said, [*Voice impersonation*] “That recommendation of the commissioners is a dagger to the heart of the PNM!” Well, that is why they do not like me, because I have been a dagger to the heart of the PNM by beating them in St. Joseph and Tunapuna. [*Desk thumping*] That is the dagger!

Now the dagger is San Fernando West; the dagger is Barataria/San Juan; the dagger is Ortoire/Mayaro.

“Is this a dagger that I see before me, the handle towards me? Come let me clutch thee.”

It reminds me of my good Shakespearean days man. [*Desk thumping*] That is the dagger they are talking about, and that is what is eating them up, because they lost the five marginal seats, which they thought they would never lose, and Tunapuna was the last bastion. It was a hard seat; I must admit.

Hon. Members: "So yuh tief it."

Hon. M. Assam: You see, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was the campaign manager in 1995 for his colleague, the former Member for St. Joseph, Mr. Ramrekersingh, and I beat him "going and coming". All the money they put, all the this and that; licks like fire and nowhere to shelter! [*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. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West brought in his troops: money, people and so on, and I "lick" them. In three weeks I "lick" them. This time they brought in that big bookie fellow; all the money and so forth, and they brought in Dr. F. David to intimidate me and my people: stones, rotten eggs, bottles. They used the public address system, when I was having my meeting, to drown me, and the police did not interfere, although I called on them for assistance and to enforce the Representation of the People Act. It was all terror in Tunapuna! [*Crosstalk*]

Nobody knows. I do not complain, because I do not have time for that kind of thing, but that was the kind of terror I encountered during my campaign in Tunapuna. They sent in their big guns and so forth.

Dr. Rowley: If Tunapuna chase you, who vote for you?

Hon. M. Assam: Tunapuna did not chase me! Why "yuh" so? What kind of Ph.D. does he have? Pile high and deep? [*Laughter*] Is that what it means? Is that what his Ph.D. means, pile high and deep? [*Laughter*] Who said anybody chased me? I said it was the thuggery and hooliganism of certain elements of the PNM that I was speaking about, which you represent and which you faced in the worst possible way, when you were challenging the Member for San Fernando East as leader of the party. They nearly mobbed and killed you at Balisier House. [*Laughter*]

The Member was a victim of the same thuggery and hooliganism that is characteristic and part of the culture of his party, which they have engendered into the people of this country.

Dr. Rowley: You are the most boldfaced man I know!

Hon. M. Assam: The Motion continues:

“And Be It Further Resolved...that the Government provide...supplementary allocation...”

Mr. Speaker, it is a pity that I forgot the figures. I had them on my desk, but I was so much in a hurry coming here. I was going to provide this House with the increased allocations that the UNC Government gave to the Elections and Boundaries Commission from 1995—2000, compared with what that party gave to them between 1991 and 1995. I am sorry, because I was looking them through, but I forgot them on my desk.

3.45 p.m.

You would be pleasantly surprised at the enormous increases that this Government gave in supplementary allocation to enable them to hire more staff, introduce technology, and to give them better accommodation and so forth so that they can conduct the elections properly. Then he says, they want the exercise completed in the shortest possible time with a view to improving it.

Mr. Speaker, voter registration and updating of the list is an ongoing exercise. I do not understand, where do these people live? He is a parliamentarian for 14 years and he does not even know the system in this country. Voter registration, updating of the list, cleaning of the list, that is, you are removing people who are dead, people who have migrated out of Trinidad, removing people who have moved to other constituencies all that is a continuing exercise done by the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

I wonder if the Member for Diego Martin West does not know that many people who have lived in an area for many years of their lives and are now grown-up and have purchased their homes in some of the developments that the Government has done, Home Construction Limited has done, Bahadoorsingh has done, Colonial Homes has done, I can go into all the companies that are involved in home development and construction. They have not changed their registration addresses, so conceivably, people have been living in certain areas for five, six, seven years and they have not changed. They are still either at their mother's registration or in the previous home they were in that they were renting in a certain constituency.

If, in the year 2000 they decide to change these things, what is wrong with that? It is their legitimate right to do that at any time, but many people did not do it for whatever reason, I do not know. It does not matter, once it is allowable under the law. This is what they do not understand. They do not understand law you know, they do not understand procedure. You do not understand the rules,

you do not understand it and you are a lawyer. What kind of lawyer are you? Once it is allowed under the law and the rules and the timeframe, whether it is two months, six weeks, whatever it is, it is allowed and it is valid and legitimate. So what is wrong with that?

As a matter of fact, people have certain kinds of loyalties and they may say that the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is running in Mayaro, they did not know that, but suddenly they realize that they could be validly registered in Ortoire/Mayaro because they had been living there for the last 10 years, but their registration is in Chaguanas. What is wrong with a man or a woman who has been living in Ortoire/Mayaro for eight or 10 years, but registered in Chaguanas and suddenly they realize that the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is “Mr. So and So” and they want to support him and, therefore, now prepared to transfer their vote from Chaguanas where they have been registered for all these years, but living in Ortoire/Mayaro in order to vote for a candidate of their choice. What is wrong with that?

The PNM gerrymandered this entire country for many years by a process of internal migration. They moved hoards of people from the overwhelming PNM areas into the marginal areas of Bon Air, La Horquetta, Maloney, Couva, and all these places. All in the back of Tunapuna and Barataria are NHA houses and that was a deliberate, political strategy to hold on to political power surreptitiously and they used state resources to do so and when it came to allocating the houses, it was not on a fair and equitable basis in accordance with the Constitution of this country, it was done purely on a partisan basis, political patronage and they want to come today and talk nonsense.

Do you know in five years, the UNC Government has not done that. We are so innocent and so naïve that all the houses and apartments that were completed were given to the same PNM people who they had allocated. This UNC Government is really, totally naïve. We had the opportunity to fill those empty apartments and houses with our own people and we decided no. We kept on the same chairman. Mr. Brian George was the PNM’s NHA chairman from 1991—1995 and he continued to be the chairman under the UNC from 1995—2000 and the board continued in place. This can be verified. A PNM board continued for five years under the UNC in the NHA which is one of the most sensitive areas for dispensing political patronage, because shelter is a critical thing and we did not do anything about it and they gave all the houses to your people and you are coming today to talk about thief and corruption and you did it shamelessly for 30-something years and it continued under a UNC Government.

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The UNC continued to rent office buildings and office accommodation from PNM landlords, do you know that? The UNC in its naivety continued to rent building accommodation from PNM landlords. The UNC continued to give—contracts—in fact, there is a certain individual who has a monopoly in certain kinds of supplies in this country and we have not done anything about it. We have not touched it and there are many such people but they want to talk about dishonesty and the UNC. I tell you, we are so naïve, we should wake up and put some licks on ourselves, that is what we should be doing because we have perpetuated patronage by allowing these people, their friends and family and their cronies to continue to reap the benefits and to cream off everything in this country, or most of the things in this country and you want to talk about honesty? Do you know anything about that?

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West tried to establish a kind of an argument based on statistics which are not very viable. He did not say from where he got them, he did not say the year, he talked about a 56 per cent, I do not know from where he got that 56 per cent. He tried, through some deductive process to suggest that when the next census is totalled it would be 1.7—1.8 billion, all kinds of spurious mathematics, all kinds of spurious equations and formations and up to now he has not convinced anybody about what he was trying to tell us. I want him to tell us who are the culprits he wants us to hound down? Who are the culprits who should be found and punished? Let him identify them. He knows all who did these wrong things and he is such an investigator he reminds me of Arthur Conan Doyle about whom I used to read in novels long ago. If you are such a great detective, go and ferret out the information of all these culprits and thieves and people who have violated the law and take it to the relevant authorities—to use his words—and let them deal with them.

Mr. Speaker, there is no election petition, no fraud cases except those persons who have been charged with some voter padding of some 425 votes, that is what I read somewhere; 425 votes were padded in an election that had over 9,000 electors, but up to now they have not brought any substantiated evidence to prove that there was fraud, or any kind of stealing of anything. There are all kinds of emotive words, they are trying their very best, but unsuccessfully, to tarnish the character of many good and decent citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and they are putting them in the same kind of category as they are. You know it takes a thief to discover a thief, Mr. Speaker, you know that. It takes a thief to discover a thief.

Mr. Speaker, he went on to talk about all these areas: St. Joseph, Tunapuna, San Fernando West and so forth. Do you believe any of that? Does anybody believe any of that, that they had their private investigators? The interesting thing about that is he brings figures to prove a point, and they all represent a maxi-taxi. Every one of the figures he quoted which they did on their own to prove a point, every one of them, a maxi-taxi or in one case he was so ashamed he said five, and that was an ordinary car. He said that one was five, so that was an ordinary car. It is so shameful that the Member for Diego Martin West, a man who has been a parliamentarian for 14 years, a man who has a Ph.D. he said he managed this company and did this and that and he comes today with some bogus figures, spurious arguments, an incoherent set of recitals in a Motion that are meaningless, vague, fatuous and a Motion, as I said before, that is vexatious, frivolous and of no consequence.

Mr. Speaker, I think that every clause of this Motion should be condemned because none of the clauses in this Motion lends itself to any seriousness and intelligent discussion on debate, not one, because he does not even know what he wants the relevant authorities to do and, therefore, I think that even that side must be baffled as to what was the intention of the mover of the Motion. They, too, must be baffled because I am sure they did not read the Motion, they come here and do not prepare, they just take their seats drawing money under false pretenses whether they are in Opposition or Government. I am sure they have not read the Motion, because if they had read the Motion, they would have said in their caucus: "Member for Diego Martin West, you have to tighten up this Motion you know, you have to provide some more information; you have to provide more explanation; you have to give some more details; you have to tell them what you mean and what you want." That is what they would have done, and I would expect the Member for Arouca South, a lawyer, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, a lawyer, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, a lawyer, and the Member for Arima to have assisted the Member because they know he studied rocks. The Member for La Brea, another lawyer, I would have expected all these lawyers in their caucus to have assisted the Member in drawing up a motion that was intelligible and that could lend itself to a decent debate in this honourable House and that the children who attended Parliament today could have learnt, be informed and be educated in the whole process. Alas, as they say in Spanish "pero embalde!", but in vain. It did not happen, and, therefore, I cannot entertain any one of the clauses in this innocuous Motion put forward by the Member for Diego Martin East.

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It is a Motion designed to stir up more commotion, more confusion; it is a Motion that is intended perhaps, and maybe he is not doing it deliberately, but he does not even know that there is a certain phrase in international relations called “unintended consequences”. He did not even know the unintended consequences of his act by putting this Motion forward. It has several deleterious, unintended consequences, Member for Diego Martin West. In future, when you bring a motion to this House, think more carefully about what you are trying to put to the Parliament and, by extension, the national community because if you do not do it, you will continue to be a laughing stock as you were in the last five years and which has led to the devastating defeat of your party. That is why you lost the marginal seats, because the marginal seats are the seats where people had been suffering for years under the PNM and it was the UNC that brought relief. Better education; better social policies; higher pensions; better roads; better drainage; more jobs; more recreational centres; better community centres, everything. That is what people want, not “ole” talk, it is performance they want. People want bread in their mouth, they want food on their tables, better education for their children, they want running water.

You had the country in grip for 34 years, where 20 per cent of the people had running water, in four or five years, the Member for Caroni East was able to bring water to over 75 per cent of the population in this country. That is performance, and that is what the marginal seats wanted and that is why we won, and if you do not know that and you continue to attribute our success to stealing, voter padding and corruption of the EBC, and this and that, you would lose again in 2005. As a matter of fact, you might lose too, Member for Diego Martin West, although you say you got 74 per cent of the vote, it may go down to about 34 per cent. You have got to be careful, watch out. It may go down to 34 per cent instead of 74 per cent because you are talking a lot of nonsense in the Parliament. You are not reaching out to the people, you must reach up and reach out to your constituents, reach up and reach out to the people of Trinidad and Tobago who are desperate for your help, who are desperate for development, who are desperate for a better standard and quality of life.

4.00 p.m.

That is what the people want, and they have not given them for 34 years. That is what they want, not this foolish Motion. They continue to make real fools of themselves, unfortunately. They come to this Parliament and say the same things, calling us thieves. They do not even have an appreciation of the dignity of Parliament. You do not call a person a thief in Parliament, you do not refuse to shake the hands of the Speaker; you do not get up and ask the Speaker, “whe yuh want”, like the Member for Diego Martin West did. They speak to the Speaker like that and they are talking about decorum and dignity and decency.
(Interruption)

Mr. Hinds: How does the Prime Minister speak to the President?

Hon. M. Assam: I feel so sorry for the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. Again, I have to call him Rumpelstiltskin, always jumping up on his one leg, one day he will go through the floor like Rumpelstiltskin; and he is just like his master's voice, always repeating what everybody says. He does not have an original idea of his own, just regurgitating what everybody says. Once the Member for Diego Martin Central, or the Member for San Fernando East, said it, because they are his boss, he says it too, slavishly, like his master's voice. Think for yourself and think on your feet.

This Motion, as I said, has no substance whatsoever; everything in this Motion is either calculated to deceive or mislead, but on the other hand, the few things that I agree with, we have already put them into train. If the PNM did not do its job prior to the December 11, 2000 election, they cannot come here and cry foul today, they cannot come and cry baby, bleeding heart; they cannot accuse the EBC or the officers; they cannot accuse the Commonwealth observer group. They cannot do that unless they are people who are hell-bent on the destruction of the democracy of this country and the destruction of the hallowed institutions which make Trinidad and Tobago such a great country. Thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): It is interesting that we have just heard 75 minutes of diatribe from the Member for Tunapuna, who has not dealt with the issue at all. He studiously avoided the issues, in his normal style, believing that the decibel level would somehow lend credibility to the nonsense he was speaking.

I am now satisfied that there was fraud in St. Joseph in 1995 as well; not only in Tunapuna in 2000 but in St. Joseph in 1995. I am satisfied there was fraud in Baratavia and in Mayaro in 1995; and that this has been an illegitimate Government, not now but since 1995. The difference is that at that time the question of interference with the electoral process, the question of fraud was not on the national agenda and persons were not ready to believe then that the type of fraud that we saw in the last election could have occurred in 1995. We now hear the reports of the bus loads of people and the green band maxi-taxis that transported voters in St. Joseph and so on, in 1995. That is when it started, that is how they got into office then and perfected their plans to steal elections in this country. People are now talking about what happened then, not what happened now, because everybody saw what happened now.

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I have some information here, I picked a random sample from my own constituency. I did not lose, so I am not a sore loser, but there was a very curious phenomena that we saw in the lists the Member for Tunapuna has spoken about; the lists that we are supposed to inspect and make queries about. We saw persons whose names had been removed from the 1999 electoral lists for the local government election, in polling division 155 in my constituency, because they were dead, but their names reappeared miraculously in 2000. Of course, it is self-evident that persons involved in the crime of personation—because I am going to deal with all the various election offences and illegal practices that the Member for Tunapuna studiously avoided. Persons who committed the crime of personation, who voted in the names—[*Interruption*]

You see, I cannot help it; the level of illiteracy on that side. The offence is “personation”, ask the Attorney General, it is not impersonation. You are illiterate.

There are a number of deceased persons whose names were miraculously back on the list in my constituency and who are recorded as having voted; or others are recorded as having voted in their names. In addition, and I can call the names, I will call the last names McKenzie, La Roche, Serrette, Bernard, all living in Petit Valley, all died prior to the 2000 election but they are recorded as having voted. That is a very small sample. Then we had a Bailey, a Carter, a Bernard, all in polling division 225, whose names appeared twice.

The other side would have had to pad up my constituency with about 10,000 votes before they could beat me in Diego Martin East. That is also why we won so convincingly in Tobago; because there was padding by the UNC in Tobago, no two ways about it, but it was not sufficient to affect the PNM's victory. It may have split votes in certain seats where the result was close and thereby deprived the PNM of winning 10 electoral districts instead of eight, but it does not matter because we were victorious in Tobago, notwithstanding all the UNC's attempts at fraud.

This campaign became so puerile and infantile. We have heard the Member for Tunapuna talking about people wanting bread; the UNC carried this bread talk to the limit. They sent two vanloads of sandwich loaves with blue notes inside and shared them out in Tobago just before the elections because they got this bread thing in their heads. This is a fact, this occurred, they sent two vanloads with bread to share among, what they believed was the hungry people of Tobago, but Tobagonians were so incensed at that insulting behaviour, that is why they paid no regard; they took the bread and they voted for the PNM.

4.10 p.m.

The fact of the matter is, what the Member for Diego Martin West has presented is an excellent Motion. It is specific and it makes specific recommendations, contrary to the nonsense just uttered by the Member for Tunapuna. The Motion specifically indicates that there is anxiety in this country with respect to the role of the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the state of the voters list used in the last election. There is absolutely no doubt of that.

I wonder what country the other side is living in. They do not listen to the radio; they do not watch television; they do not read newspapers? There is considerable disquiet and anxiety in this country regarding the state of the voters list, even in Tobago. I go back to Tobago. There was an NAR candidate—not even a PNM—on TV6 with the voters list for his electoral district, showing one person originating in Trinidad and splitting, somehow, by some feat of biology, into two people and ending up in two different places in Tobago. The same one man, split into two and landed up in two different polling stations in Tobago. It was not a PNM candidate who was saying that, it was an NAR candidate and he had the list and he was providing the evidence. Because you see, the type of fraud that has taken place in this country is extensive.

The whole question of illegal transfers is the tip of the iceberg. The fraud committed by the UNC involved under-aged voters; persons using false identification papers to register as first-time voters; 16 year-olds, 17 year-olds registering as first-time voters, coming from these constituencies such as Couva South and North and so on, and finding themselves in these marginal seats. That was scam number one. There was a particularly high incidence of that scam in San Fernando West.

Scam number two was to go through the list of known PNM supporters and delete them from the list. I remember on election day, one of my activists who has been living in the Maraval area for the last 51 years, voted in every election that that person was eligible to vote in, but on this occasion—he voted in the 1999 local government election—when he went to vote on December 11—one of my activists—only to find out that his name is gone. Gone! He has a valid ID card that will be valid until the year 2008. The name is gone from the list!

When we called the Elections and Boundaries Commission and asked how can this happen; the person has never moved; he has lived in the same place for all of his life; he has a valid ID card; voted in 1999; his name was on the list then; he never transferred his vote. How has his name gone? It was interesting the reply that we got on election day out of the EBC. They said a curious thing has

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happened with the computer database, because when you check the last four digits in the ID card number, let us say they were 0138—that was the last four digits—they found 0137, 0139, 0140, but 0138 gone, deleted! The scamps were not even careful enough to renumber and re-sequence the numbers. It just disappeared.

So that this is scam number two: Go and find the names of known PNM supporters and activist party members and delete them from the list, and make sure you do it just about a week before election, in all of these supplemental and amended lists that just come out of nowhere at you. Take it out then, so that on election day, the PNM people would be scrambling all over the place, trying to figure out what has happened. How could people with valid ID cards, voted for the last 30—40 years of their lives—name gone! So that is scam number two.

Scam number three is double voting and that is why this EBC list is so corrupt, because the 940,000-odd names are not real people. There are at least 140,000 phantoms on that list. That is why they did not get 307,000 votes; they got far less, because inside of their total is maybe 100,000 double voters, persons who voted in one polling station at 8 o'clock and voted in another one at 9 o'clock and voted in another one at 10 o'clock, because scam number three was to interfere with the electoral ink. This is the first time in the history of elections in Trinidad and Tobago that there are so many reports of the electoral ink washing off people's fingers. Funny!

When I investigated the matter—people actually came to me who had just voted and showed me how they could dip their finger in bleach—ink gone. It is the first time since the history of the conduct of elections in Trinidad and Tobago that you had this high incidence of defective ink. And guess what? Apparently the ink has to be mixed with some special alcohol that is produced, guess where? At Caroni (1975) Limited. It has to be mixed with a special alcohol. "Yuh thing it easy."

So that is scam number three; interfere with the electoral ink, and when you have bogus names on the list and names of phantom voters and when you can wash the ink off your finger and you can go all over the place and vote two, three, four, five times, because the Elections and Boundaries Commission has very curiously said that anybody whose name is on the list could vote, you know, you have to put all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together. You have a list with 150,000 phantom names; you have the chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission coming out and saying, once your name is on the list you could vote, and then you find out that people are voting on election day without any identification.

It is also the first election that I have been involved in where I have seen so many persons permitted to vote without identification. You just come in and say, "I am John Smith", and nobody else coming to vote on that name because it is a false name. So John Smith of "Dacka Trace" is not a real person. His name has been put on the list by some corrupt person. He goes; he votes in one place at 8 o'clock; he comes at 9 o'clock now to vote under the name of John Smith in "Dacka Trace." He has lost his ID, he has no passport; he has no driver's licence. They say, "All right, fill out this piece of paper here; raise your right hand, swear you are John Smith, vote." This happened with such regularity on the day of the election, and this is why I am satisfied that there is an illegitimate Government on that side.

You could drag those court cases all you want; you could file any kind of constitutional motion; you could bring conservatory order; you could appeal and appeal and appeal, until there is a whole set of orange peel, it does not matter to me, because at the end of the day, when we win those two seats, that is the end of you! [*Desk thumping*] So it could be two, three, four months, whatever, enjoy it while it lasts. [*Interruption*] I hear "love it". You could twin the two stadia, I do not mind. I hear you love it.

You see, I hear the Member for Tunapuna crying, laughing and saying he "ain't" get no petition yet. The time is not up yet, and I know the Attorney General knows that. We have time. Do not beg for any petition, you know, because when it comes let us see what will happen. For example, we have determined that the Member for Tunapuna filed his return on January 26, and to get that information was like pulling teeth!

According to the law, the expense return of a candidate is a public document and the Attorney General would be well aware of this, you know. If you go into the law, you will see that the expense return is classified as a public document, and for the payment of \$2.50, any member of the public can go in and demand to see the expense return, or any other election document. But when we attempted to get it today, is like pulling teeth. The first thing the people in the EBC say is, "You can't get that; that document is not available to the public." We had to go and make one set of noise. It was only when they got threatened by a lawyer that they produced the expense return. So we found out that the Member for Tunapuna filed his return on January 26, 2001.

4.20 p.m.

We have 14 days. The Attorney would know what I am talking about, so we are not begging for a petition. When he has to get in the box to answer, let us hear what he would say. Let us hear what he would say because I am quite satisfied that it was absolutely impossible for the most unpopular representative on that side—a man who was chased out of St. Joseph by his own people—to have landed in Tunapuna three weeks before the election and, somehow, miraculously managed to increase the votes in that constituency by 1,500, 2,000 or whatever it is. This man, who the people just chased from St. Joseph, was begging to be made a candidate and was bad-talking the Prime Minister and the UNC all over the country. He was bad-talking and *mauvais langueing* the Prime Minister and the Government when he thought that he was not going to be a candidate. The people in St. Joseph put their feet down. They said, “We doh want he, not he. He is pompous; he is arrogant and he has not serviced this constituency properly.” The UNC people said that. They ran him and he wants us to believe that he reached Tunapuna three weeks before the election and somehow managed to pull an additional 1,500 or 2,000 voters. No way! No way Jose! At least the Member for San Fernando West was squatting in San Fernando for about a year. He was down there doing his business for about a year, but not the Member for Tunapuna, he was there for 21 days.

The fact of the matter is that it was not just illegal transfers. It was not just that at all. What the Member for Diego Martin West has asked for is an immediate, comprehensive, nationwide voter registration exercise inclusive of a new voter identification system. I know that everybody on that side is not illiterate. I see the Member for Princes Town is watching me, but everybody on that side is not illiterate. They will know that when you ask for an immediate, comprehensive, nationwide voter registration exercise, inclusive of a new voter identification system, then you are being specific. How more specific than that can you get? This is the kind of puerile, infantile, diatribe that we have to listen to from the Member for Tunapuna because he would not deal with the issues. The problem is that the list, and the system of identification is corrupt whether it has been or is now so. The system of identification is antiquated.

When you look at a voter identification card it has no indication of the person’s address on it. Your identification card does not say where you live, it just has your name, date of birth and so on. On your driver’s permit, there is an address, but the identification card does not tell you that.

We are calling for a new identification card that has your polling division on it so you cannot move all over the country. You cannot take the same identification card and move around with it because if your polling division was on the card then you could only vote in one place. *[Interruption]* The Member sees it now. *[Interruption]* Is that so? I have a new one and it does not have it. I am not worrying with the Member because he is falling into the realm of illiteracy as the Member for Oropouche who does not know the difference between “impersonation” and “personation”.

What we are calling for is a new system of voter identification that is, more or less, tamperproof. The old identification card system is antiquated. It is too susceptible to forgery! Forget the “ole” talk and banter, the Members on the other side are well aware of this. There is no identification mark as there is on a currency bill where you can hold it up to the light and see the line or watermark on it. There is no unique identification system of confirming that an identification card is a valid one. It is just a piece of plastic. That is all it is. We have to do better than this. I also submit that if you wish to transfer you must cancel your identification card and get a new one. You should not be able to use the same old identification card. I also submit that persons must attend the office in person when they wish to transfer. It should not be that someone could carry in 200 or 500 transfer forms without investigations being done to determine that these people are real.

What has occurred in this election is that persons who do not live in certain districts have made false declarations; they have filled out forms illegally and they have illegally stated that they reside in certain electoral districts where they do not. The only way that can be done is when the regulations are relaxed which allow persons to do these things on behalf of others.

Section 94(1) of the Representation of the People Act which deals with election offences states:

“A person is guilty of an offence who votes at an election—

- (a) knowing that he is not entitled to vote at the election;
- (b) as an elector more than once in the same electoral district or in more than one electoral district;”

That is one of the first offences I have seen in this Act. This is what occurred in this last election, and I am now satisfied that it happened in 1995 too. You had persons voting more than once and it is an offence.

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Section 96 deals with the situation where:

- “(1) A person is guilty of a corrupt practice who is guilty of bribery.
- (2) A person is guilty of bribery...”

when he

- “(a) gives any money or procures any office to or for any elector or...for any other person...in order to induce any elector to vote or refrain from voting;”

This scam where they were handing out \$200, \$500 or whatever, is an election offence. This latest scam that the UNC came up with where, in PNM areas, they gave people money not to vote. [*Laughter*] The Member is laughing because he knows exactly what is going on. They went into PNM areas and paid people not to vote. They broke the law. This is a corrupt practice. The Member is laughing because he knows exactly what I am talking about. They all know exactly what I am talking about. [*Interruption*] Go ahead. As I said, when we win those two matters in court, Member for Oropouche, you could keep laughing all you want. As I said, time longer than twine. Sit there and laugh. The Member probably knows something I do not know. He probably knows what the outcome of that court case is going to be.

Let me go to section 99 which says.

- “(1) A person is guilty of a corrupt practice if he commits, or aids, abets, counsels or procures the commission of, the offence of personation.”

This is particularly for the Member for Oropouche in his sublime illiteracy. Let me read it for him again; “personation”, there is no “im” in front.

- “(1) A person is guilty of a corrupt practice if he commits, or aids, abets, counsels or procures the commission of, the offence of personation.”

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I interrupted the proceedings, because it is 4.30 p.m., in order to move the adjournment of the House.

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Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to next week Friday, February 9, 2001 at 1.30 p.m. when the Government intends to deal with bills entitled “An Act to amend the Plant Protection Act, 1975”; “An Act to amend the Supplemental Police Act, Chap. 15:02” and “An Act to regulate the licensing and operation of private security agencies, the employment of security officers and matters incidental thereto”.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.31 p.m.