

Leave of Absence

Wednesday, September 12, 2001

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 12, 2001

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Point Fortin (Mr. Lawrence Achong) requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House of Representatives. Leave of absence is granted.

UNITED STATES TRAGEDY

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, during the last 24 hours we have seen some tragic activities in the United States, and I humbly ask hon. Members to observe one minute's silence for those who have perished in those tragic circumstances.

The House stood.

PAPER LAID

Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad and Tobago Free Zone Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2000. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]

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

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Presentation

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the Third Report of the 2001 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on proposals for the supplementation of the Annual Estimates 2001.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West):

**Caroni (1975) Limited
(Annual Rent Due)**

- 30.** Could the Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs state:
- (a) With respect to the lease of lands at Caroni (1975) Limited to INNERCOB Industries Limited for the establishment of InnCogen and other industries in 1998, what is the annual rent due to Caroni Limited?

- (b) How much money has been paid by INNERCOB to Caroni (1975) Limited as at June 30th, 2001?
- (c) If any arrears are owed to Caroni (1975) Limited, could the Minister further state:
 - (i) for which year/s and how much is the total indebtedness; and
 - (ii) what action the Company intends to take in order to collect, in a timely manner, all moneys owed to it by INNERCOB?

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask that this question be deferred to the next sitting of the Parliament.

Question, by leave, deferred.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Miss Penelope Beckles (Arima):

**Arima Town Hall/Administrative Centre
(Construction of)**

- 38.** Could the hon. Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government indicate:
- (a) When his Ministry will undertake construction work of the new Arima Town Hall and Administrative Centre?
 - (b) Could the Minister also indicate:
 - (i) The estimated cost of construction of the building;
 - (ii) The estimated date of completion;
 - (iii) The nature of the construction in relation to the New Arima Town Hall and Administrative Centre?

The Minister in the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government (Hon. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg that this answer be deferred until later in the proceedings.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Secondary Entrance Assessment
(Assignment of)**

- 42. Mr. Kenneth Valley** (*Diego Martin Central*) on behalf of Mr. F. Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the Hon. Minister of Education:
- (a) Is the Minister aware that some students who wrote the recently concluded SEA, have been assigned to schools that do not now exist?

- (b) If so, would the Minister outline the instances where this is so?
- (c) Could the Minister give the assurance that these schools would be ready for the new term in September?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are no instances where children were assigned to schools which do not now exist. I believe the question the Member really wanted to ask was whether there were students who wrote the SEA exam and who had been assigned to newly established schools.

Based on our policy of inclusion, starting from last year, Government took a deliberate decision to open up the education sector and to allow organizations to participate in the education sector in keeping with the schools that had been established for other denominational groups. Last year we saw that there were eight new denominational secondary schools: three of those were Maha Saba Schools, one was a Roman Catholic School and four ASJA Schools.

This year six new schools have been established. They are the Swaha High School, the Saraswati Hindu Girls' College, the Miracle Ministries Pentecostal High School, Trinity College East, Bishop Anstey East—both of these schools are Anglican Schools—and the Light and Life Pentecostal High School in Tobago. In the case of the Saraswati Girls' College and Miracle Ministries, infrastructure arrangements were made to accommodate the children who were assigned to those schools. Principals and teachers have been allocated to manage the schools and deliver the curriculum to the students. All six schools opened on schedule and, therefore, classes are on-going at these six schools, as elsewhere in the country, even as we speak.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Valley: I wonder whether the hon. Minister could inform the House whether the Biche Government Secondary School is ready for the new school term?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: That is the next question on the Order Paper.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a question on the Order Paper, and I am asking, given the answer the Minister stated clearly that there were no students assigned to a school which was not completed, whether the Biche Government School was completed. If it was not completed for the new school term, could the Minister inform the House whether any student who wrote the SEA was assigned to the Biche Government Secondary School?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The construction of the Biche Government School has been completed since last year. With respect to the second question, no new students were assigned to the Biche Government School.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (Laventille East/Morvant):

**Biche Government Secondary School
(Delay in Construction of)**

- 43.** (a) Would the Minister of Education state the reason(s) for the delay in the construction of the Biche Government Secondary School?
- (b) Could the Minister tell this honourable House the cost of construction and furnishing of this school?

Secondary Education Modernization Programme

- 44.** (a) Would the Minister of Education outline the schools that have been constructed so far under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme?
- (b) Could the Minister state the amount budgeted for construction in each case?
- (c) Would the Minister outline the actual cost in each case and explain the reasons for the difference, if any?

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Arima Town Hall /Administrative Centre
(Construction of)**

- 38. Miss Penelope Beckles (Arima)** asked the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government:
- (a) Could the hon. Minister indicate when his Ministry will undertake construction work on the new Arima Town Hall and Administrative Centre?
- (b) Could the Minister also indicate:
- (i) The estimated cost of construction of the building;
- (ii) The estimated date of completion;
- (iii) The nature of the construction in relation to the new Arima Town Hall and Administrative Centre?

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to question 38, the hon. Minister is on his way and I do apologize for his being late.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That means the question will be answered?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Yes.

The Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government (Hon. Carlos John): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do apologize for being late in getting here.

With regard to the question posed by the Member for Arima, I wish to state that with regard to the new Arima Town Hall, the Government shall undertake construction of this Town Hall following a strategic review and planning of the new Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government. In any event, a budget has been put aside in the next fiscal year for designs for this building and upon completion of the designs, we shall set a schedule in place for start up of works.

With regard to the agreement on the administrative complex, the Government shall undertake construction works to the Arima Administrative Complex following acquisition of private lands at the corner of Broadway and Woodford Street, Arima, to provide space for an office block.

In 1998, Cabinet agreed to the purchase of private lands required to consolidate the government office block in Arima. The proposed budget estimate, at 1997 rates, for the new Arima Town Hall was in the sum of \$22,528,000 inclusive of value added tax. The estimated cost of construction of the Arima Administrative Centre shall be based on the brief and schedule of accommodation for the proposed users. The estimated date of completion for the new Arima Town Hall and Arima Administrative Centre shall be based on the approval of the final design and the reasonable time frame and methodology for the construction of the project. The nature of both projects shall be determined following design, geotechnical science report and the philosophy of the structural design for the project.

I wish to state to this honourable House that the stakeholders, both at the borough level and the Member of Parliament for Arima, would be involved in the discussions on both projects. Thank you.

Miss Beckles: Is the hon Minister aware that there are plans approved for both the Town Hall and the Administrative Centre? Assuming that there was an existing cost in 1997, could he indicate what was the reason the Town Hall was not constructed at that time?

Hon. C. John: I am not in a position to explain why the Town Hall was not constructed since 1997. I know one of the major constraints was budget. However, the engineers, after consultation with members of the borough considered it necessary to have some of the existing plans revised because we believe that we would be in a position to provide more accommodation by expanding the projects somewhat.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

Bill to provide for the Supplementary Appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2001 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

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

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

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

Be it Resolved that the House adopt the Third Report of the 2001 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on the proposals for the Supplementation of the Annual Estimates 2001.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Friday, September 07, 2001 and agreed to the following proposals:

There will be an increase to the 2001 appropriation of \$929,981,765 and increases in the limits with respect to the grant of approvals for the write off of losses. The increases in appropriation will provide funds for the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund of \$600 million, the Dollar for Dollar Education Programme Fund of \$240,660,000 and settlement of outstanding debts in respect of the 2001 Public Sector Investment Programme of \$89,321,765.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the year 2000, the Government established what is now known as the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, the purpose for which was to deposit a percentage of the surplus revenues achieved from the price of oil over and above the budgeted price. In the year 2000, \$415 million was transferred to this Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund.

During this year, the Government has received just about \$1 billion in excess of the budgeted revenues from oil and, in accordance with the decision of the

Government, 60 per cent of that excess revenue will be transferred to this Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. By the end of this year, the Government would have set aside in excess of \$1 billion into this Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. This year the budget was predicated on a price of oil of \$22 per barrel. We have received an average of \$27 per barrel.

Last year the decision was to transfer 67 per cent of the surplus revenues to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. This year we are transferring 60 per cent to accommodate a 20 per cent transfer to a new fund that the Government will be creating, which I will cover next in my presentation. The fund is to be managed by the Central Bank and the legislation governing that fund is expected to be brought to this House before the end of this year.

The second item approved by the Finance Committee was a transfer of \$240,660,000 to a Dollar for Dollar Education Programme Fund. This fund is to provide for the granting of funds to students wishing to acquire tertiary level education in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not the intention that the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund be used permanently to cover the expenses of this dollar for dollar programme. The intention is that the dollar-for-dollar programme would be a charge on the Consolidated Fund; and the transfer of moneys, as we have it now, from surplus revenues is to allow the Government some time to wean that permanent expenditure from the Consolidated Fund.

This dollar for dollar programme, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to enable students, particularly poor students with the required grades, to acquire university education. It is part of the plan that will allow Trinidad and Tobago to increase its intake, so to speak, coming out of secondary school to university education from a current level of 7.5 to 20 per cent by the year 2005.

The third item has to do with additional funding in the Public Sector Investment Programme of \$89 million. A number of ministries are in need of additional funding to meet outstanding bills for work completed during the course of this year's Public Sector Investment Programme. In some cases these projects have surpassed the targets set for 2001 and the allocations previously approved have been utilized.

A number of questions have been raised by Members of the House during committee stage and answers have been provided in writing to Members. The overall effects of the increases are as follows:

	\$
Judiciary	547,000
Tobago House of Assembly	5,000,000

Ministry of Finance which would include the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund transfer and the Dollar for Dollar Education Fund transfer	842,425,023
Ministry of National Security	3,821,453
Minister of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs	6,136,077
Ministry of Education	4,629,000
Ministry of Human Development, Youth and Culture	20,350,000
Ministry of Housing and Settlements	2,459,557
Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government	42,576,956
Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs	2,036,699
Total	929,981,765

In the Public Sector Investment Programme as at the end of August, the expenditure stood at \$700 million. The expectation is that, with the approval of the additional expenditure being requested today, the Public Sector Investment Programme will end off this year at a figure of about \$980 million, which is in fact the figure approved by Parliament during the budget last year.

That notwithstanding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we expect that by the end of this year, we should end with a surplus of about \$100 million. For all intents and purposes we have exceeded our original plan, which is to come in by the end of the year with a balanced budget. Given this increase of \$929,981,765, the 2001 appropriation will now be \$17,896,551,076.

The Finance Committee also agreed to increase the limits for write-off of losses which were set way back in 1965, some 35 years ago. These increases reflect realistic limits for write-off of losses relative to present-day costs. These limits are really moving, in some cases, from \$500; and in other cases \$1,000 to what we consider to be realistic values of today of \$25,000 and \$50,000 in other cases, as was approved by the Finance Committee.

Between August 1998 and the year 2001, Parliament has approved the write-off of about \$16.6 million, representing about 133 items, all having to come to the House. It is expected that with the increased limits now being given—like I said, increases of limits set some 35 years ago—more than 75 per cent of the requests coming to Parliament for approval would be delegated to the Ministry of Finance to the authority of the Treasury.

Question proposed.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it extremely difficult to be concerned with this minor matter before us today given the happenings of yesterday. I think that there are, in the occurrences of yesterday, lessons for us here in Trinidad and Tobago. I really think it touches the soul of people all over the world that we can have that level of inhumanity to mankind.

We, in Trinidad and Tobago, can consider ourselves extremely fortunate—blessed. We are not plagued by natural disasters. We do not have major earthquakes. We do not have volcanoes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, even when hurricanes are coming to this country, they tend to squeeze between Trinidad and Tobago, expand and go and “lick up” Venezuela, leaving Trinidad and Tobago alone.

We have good fortune. We have oil and gas and we are fortunate at this time that oil prices are quite high. So, we are blessed. More than that, people from all over the world are in this melting pot that is Trinidad and Tobago. There is a high level of tolerance so far, although, from time to time, there are some stresses.

On reflecting on the occurrences of yesterday, given what has been happening to our friends opposite over the last month, given the unease that has been the experience of Trinidad and Tobago, it is time that we all reflect and know that this place really, given our blessings, owes certain obligations.

2.00 p.m.

The French, I think, have a saying: *noblesse oblige*; if you have that type of blessing, well then there are certain obligations which flow from that; that we need to conduct our affairs without arrogance, first of all, and with concern for our fellow citizens; the avoidance of corruption; the commitment to integrity and truth in what we do, and all these things, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I must confess that this matter before us which is simply the cleaning up exercise in preparation for the audit of the accounts for the year 2000 and 2001—that is what this is, simply a cleaning up exercise to ensure that there is parliamentary approval for moneys already spent in the various ministries and

departments and so on. Really, this is a minor matter, given current world events because I am sure as information comes out, most of us would hear some relative or someone we know who was injured or died in that barbaric act yesterday.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is one minor issue in this matter which, I think, needs some comments and that is the Revenue Stabilization Fund. I remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Article IV, Consultation for Trinidad and Tobago, which was published on the Internet, I think, on July 27, the point was made that there has been no legislative approval yet for the Revenue Stabilization Fund. I think the Minister has informed us that that legislation would come to the Parliament before the end of the year. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we are speaking about a revenue stabilization fund, I find it somewhat illogical that we would still have the system of year-to-year estimates concerning oil prices. It would seem to me that whole concept of such a fund is that, first of all, one would assume a normal oil price and the fund would, therefore, collect excess revenue, and in any year if oil prices are below the normal oil prices—normal oil prices are determined by trends, looking over a period—you know, Mr. High Commissioner, with top hat and—

Mr. Assam: That is griping you?

Mr. K. Valley: That griping me? Could you imagine? [*Interruption*] The hard part is that you were never successful at anything you did. Let the truth be told. When you leave here, for example—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really do not want to get involved with that this afternoon so let me leave him alone. Let me talk about the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

It would seem to me that if we are serious about that we would really be assuming an oil price for budget projections between \$17 and \$18. So that revenue earned on prices higher than that figure would not go into the fund. Let us assume, for example, that coming out of the events of yesterday, there was a crash in the world's economy and oil prices were to fall to \$12 or \$13, then one would expect that there would be a drawdown from the Oil Stabilization Fund. This issue, however, of moving your oil price projection on an annual basis, I think you are really fogging the numbers when you speak about an oil stabilization fund.

Secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is the issue about the amount of the excess revenue that is going into the fund. Last year it was two-thirds and, really, if one is serious about such a fund, 100 per cent of the excess revenue should really go into the fund because what you are saying is: listen, we are normalizing the situation, we are putting funds aside for that proverbial rainy day, as it were. Last year it is 67 per cent, this year it is 60 per cent, and you say you are putting 20 per cent in the dollar for dollar plan, which is another harebrained idea.

I want to ask the Government to look at that concept again, because when that legislation comes we would have a few things to say. I think, more than that, the IMF would have a few things to say on the operations of that Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one can speak about this dollar for dollar plan, but then the budget is supposed to be on Friday and, as I said, I am really not in the mood to speak about these piddling matters, given the mourning of the world, as it were. You see, I think after yesterday, my friend from Tunapuna should really reflect—he sounded very nice on radio yesterday but it does not appear that the events have touched his consciousness, otherwise one might have seen some type of change in his behaviour today. It is difficult, you understand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have no significant difficulty with the matter coming from the Finance Committee, other than, I think we need to look at the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

I thank you.

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just take a minute to respond to the only issue raised by the other side, which has to do with the Revenue Stabilization Fund. I really could not understand what the Member for Diego Martin Central was saying: he said a number of things that just did not add up. I really do not want to spoil the day but one can understand why, in 1995, he was not Minister of Finance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not understand what he means by budgeting with a normal oil price. I do not understand it! If the price moves to \$43 or it goes down to \$9, how does one anticipate? Even if we were to use a normal oil price, what is a normal oil price? The fact is that this Government took a very prudent approach in the year 2000, which is what we are dealing with this year and we will take a prudent approach next year, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have budgeted this year on the price of \$22 a barrel. It turns out that oil has come in at, let us say, \$27 a barrel. If we were to do what the Leader of the Opposition has been suggesting all along, we would have taken the entire billion dollars in surplus revenue and spent it. We would not have saved a cent! Instead, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we took a Government position of taking, in the case of last year, 67 per cent of it—two-thirds—and putting it aside for a rainy day; putting it aside for the day that the oil price will drop on us and we would have, at least, some buffer to carry us through those difficult times and not end up with a situation like what we found ourselves in, in the 1980s.

We have varied the formula this year from a 67 per cent savings to a 33 per cent to the Consolidated Fund, to a 60:20:20; 60 for savings for the rainy day, 20

per cent for education, 20 per cent to provide for poor people to get a tertiary and university level of education in Trinidad and Tobago, without which, in fact, they will not be able to go to the university. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what they are arguing about. The fact that we have had the vision, the caring and concern for young people, particularly, for poor people, that would give every child with the basics to get into university, to get that university education, by providing moneys for them.

We had a challenge this year which was that out of this year's revenue we should find money to fund students wishing to go to university from the beginning of this university term. We found \$240 million to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The moneys did not go into the Consolidated Fund and it will not go to spend on all the things that they would criticize us for spending. Twenty per cent in excess of \$240 million is being set aside by us for young people's education. They have a problem with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker!

This Government will continue to do the responsible thing. They can argue about the change in formula 67:33, 60:20:20, whatever they will do; the fact is that it is now turning out that for every extra dollar that we make, 80 cents of it will go to savings and education, and only 20 per cent will go to the Consolidated Fund, compared to 33 per cent going to the Consolidated Fund last year.

There is nothing and, in fact, there is a suggestion that all the moneys of the Revenue Stabilization Fund are going into education. I do not know from where this information is originating. The fact is that the Revenue Stabilization Fund will be governed by legislation. This billion dollars that will be in the Fund by the end of this month will be governed by legislation, it will be managed by the Central Bank, and moneys can only come out of that fund in accord under prescribed conditions and as prescribed in law. So that we could not, next year, under some whim and fancy of anyone, take moneys out of this Revenue Stabilization Fund for any other purpose but for preparing for rainy day situations, where the price of oil may drop below the budgeted price.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

2.15 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the Supplementary Appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2001 be now read a second time.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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

Bill accordingly read a third time and passed.

RELATED MOTIONS

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in my name. In moving this Motion, I seek the leave of the House to debate, along with this matter, Motions Nos. 2, 3 and 4 on the Order Paper which relate to the same subject.

Question put and agreed to.

**GUARANTEE OF LOANS (COMPANIES)
(INCREASE IN BORROWING)**

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is *inter alia* provided by subsection (1) of section 3 of the Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act, Chap. 71:82 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act") that the government may, in such manner and on such terms and subject to such conditions as may be agreed between it and a Lending Agency, guarantee the discharge by a Company of its obligations under any agreement which may be entered into by the Company with a Lending Agency in respect of any borrowing by that Company that is authorized by the Government:

And whereas it is provided by subsection (1) of section 4 of the Act, that the aggregate amount of all borrowings by Companies that are guaranteed by the Government under the Act, shall not exceed fifty million dollars (without

Guarantee of Loans
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taking into account any amount in respect of interest, commissions and any other expenses secured by the guarantees) or such greater sum as may from time to time be specified by Resolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives:

And whereas by Resolution passed in the House of Representatives on the 14th day of May, 1979 and in the Senate on the 22nd day of May, 1979 an aggregate sum of five thousand million dollars was specified:

And whereas it is now necessary to increase the aggregate amount of all borrowings by Companies that are guaranteed by the Government under the Act by a further sum of five thousand million dollars:

Be it resolved that the aggregate amount of all borrowings by Companies that are guaranteed by the Government under the Act shall not exceed ten thousand million dollars.

In the second Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker,

Whereas it is provided by section 3(1) of the Development Loans Act that the Government is authorized, *inter alia*, for the purposes of financing general development in Trinidad and Tobago, or repayment of borrowings effected for general development, *inter alia*, by a statutory authority within the meaning of the Statutory Authorities Act, Chap. 24:01 or by an enterprise that is controlled by or on behalf of the State, from time to time to borrow money externally or internally in a sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate seven thousand, five hundred million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago and thereafter such sum in such currency as may from time to time be specified by resolution passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives:

And whereas by resolution of Parliament published in Legal Notice No. 15 of 2000 the Government was authorized to borrow a further sum not exceeding in the aggregate two thousand, five hundred million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago:

And whereas it is necessary for the Government to borrow further sums of money for the purposes stated in the said section:

Be it resolved that for the purposes stated in the said section, the Government is hereby authorized to borrow money externally or internally in a further sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate three thousand million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the third Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker,

Whereas it is provided by section 2(1) of the Treasury Bills Act, that the Minister may borrow in Trinidad and Tobago such sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate, two thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies and such further sum or sums as may be specified by resolution of Parliament, or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies, by the issue of Treasury Bills:

And whereas it is provided by section 2(2) that the Minister may borrow further sums for the purpose of paying off at maturity, Treasury Bills issued under subsection (1), by further issue of Treasury Bills:

And whereas it is necessary for the Minister of Finance to borrow further sums of money for the purpose stated in the said section 2(2):

Be it resolved that for the purpose stated in the section 2(2), the Minister of Finance is hereby authorized to borrow such further sum or sums in Trinidad and Tobago, not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies.

In Motion No. 4, Mr. Deputy Speaker,

Whereas it is provided by section 3(1) Treasury Notes Act, that the Minister on the written advice of the Governor of the Central Bank may, for the purposes of promoting monetary credit and exchange conditions most favourable to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, borrow money in Trinidad and Tobago in such sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies and such further sum or sums as may be specified by resolution of Parliament, or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies, by the issue of Notes:

And whereas it is provided by subsection (2) of the said section that the Minister may borrow further sums for the purpose of paying off at maturity Notes issued under subsection (1), by further issue of Notes:

And whereas it is necessary for the Minister of Finance to borrow further sums of money for the purposes stated in the said section:

Be it resolved that for the purposes stated in the said section, the Minister of Finance is hereby authorized to borrow such further sum or sums in Trinidad and Tobago, not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies.

Guarantee of Loans
[SEN. THE HON. G. YETMING]

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the case of the Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act, where the limit is currently \$5,000 million, the Motion is to increase that limit from \$5,000 million to \$10,000 million. This Act provides a statutory limit on guarantees to be provided by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for borrowings by wholly owned and majority owned state enterprises.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act was enacted in July of 1969 and the initial limit was \$70 million. During the course of the 70s, this limit of \$70 million was increased six times to the last increase in 1979, when it was increased from \$1 billion to \$5 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The current limit of this Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act is, therefore, \$5 billion—\$5,000 million—and in 1995, the balance stood at \$2.4 billion. As at September, 2001, the limit is now \$4.6 billion.

Over the past five years between 1995 and the year 2001, the stock of Government guaranteed debt therefore moved from \$2.4 billion to \$4.6 billion; an increase of about \$2.2 billion. These increases, Mr. Deputy Speaker, arose out of the following guarantees which were issued by the Government to Taurus Services Limited. The increase in the guaranteed debt of Taurus was about \$2.2 billion and the extent of Government guaranteed debt of Taurus now stands at \$1.5 billion.

There was an increase of \$500 million for Caroni; an increase of \$290 million for the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company; an increase of \$213 million for UDeCott; an increase of \$175 million for Tidco and \$177 million for MTS. In the case of Taurus, the increase of guaranteed debt of Taurus of \$1.5 billion arose out of notes issued by Taurus to the First Citizens Bank totalling \$1.2 billion arising out of the loans transferred from the First Citizens Bank to Taurus.

As Members would know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, First Citizens Bank is an amalgamation of three failed banks, and in an effort to clean the balance sheet of First Citizens Bank, these questionable loans were transferred to Taurus and the Government issued paper, or guaranteed paper issued by Taurus to First Citizens Bank to the tune of \$1.2 billion. Taurus also assumed some debts of old BWIA totalling about \$690 million. Both of those transactions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, totalling about \$1.8 billion, did not originate with this Government.

In the case of Caroni, \$534 million was to support the company's operations. In UDeCott, their guaranteed debt of \$213 million was made up of \$150 million, which the Government guaranteed for the construction of the Uriah Butler interchange, and \$45 million which was used for the deepening of the Port of

Spain harbour. In the case of Tidco, Tidco's debt, borrowings of \$175 million, had to do with the National Road Enhancement Programme. For MTS, guaranteed loans of \$177 million, which had to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the building of 10 schools under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP). And for the TTMF, \$290 million was for the provision of subsidized low-interest housing loans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government is committed to managing its debt stock down from its current level. The current debt stock of the Government, which is both direct and indirect debt, currently stands at 60 per cent of GDP. Earlier this year, the Government announced a moratorium on further borrowings, apart from budgeted items, because we had reached, in our prudent view, the limit of borrowings that we should carry. The intention—the expressed unannounced intention—Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that that debt stock of 60 per cent of GDP will be worked down to 50 per cent of GDP by the year 2005. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is expected that during the course of year 2001/2002, the debt stock will be reduced from its current level of 60 per cent of GDP to 57 per cent of GDP, well ahead of our schedule of bringing the figure down to 50 per cent of GDP by the year 2005.

The other matter that I will just raise in this context is the fact that the state enterprise sector, which these guaranteed loans relate to, is going to come under some increased scrutiny. We are establishing a debt management unit within the Ministry of Finance; not only to properly manage the Government's debt, but also to manage the growing debt of the state enterprise sector. The governance, the transparency and the accountability of the state enterprise sector, particularly as it relates to contracts and borrowings, will come under increasing scrutiny by the Ministry of Finance.

In fact today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Cabinet approved the establishment of a special audit unit within the Ministry of Finance that will be given responsibility for reviewing the manner of spending and the audit practices and procedure, and will have the ability and the right to do some forensic audits of its own into any state enterprise, any state body and/or statutory body; and that will be formalized within the next couple weeks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the second Motion, which has to do with increasing the limit in the Development Loans Act, Chap. 71:04, the current limit is \$10,000 million, and we are seeking by the second Motion to have that increased to \$13,000 million. This Act was enacted in 1964. The initial limit of this Act was US \$30 million. That was converted subsequently to Trinidad and

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Tobago dollars. In 1990, the limit was increased to \$5 billion, and further increased in 1994 by \$2.5 billion to \$7.5 billion. By 1999, the limit was increased to \$10 billion. This was done in July of 1999, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Development Loans Act. Under this Act, there have been some borrowings since July of 1999 to take care of development expenditure under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and to provide budgetary support of \$650 million. Six hundred million dollars was used for monetary support which included liquidity absorption. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in May of this year, the Central Bank reduced the reserve requirements of the commercial banks from 21 per cent to 18 per cent. The reduction of about \$400 million was absorbed and sterilized by the issue of bonds, and this is where this \$600 million accounted for part of; and other borrowings include the borrowings for the Maximum Security Prison—

Mr. Bereaux: Mr. Minister, could you please repeat? I did not hear what you said.

Sen. The Hon. G. Yetming: I said that to provide monetary support, and in the context of the reduction in the reserve requirement which the Central Bank did in May of this year by reducing the reserve requirement from 21 to 18, approximately \$400 million was released to the banks, but which was taken back out of the system and sterilized by the issue of bonds under the Development Loans Act. Also, there were other borrowings for the Maximum Security Prison and the NHA Housing Programme and sundry projects, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

2.35 p.m.

The other two Motions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, both cover the same issue, which is, giving the Central Bank the capability for conducting monetary policy.

As you know, traditionally, the Central Bank would carry out monetary policy largely by operating levels of reserves available in the banking system. The main instrument employed by the Central Bank was the use of the reserve requirement. However, the reserve requirement, as a tool of monetary policy, is not a good tool because of its lack of precision and the large adjustment costs associated with its use as a result of the reserves having to be kept by the commercial banks at the Central Bank on which banks receive no interest. The costs are eventually passed on to the borrowers and by reducing the reserve requirement and allowing the banks to receive interest on that money, the cost of borrowing will come down.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the reserve requirement was reduced from 21 per cent to 18 per cent in May, the prime lending rate of commercial

banks went down by one and a half percentage points. The two limits, both at the Treasury Bill and the Treasury Note limits of \$2 billion and \$1 billion respectively, have been fully utilized and the Central Bank, in the conduct of monetary policy, requires additional leeway so that it can have that capacity to conduct further open-market operations. It is their view that the increases now requested would allow them to have that additional flexibility over the next four years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon Members, as you remember, leave has been granted to deal with Motions Nos. 1—4 together, so debate can take place on all those Motions.

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a tall order; I think we have four Motions discussed on the Order Paper. If I add properly, what the Government is seeking to do is to increase the borrowing and the ability of the Government to guarantee loans by a total of \$10 billion.

We have just heard what the price of oil is from the hon. Minister of Finance in the Appropriation Bill. The price of oil, which is the product that provides most of our revenue in Trinidad and Tobago, has moved from the budgeted figure of US \$22 per barrel to an average of US \$27 a barrel. The hon. Minister was trumpeting his and the Government's good planning by saying how they are putting money aside. But it is typical of this Government: They come and put aside \$600 million and then say, "Please give us permission to increase the borrowing by \$10 billion."

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I always knew when I was going to school that Chinese people were very good at mathematics and I have great respect for them. I am not as good as they are, but I could count too. I know that if you tell me that you are saving so brilliantly, you are putting aside \$600 million and it is going to reach \$1 billion sometime or whatever and now you are coming to get permission to borrow another \$10 billion, you are trying to fool me.

It is like my good friend—and this is no reflection on ethnicity—who just happens to be named Lum Hee; a good friend of mine—*[Interruption]*Lum Hee. He said, "I do not raise my prices high at all; if I buy for \$5, I sell for \$10, 1 per cent interest," and maybe that is what the hon. Minister of Finance is coming here to tell us. But be that as it may, for the time being I am going to move away from that. It is not Assam's name; if he was named "Assam" he would say, "It is only 10 per cent interest." He is not named Assam; this is another person.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am going to another point. In the first Motion it states:

“Whereas it is *inter alia* provided by subsection (1) of section 3 of the Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act, Chap. 71:82...that the government may, in such manner and on such terms and subject to such conditions as may be agreed between it and a Lending Agency, guarantee the discharge by a Company of its obligations under any agreement which may be entered into by the Company with a Lending Agency in respect of any borrowing by that Company that is authorised by the Government...”

We say those companies are state agencies, state companies or state-owned companies and therein, again, lies the insult and the “boldfaceness” of this Government.

We have just had a situation in this country where we had the hon. Leader of the Opposition coming here and producing an ISS report commissioned by a state enterprise, Petrotrin, with respect to and pointing out certain misspending, certain corruption that went on, demands and requests for bribes by a minister of Government—not a sitting minister unfortunately—but a former Minister of Energy, Mr. Finbar Gangar, who, I understand today, is not in the country and who, since that report came out, is not in the country. He is not in the country any more. He has apparently fled elsewhere and is occupying a house in Kensington Gardens paid for by a cheque from Ispat. I am just saying that we have that.

We had a situation, courtesy of the hon. Member for Baratavia/San Juan, where he had some altercation with the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority and we had, courtesy of him, another can of worms and some reports. One report was named “Special Report” and another one, purporting to be a management letter, also named a report, and the thin-skinned Minister of—should I say the very concerned and sensitive Minister of Finance, went ahead and sued.

In any event, suing is not a problem; it is his right and even if a judgment is received by him, those on our side would not be the first persons in this House to have judgment for money which they cannot pay. There are other more illustrious, brilliant, better spokesmen and well-educated people on the other side who have judgments on them which they cannot pay, so we do not have a problem with that. What came about from that was a lawsuit.

The fact is that a number of corrupt practices were referred to in those reports and we are looking forward to something being done about them. A number of illustrious persons have asked for investigations to be done; have asked for commissions of enquiry to be brought and then you have all the statements saying, “Carry it to the police!” They would not have the commission of enquiry

so we could get the facts out; they say, “Carry it to the police,” because they know it is extremely difficult to get the information. The police get information about improprieties by Members of Parliament, people who have sworn to false declaration, then they come here and say that they have requested the information from the US Embassy and Canada. I am thankful to the hon. Attorney General for telling me that no such request was made on the last occasion when I spoke about it.

To get back more to the issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have all these things on the fire; we have all these unaddressed improprieties or allegations about improprieties from the state enterprises and what do we have? Do we have it addressed by the Government? No, we have them creating all sorts of smokescreens and then quietly—first the hon. Minister, who is a banker of note I understand—I was never able to borrow large sums of money, so I never reached the echelons at which he dealt in that area, but I have to take the word of the other people for him—came and said to the general population, “We have to hold back on borrowing.” He might have noticed that I did not attack him and I have not done it in this House, simply because I say here is a man who, at least, appears to be bringing some of the conservatism that bankers are known for into his position as Minister of Finance and, therefore, I was pleased.

I would tell you something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although I sit over here and he sits across there, if he handles the finances of the country well, I am—*[Interruption]*

Mr. John: You want to come over?

Mr. H. Breaux: Please, do not insult me. I am a man of honour and I will not do that; so let it stop there.

Although I sit over here and you sit over there, if you handle the finances of the country properly, I stand to benefit; my constituents will benefit; we will all benefit, so I am interested in your handling the finances of the country properly. So when I stand here and criticize, it is in an effort to keep you on the straight and narrow path, but you must not misunderstand our allowing you to go through as being not knowing what to say. No, do not fool your head about that.

The hon. Minister got up here and spoke about the debt stock, and we have to be really careful. We had gone around the country during the election period pointing out that they had extended the debt and debt was on a runaway horse. When I heard the Minister say that I said that—at least, the Member for Couva North may not be able to fire anybody, not even a little captain by his home but, at least, he could hire a good Minister. I was really very pleased about it. But here he says that and in his typical duplicity, as practised by this Government, he gets

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up here now and tells me that he wants to extend their ability to borrow again, including the ability to guarantee loans by \$10 billion.

Do not tell me that tomorrow or Friday in the budget you will tell me how you would do things, because you are asking us to vote on this today. You may have the votes to pass it, but I want you to know that you are not pulling wool over anybody's eyes. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before this Motion is passed, we want to hear from this Government what it is doing about transparency; what it is doing about corruption. Do not tell me you are putting an audit group in the Ministry of Finance and it will have the power to do forensic audits; when they do the forensic audits you are not even bringing them to this House which paid for it.

We paid for the Lindquist report, but you have it, and I understand that part of the reason you are not revealing it is because certain names are in that report and you do not want us to know. But I am unable to say because I did not see it. I have only been advised as to some of the names and I want to be a responsible Member of this House; I always seek to be, so I am not going to call it yet; but one day. They say, "time longer than twine"; I will see that report and when I do I will read it here. I am hopeful that I would see it.

Over the years we have raised the question of corruption and the spending of money. We have this Government—we talk about loans to Taurus and First Citizens Bank (FCB) and that FCB is a group of failed banks. Although FCB is a group of failed banks, you had a man called Ken Soodhoo who was fired from FCB for behaving in an improper manner and one of the persons involved with him in that transaction with the bonds and so on is a Minister of this Government, and it is not a Minister who won his seat.

Sometimes if you have a powerful Minister like the Member for Oropouche winning by so many votes, you have a little difficulty dealing with him; or the Member for Couva South or the Member for Naparima, or a man like the Member for San Fernando West; those are powerful men in their own right, who stood up before the people of this country and have won their seats. I could see any Prime Minister who wants to stay around for sometime having to be real careful about how he deals with them.

Do not tell me that you are bringing a man like the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and his name is calling—I say his name is calling, Mr. Deputy Speaker—in a transaction involving FCB, a wholly-owned or, at least, a bank which we are coming here now to talk about guaranteeing loans, and you are keeping him around. What secret is he holding for you? [*Interruption*] Sorry if I

am alleging anything and I do not want to but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are telling me that—I want to take that back. I do not want to cause any problems. [Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am just going to remind you of the Standing Orders.

Mr. H. Breaux: “I see that long time”; I could spot you. [Laughter] Well, you could read it for me; I would take that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 36(4) and (5), but 36(5) states:

“No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member of either Chamber.”

Mr. H. Breaux: I am not imputing improper motives to the hon. Member for Couva North, but I am saying that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, that his name and his company were linked with Soodhoo in a scam to defraud the FCB Merchant Bank and, by extension—since FCB is owned by the State—the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what I am saying. As to why he is still there, knowing the astuteness of the hon. Member for Couva North, I can only surmise and I will not have the surmising verbalized in this House. So I am saying that is not all.

2.55 p.m.

We had a report on that and that report was brought and when another Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—who is now a fugitive I understand, or is fleeing from this country; he is not here—had a report done involving the same Soodhoo when it involved the National Petroleum gas stations that are not down yet. We had to put down a certain number of gas stations, they are not finished but the money is spent. When the report was done, and I understand delivered to the hon. Prime Minister, he said they are not going to read it because it has libelous material in it. But, you know, this is Parliament, causing a report to be done and they do not lay it in Parliament.

Then Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had the airport of infamy, the “shed of shame” and all the costs that went on and if you go into that place and our visitors who have passed through there will see it is a place of variegated tile. I have never seen so many different shades of one type of tile in my life. I profess to be an amateur builder and I have looked at the number of tiles there and they have all sorts of colours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker—[Interruption] No, second, third, fourth and fifth, because there are about five different sets of tiles.

Mr. Imbert: Foreign used.

Mr. H. Breaux: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the equipment for carrying the baggage is old, it is foreign used and we have paid for that. We had a former High Court Judge, Mr. Justice Deyalsingh commenting on the contract and saying that there were serious conflicts of interest in awarding it and what do we have? Let the chips fall where they may, but then this same Government came back here and moved motions to get information from this House so that the same contractor could have an opportunity to go to court and he was paid big money for that “shed of shame” that you see there.

So now Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am a bit concerned, and I may appear not to be impressed with the hon. Minister’s claim that he will have a forensic audit team reporting to him. The Minister, as much as I would like to believe him and to take him at his professional word, I cannot help but say that his political positions or the political company that he keeps does not allow me to believe him or take him at his word, because he, no matter with all the big position he has held and tries to hold and all the positions he tries to keep for himself so that Ato cannot live near to him, he cannot stop Ato from living near to him. If the Member for Couva North tells him to do something and he—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, that is slightly irrelevant.

Mr. H. Breaux: I did not catch what you are telling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The issue about Ato and who lives there.

Mr. H. Breaux: Well, you see I am saying with all his big position, if the hon. Member for Couva North tells him to do something and he does not do it, out he goes because he is no powerhouse. He might want to play he could mediate, but he is really a nonentity having regard to the fact that he is appointed. He is not like us. He is a Senator, but appointed. You see, he is a Senator and Senators come and go, they get 10 days and five days and what not. So I want him to know he is in a House of men and women of stature.

Not like the hon. Member for Siparia, a powerhouse in her own right, former acting Prime Minister, so that is who he is sitting next to. I would not at the same time extend the same power to the hon. Member for Tunapuna seeing that he came by his seat in a most questionable manner. The votes he got we were not so sure that they were all—*[Interruption]* I will deal with that just now. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Allow the hon. Member to continue. Member, could you kindly address the Chair, please?

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell the hon. Member for St. Joseph he has done wondrously well. He has been able to consolidate St. Joseph with the help of CLICO and I understand that he is MP for CLICO affairs and has admitted it in this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Standing Order 36(1), could you kindly return to the topic please?

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I thought you were telling me that I should not say that, but he admitted it. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Narine: The amount of money he spent on roads could have paved the whole West Indies.

[*Hon. Winston Peters walks in*]

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to welcome back the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, I thought perchance being a US citizen he had been called to serve abroad having regard to the trauma going on in the United States of America at this time.

Mr. Narine: The Prime Minister put him on alert.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I was saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are dealing with use of money and about the way in which this Government has used money and notwithstanding—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, Order.

Mr. H. Bereaux: And notwithstanding the claims—We had Justice Deyalsingh who talked about it, nothing was done; then we had InnCogen and all of these things and our money was spent by the hon. Attorney General and Member for Couva South when it came to the last election, to bring Mr. Bob Lindquist, noted forensic auditor to Trinidad and Tobago. He came to Trinidad and Tobago and did the report, it has been in the country, it has been delivered and it is kept by the Government. They are not releasing the report. Why? Are you telling me in the face of the problems at Trinmar which was read out in this honourable House how the chairman of Trinmar, whom Petrotrin, the parent company tried to fire and instead when the chairman tried to fire him or indeed fired him, the board of Petrotrin fired Bartlett, the chairman of Trinmar, the chairman of Petrotrin, Mr. Donald Baldeosingh had to leave.

Then we had the unholy history in the ISS Report about how the then Minister of Energy and Energy Industries actually asked for \$10 million bribe and when

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they offered him, he said it is not enough, and it is in all the newspapers in plain view and in the *Daily Express*. There is a report going on every week and every time I come here the Member for Nariva asks me about Laveaux Lane, ask me now “nah” I on “meh” feet. I am on my feet and ready to speak about Laveaux Lane, but let me tell you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Would you kindly allow the hon. Member to address the Chair, please? Continue, Mr. Bereaux.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so in the light of all the problems and all the revelations, the most unholy—how should I put it—prostitution of public office going on, or alleged prostitution of public office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not alone, it is not the Opposition alone. When we were talking for the last five years in this honourable House, they say we are only pelting stones, we have nothing else to talk about, but I have illustrious company with me. I have the hon. Member for Oropouche, I have the hon. Member for Naparima, I have the hon. Member for Couva South and I have the hon. Member for San Fernando West who are speaking about transparency and nobody is blaming anybody, all we want is transparency. Do you know why? We want transparency because when these allegations of corruption go out in the public, some of them cannot identify the Ministers, they do not know them.

A “big shot” Minister like the Member for Tunapuna and the Member for St. Joseph are not known, they do not drink in rum shop like me, so nobody would not rob them, they are not exposed, but I am a poor, lowly Member of the House so I have to go in the places that I could afford. *[Interruption]* I have money here, I have bright children too, that is the reason why. So you stay “dey”. I am from Chaguanas originally and Longdenville so I have the same propensity that some people in those areas have for saving their money. So if you want to find out why I may have—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Could you kindly return to the Motion please?

Mr. H. Bereaux: We were talking about money and savings so I want him to know that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I am concerned that we have transparency in this House and in Government’s business, it is because when they talk about politics, it does not—and I do not enjoy having this litany of misdemeanors or should I say infractions by Members opposite and having to do that. No. I do not enjoy it, and I will tell you why I do not enjoy it. Notwithstanding how much they may be opposed to me politically, we are colleagues and any time I speak of them in a certain way, they say all politicians are the same thing, and I would like to

leave a good example and a good name for my children, so that is why I want them to introduce transparency and accountability if it is you are so sure you have nothing to hide. Why? A commission of enquiry is not a problem, but you are asking for it and using all sorts of excuses when your own people nearest to you, who have supported you over the years and who have defended you are asking for the same things and you now have all sorts of excuses.

I will tell you that this Government should not be allowed to increase the maximum amount of borrowing which it is entitled to do under these various Acts until they put forward a proposal and let us legislate it about dealing with allegations of corruption. I do not want you to tell me go to the parliamentary committee because that is like himself to himself. Have you heard about the calypso, “himself told himself you are charged for speeding”? That is himself to himself, because there is no way when a Minister or Government department or Ministry is being questioned about any impropriety you go to the same committee—a parliamentary committee headed by a Minister and having a majority of Government Members in it.

If you want to introduce parliamentary committees to determine transparency, you have got to follow the same principle as enshrined in our Constitution with respect to the parliamentary committees that are known, those that are ancient and distinguished namely the PA(E)C and the PAC whereby a Member of the Opposition heads those committees, and if you want to create a number of them, put it in the same way with the same kind of membership and the same kind of chairmanship.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, best I call you Speaker and let you stay there. I do not know why they do not allow you to stay in that position. You look so distinguished and illustrious and I really think you deserve to be Speaker permanently. You have the Opposition, and normally I cannot speak for the Opposition but the overwhelming view among my colleagues on the Opposition Bench is that you will make a very good Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

So, as I was saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and maybe I am wrong in this one, but I cannot help but go to it. Take for instance, a guarantee of a loan of \$1.575 billion to Tidco, now maybe I do not know it, but Tidco as I understand it is involved in tourism, Tourism Development Authority. If I am not wrong, I understand that the hon. Member for St. Joseph and Minister of Infrastructure was once a very high official in Tidco and had certain things to do with the beauty pageant which was supposed to have brought to us—I do not want you to tell me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am going off track. You see, in order to examine how much more money you get—You see when my old lady gave me my allowance

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for the week and I asked for a little more on it, she would ask me how I spent the last week's allowance and I had to account. So when we are talking about increasing the Government's ability to borrow and to guarantee loans, we have to look at how they spent what they had. And this is against the background of their having increased this ability since they came into office.

Tidco was in charge of the Miss Universe Pageant; they formed a company and the company spent whether it is \$70 million, \$80 or \$100 million, some big number like that—whichever one they want they could choose that number—and the company was dissolved shortly after. So the man who spent the money dead. *[Interruption]* So do not ask me, the company dissolved. I did not spend any money.

3.15 p.m.

I am not alleging impropriety to anybody. I am just saying that here you have a company that was formed to do a certain work, and that was to host the Miss Universe Pageant. The hon. Minister, at that time, told us how many tourists we would get and so on. We did not get those numbers but let us put it down to his incompetence in terms of that. I also want to tell him, because I know the next time he is going to jump up and say that I went there and drank his Johnny Walker Blue or Black. I did not attend. I want him to know that I did not attend. I felt proud to be invited. I never received such a big invitation yet and I felt proud but when I showed my wife, I said "Look, they have invited us to the Miss Universe Beauty Pageant." She asked, "You would go to that after they are wasting so much of Government's money on it and so many things to be done in this country? You are a disgrace if you set your foot in that." I was so proud of her. I am the politician but I listen to home. She refused it.

So they got all this money and they spent it claiming to have done certain things. But immediately after the show finished, the company was dissolved. Nobody to be held responsible. That is what is called real slickness. I could not even think it up if I tried. I must congratulate them for the masterstroke of deception. They fooled everybody in Trinidad and Tobago and made it look like good management. I really do not want to identify the person, but he knows what he did. The time will come when all people who misused funds, or collaborated or facilitated the misuse of public funds would have to come to book. I am not personalizing this at all. I am dealing with it on principle.

I want to deal with the question of Tidco's spending money there. That is only \$70 million, this is \$1.75 billion—\$100 million—so Tidco was not able to do a good job. Donald Trump went laughing to the bank just because he played golf

with somebody for once. Some of that money that Tidco was given was not for tourism, you know. It was for road enhancement. We in Trinidad and Tobago have a Road Improvement Fund, where a certain amount of tax is put into that Fund. It has to be disbursed and accounted for. They allowed the State enterprises to borrow money and created off balance sheet debts—tricks again, tricks.

The previous Minister of Finance was a bookkeeper but he is smart so he decided he did not want to come back into this again. He is more cunning. He has gone to beat pan. The Government is creating off balance sheet debts so you cannot see them, you cannot query them and that is the problem.

Now we have the Minister of the Infrastructure, the man who got \$835 million. It is all right with me, he can get that now, but I did not want him as Chairman of Tidco to be controlling the building of any roads, regardless of how brilliant a manager he may be. I mean, he is really brilliant because he paved the savannah and even the line Minister did not know. Now we have a situation in which they are creating all these off balance sheet debts.

Look at something. Caroni is killing people. When I say killing people, their improper maintenance practices cause people to die. Then the Member for Nariva came here and said that because we did not pass the Occupational Health and Safety Act, that is why the people are dying. Such ridiculous—it is not even an excuse. I want to give him the benefit of the doubt, maybe he did not understand what is the Occupational Health and Safety Act. As we know, it is a difficult piece of legislation and he really is not trained to appreciate the niceties of the legislation, so maybe he did not know. Let us put it down to ignorance and not malice.

So we have the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company, that is about the only good money guarantee that they did. I know TTMF is a good company and the housing is very good. Now the schools, MTS is doing the schools but I do not know the quality of the work and I do not want to comment on it. I support the education but I have some difficulty in commenting on the quality of the work on the schools. Then we have the explanation given to the Minister. Let me look at the second motion.

Whereas it is provided by section 3(1) of the Development Loans Act that the Government is authorized, *inter alia*, for the purposes of financing general development in Trinidad and Tobago, or repayment of borrowings effected for general development, *inter alia*, by a statutory authority within the meaning of the Statutory Authorities Act, Chap. 24:01 or by an enterprise that is controlled by or on behalf of the State, from time to time to borrow money

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externally or internally in a sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate seven thousand, five hundred million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago and thereafter such sum in such currency as may from time to time be specified by resolution passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives:

And Whereas by resolution of Parliament published in Legal Notice No. 15 of 2000 the Government was authorized to borrow a further sum not exceeding in the aggregate two thousand, five hundred million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago:

And Whereas it is necessary for the Government to borrow further sums of money for the purposes stated in the said section:

Now they want to borrow \$3,000 million.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

3.25 p.m.

Mr. H. Béréaux: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank hon. Members for extending my time. The truth is I am going to make every effort to use all of it.

As I was saying, the hon. Minister of Finance indicated that the Development Loans Act, Chap. 71:04—they borrowed money to deal with the PSIP and for budgetary support. I could remember us talking about that, when we told them, “you all are borrowing money to save and then saying it is savings.” We were laughed at, scoffed at, but now we see they are borrowing money for budgetary support.

More important—and it is unfortunate—I am not from the banking industry, so when something appears to happen to favour banks, you cannot blame me for being likely to be partial. If you are from the banking industry and I see something which I never understand completely, but it looks as though it is favouring banks, I have to ask you to explain properly to me. I hope the hon. Minister will explain this. He says that the Central Bank reduced the banking reserve from 21 per cent to 18 per cent. As I understand the banking reserve, it is set there, and in order to fund the banking reserve or to get money for the banking reserve, the banks have to lend at a little higher rate. So if you reduce the banking reserve from 21 to 18, the rate of lending should fall. But he told me also it was sanitized and it went into—some \$400 million was taken back into another loan.

I do not know—it was not explained whether that loan was at the same rate at which the Central Bank pays for the reserve. I want to know that. You cannot get vex with me because I am not of that high echelon. I do not know too much about this high money business, but being a suspicious lawyer, I want to know what is the difference in the lending rate between what the reserves attract and whatever the difference between 21 and 18 per cent in money, \$400 million—what was the lending rate that that attracted.

You see, that is important. It is very important because I want to know if this was done to facilitate the banks. I have to follow what I read in the newspapers sometimes, because it is written by men of great education, men with Phds. I am talking about Dr. Winford James. He writes from time to time, and those of you who do not know him, notwithstanding his academic qualifications, he is the President of the Credit Union League. He has been saying that the Government, led by the Minister, or should I say, spearheaded by the Minister—I do not want to get in any trouble with the political leader and Prime Minister, because the first time a person was named deputy political leader, won it in an election, all hell broke loose—has been putting pressure on credit unions. You know, when you hear it from all sources—Dr. Winford James is from Tobago; and I hear somebody from the Hindu Credit Union complaining too—although I do not know much about it, I want to believe that if we have people of diverse interests though in the same movement, complaining, something must be wrong.

I want to say, very simply to this Government, that they come and railroad other things through this Parliament. This Motion is premature. What you should have come to this Parliament with is either a statement about how you are going to deal with the Trinmar situation on that Southwest Soldado; deal with your errant former Minister; deal with your present Minister who has at least one major strike against him. We want you to deal with accountability and we want you to deal with transparency. If you deal with transparency and if you show us how you are going to—first, you give us a proper accounting of how—as my old lady would say—how you spent last week's money; the money which you guaranteed for Petrotrin, how did that improve the production of oil in Petrotrin areas. Because you see, I know something about that.

The price of oil is up but Petrotrin laid off almost all the casual workers, giving them sometimes one week in a year, purposely and maliciously dealing with my constituency in a most vicious manner. And now you are coming to ask me to give you the opportunity to guarantee loans for them? That is what they are doing. I want you to also tell me how they used the money that you guaranteed,

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because I will tell you what I know also. There is, what is called, a state sector in Petrotrin, led by a man called Ramtahal, and his business is to—any Minister or member of the UNC who asks him for anything, he goes and does it in their constituencies. That is what he does—state sector man.

He is the person who was involved—those were the computer nerve centres. I know it and I know him. I am from down there and I know him. That was the nerve centre for the election, Ramtahal, and that crew, the state sector group in Petrotrin.

I want you to come here and bring the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, if you do not know, and let him tell us how much of the guarantee from since way back, how they have used that money. Let somebody come. The Minister of Tourism, is it, let him get up and use his decibels, as he is wont to use, and his Mid-Atlantic brogue, in order to tell us—*[Interruption]*

3.35 p.m.

No, no, no. The Minister of Tourism is John? *[Interruption]* I am very sorry. I want to treat the hon. Senator with a certain degree of kid gloves. I am a Virgo, and usually I am very partial to treating ladies in a very, very special way. *[Interruption]* Virgo. September 3, the day Britain declared war. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want the Minister of Tourism to come to this House and explain how the \$1.75 billion assisted the country. They must account for that money. Say how it was spent!

Sen. Yetming: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was no \$1.75 billion lent to Tidco. It was \$175 million.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Thank you. I always stand corrected. If I am corrected, I am corrected.

Mr. John: Leave finance matters to Valley.

Mr. H. Bereaux: You do not worry about that, this is not finance, it is accountability. That is trick you are trying. You come here and say that it is finance. This is not finance, this is people! When you all misuse money it is my constituents, poor people, who suffer. When you are given \$864 million to spend and you do not give any for agriculture, it is I who have to pass on the bad roads to go from La Romain to Siparia! It is me! I know! So, when the Member for Oropouche is talking I know what he is talking about because I plant too. So do not try to pull this stuff about finance on me. I am just as the Chinese man, I buy for five dollars, sell for five dollars and make one per cent profit. The point is, it is

when you all misspend the money you say it is finance. You rob the poor people and come to talk about it. That is the point.

All those tiles at the airport that are not worth the money that was paid for them, that is bread. *[Interruption]* This dollar for dollar thing, do not tell me anything about that. Do you know why? When the price of oil was US \$21 and US \$23 per barrel in the days of the PNM we gave university education free. Now, after they raise the price, which took away from people, they are giving them half and saying dollar for dollar. Dollar for dollar, what? That is only 50 per cent of what the PNM did. So, do not try to come with that. I do not want to hear anything about that. You doubled the cost, give the people half and talking about poor people? No, it is not poor people, it is every person who goes to the University of the West Indies and is entitled to get 50 per cent off the fees. In the days of the PNM when a number of ministers here today went to school for free— *[Interruption]* I am not hearing the Member. *[Interruption]* What happen? Is the Member ashamed to tell me? Get up and speak! I do not know why the Member for Nariva keeps chatting at me all the time and when I am willing to give way he has nothing to say.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am going to tell you something. People say we talk about corruption but do you know why we have to talk about it. Corruption is not only the stealing, they are stealing from those who cannot afford. They are stealing from the poor. They mismanage money that the poor could have. That is why we want to know about it. I want a proper account of how the previous sums were spent. I was told \$500 million was for Caroni (1975) Limited and then we have a big statement about the managers of Caroni (1975) Limited having raised their own pay and given themselves bonuses before they performed and some of them are still working there. *[Interruption]* Nothing. He then tells me that he is going to investigate. *[Interruption]* I do not know particularly. I believe it is the Member for Tunapuna, but, of course, he would not own up. When you say anything about a minister he jumps up like a Jack-in-the-box, but now he is not owning up. He is trying to get away from his responsibility. The buck stops by him. He boasts about being a super minister and taking off gloves for people. He should take off the gloves and deal with the corruption! That is what he should do, but he does not want to hear about that! He is not hearing the message, but he wants to kill the messenger, but he would hear from this messenger.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is \$500 million. This is the same Government. This is the same \$500 million with which they did not spray the canefields. They said they were going to use biological methods to deal with the froghopper and “lick

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up” a whole cane crop. Now they are coming to tell me they want more money? How much of it do they want to give to Caroni (1975) Limited with which to do the same stupidity? We want to hear about that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance comes here and tells us—I cannot beat the logic because it is strange—that the present debt is 60 per cent of GDP and we did not earn money as per US \$22 per barrel of oil. We earned money on the basis of US \$27 per barrel. Let us say, as a result of that, we got \$1 billion more—it should be more than that actually—the debt must come down. He is saying it is 60 per cent and he will bring it to 50 per cent by the year 2005 and when he is told about stabilization and the normal price of oil he said price goes up and price goes down. If he knows that the price goes up and down, what does he expect? Does he think the price of oil would stay at one level from now to the year 2005? I know about the price of oil and I am telling him it operates in a cycle. I look at CNN often so that I can hear what the people say. So, the price of oil is not going to stay as high as it is now. It is simple. Hear what happens. When the price of oil is high, the countries start to rake in money. When the demand drops the price goes down and it keeps going down. The big producers close in wells and so forth, the price keeps going down until it reaches bottom and then starts to go up again. They may try to open the wells but all do not come back on at the same time and so on.

3.45 p.m.

The price of oil would not stay steady from now to 2005. He should have some scenario budgeting. I would tell you about that in the budget. He should have some scenario budgeting to deal with various prices. I wonder if he knows anything about that. You think that is just to go and when I come to borrow money, you raise the price, charge me interest, service charge and everything to rob me? That is what they do. I do not know. Maybe he is too high to lend money to a little “fella” like me. That is what happens to me when I go to those banks. All of them. Leeches! We have him here. I thought that he would bring a certain degree of conservatism to this budgeting process.

First we want the Lindquist Report, the Soodhoo Report, and a commission of enquiry into the infractions of this Government. Then, they could talk about raising the ability to borrow.

Thank you.

Mr. Nathaniel Moore (*Tobago East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thanks for the opportunity to intervene briefly in these Motions. The label says Tobago East. In

keeping with my policy, I would speak mainly about matters concerning Tobago and how it is affected by what we are doing here. These Motions have to do with getting permission from this House to put the country in greater debt; to incur more debts and to guarantee them.

I would go quickly to the case of the Tobago House of Assembly which has been asking for a long while for permission to raise loans and access grants to assist in the development of that part of the country. I am not sure what happened during the last few days, but up to recently, the attempts by the Tobago House of Assembly seeking permission from the Minister of Finance to raise loans for the development of Tobago have not succeeded. I remember my efforts some time ago to find out what was the Government's attitude to financing Tobago. I did ask a question and I would say before I make other comments on it, that I was totally dissatisfied and unhappy about the reply I received. I did not know what to conclude about the reply. The question was asked to the Minister of Finance and when it was being answered in this House, the Minister was absent and another Minister, the Member for Tunapuna, read the reply. I do not know what was the input of the Minister of Finance in the answer. I realized that he was newly appointed to the ministry and perhaps, he did not have a working knowledge of what was required in the question. Obviously, he had to do some research and get help from the staff. I do not know how satisfied he was with the information he got, but the answer read so strangely to me that I was embarrassed.

The difficulty that the Tobago House of Assembly experienced over the last four and a half or five years in getting financing caused the Assembly to invoke a part of the law governing the operations of the Tobago House of Assembly and it asked for a dispute resolution commission. The commission sat and made recommendations to the central government and gave advice after studying all the facts. The people in the Tobago House of Assembly brought their case and the central government brought its case. The commission sat a few times. I do not remember the number of times. The point is that they came up with a list of recommendations to the central government about how they might deal with the finances of Tobago. The part having to do with the Tobago House of Assembly accessing loans—at least, the advice was that no hindrance should be put in the path of the Assembly in accessing loans and grants. That is, no hindrance that is not dictated by the law. I paraphrase it. In other words, do not prevent the Tobago House of Assembly from accessing loans.

We sat in Parliament. I happened to be in the other House at the time when we were discussing it. We gave the Tobago House of Assembly the power to access

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loans and grants. One of the conditions was that the Minister would give his approval. The Minister comes to this House very often and asks for approval for so many other things. Although the people in the Tobago House of Assembly asked for the facility to raise loans on behalf of the people of Tobago, they were not successful in getting any favourable reply.

The Minister said that borrowings would have to be considered within the context of the approved capital programme. That is what the Government recommended. The point about it is that the Minister was agreeing that the Government did not carry out or implement the suggestion or advice of the commission to allow Tobago to raise grants. The reason he gave was that the borrowing would have to be done within the context of the Government's approved capital programme. I ask: What prevented the Government from approving a programme which would have included Tobago borrowing some money on behalf of the citizens of Tobago? There is no question that we need the development fund. I had the cause to say here already, that for over 100 years in which Trinidad and Tobago were together as two islands with the same government, Tobago was neglected considerably.

The case we are making is that we must spend some money to develop Tobago and bring it to a level of development equal to what is experienced in Trinidad. Then, we could go back to normal financing to Tobago. After giving some additional funding to bringing Tobago to an acceptable level to make the citizens over there happy, then he could come to ordinary financing for Tobago. That is not done. Tobago's case is dealt with in the usual fashion, at other times in other areas.

In Tobago, we suggest to ourselves sometimes, that we are not perhaps the real citizens as the average one or that our situation does not come into the total to make an average citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps, there is an average for Trinidad and another level for Tobago which is somewhere below the average. We are denied the facilities to develop ourselves over there to bring us up to the level of the average citizen of the country. The point is that our eyes are not closed.

A host of state enterprises were mentioned by the Minister such as Taurus, Caroni (1975) Limited, Tidco, and MTS. They are permitted to borrow money. WASA and T&TEC could borrow money for their programmes. Somehow in Tobago, although the law particularly states it, we are not permitted to borrow money to develop Tobago, and it is in a state of underdevelopment.

4.00 p.m.

I am not concerned with which government was responsible. The point is that all past governments—since 1889—deprived Tobago of its just due and it would

seem to me that one regime is blaming the other. When you are called upon to do something on behalf of Tobago you are saying the regime before did not do it and so forth. To me, this was an opportunity to do it. In fact, if there is one party in Government that should have been kind to Tobago, it is the UNC Government. *[Interruption]* I am not the type to answer to that kind of thing because I could remind the Member about the same pageant the Member for La Brea spoke about, the rice deal and so on. We could talk about that. I could talk about the North West Regional Health Authority fiasco and so forth but, I am not one who believes that if you do an evil you correct it by doing another evil. If you felt that something was wrong about ADDA, why try to punish the people of Tobago for that? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, I ask the Member for Tunapuna not to tell us what we want in Tobago. We do not want any casino, any hotel of the type that the Member might want to bring to us. We prefer the hotels that would bring maximum to us as poor people because we fight too hard for the little we get in Tobago. We would like to get the type of hotels that we think we could benefit from and not the ones that would swallow us up and when the reverse comes leave us there with ghosts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have heard about ADDA and the former Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly. Let us say that there was something about the operations of the former Secretary for Finance that the Government did not like. There are agencies and institutions to take care of that, so that you do not deprive the people of Tobago because of what you perceive as one man's irregularity. That is a problem. When we see money being misused and we are not benefiting from it, we are not going to be happy.

There is this cloud of corruption hanging over this Government and the cloud is becoming thicker and thicker than the clouds we saw over the twin towers of the World Trade Center yesterday, and you are telling me about ADDA where about \$12 million was spent trying to get some investment to develop Tobago.

We are deprived when we appeal from month to month, from year to year to be allowed to get funds to develop Tobago. We are shortened in the budget and we are not allowed to raise loans or to access grants from people who are kind enough to give us. You are not giving us. We are saying let us try an investment. It failed, it backfired, but that is not the only investment in Trinidad and Tobago which has backfired. That was a very small sum in relation to what we are getting and, perhaps, a small sum in relation to one fellow in this Government who is trying to siphon off from the public.

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Do not act like small minds in relation to a part of the country where people are well meaning and withhold funds from them that is their just due. If you want to tell me that the former regime misspent, the people changed them and brought in another set of people, [*Crosstalk*] that is the duty of the people. It is not your duty to punish them. You must respect yourself and become contrite so that when people point out that there is corruption, you must investigate it and then repent so that one sees better things happening.

Do not justify your evil by saying other people have been evil. If there is a big beam in your eye take it out and you will see the small mote in your neighbour's eye. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] You and others come here and you justify all the wrongs that I have heard about in this country for a long time. A man who is respectable in this country gets up and calls his colleagues all kinds of names like Judas, jackass and so forth, and a bunch of you got up and say, "Let us support him. Let us support him." What are you supporting? What kind of morality is there on the other side? Evil? What do you want our children to do? You want our children to get up and "cuss" in the streets like commoners, and then their parents and others could tell them go ahead? That is why some of them get into crime. They have no kind of example to get from our leaders. Then some people, who are supposed to be learned people, are getting up and saying, "Let us support him."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please get back to the contribution.

Mr. N. Moore: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am talking about the calibre and mentality of the people who are dealing with our finances, and who would have to see about our way of living. I am going to try to comply with your advice.

Let me say something. The man whom you people over there are trying to support in wrongdoing knows well that you are foolish and would laugh at you and wait for the chance when you get the slack. He knows that his friends are those who would advise him well. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Order! Hon. Member, could you kindly address the Chair, please?

Mr. N. Moore: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to take the advice that we can enlighten the people of our country so that our children could get the right example, and when they grow up to become the legislators of our country they would take pride in uprightness and they would know how to uphold what is correct and what is good. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The reporter is having some problems in hearing the contribution.

Mr. N. Moore: Mr. Deputy Speaker, one is tempted to admonish and advise sometimes, and I can advise the hon. Member for Tunapuna that they are getting very unfavourable comments from the children at schools and on the streets. If they want to help the country they could avoid it. This showing is not a commendable one. There are Members who are listening and know that they have their turn to speak and would speak when the time comes. For one, I do not disturb Members when they are speaking and I do not like to be disturbed.

The main point I am making is that we have made provision in the law for state enterprises to raise loans to carry out development in the various aspects of the development of our lives. I am saying that Tobago is a part of this country, and Tobago deserves to be able to raise loans because the THA is empowered by this Parliament to do that—to access loans and grants on behalf of the people.

I appeal to this Government and the Minister of Finance directly, as a new Minister, to forsake the path trodden by his predecessors in dealing with Tobago and to deal with Tobago with an even hand. If it means he has to come under a little pressure like some of his other colleagues in other areas, then to undergo that is for the sake of a section of this country who would be thankful to him for taking such a stand. The people of Tobago will applaud the Minister if, at least, he understands what the Dispute Resolution Commission advised, and would take some serious steps in complying because the Government accepted the report.

What was a little painful the last time when I asked the question and I received the answer was that the Dispute Resolution Commission said Tobago must be allowed to access loans and grants, and no hindrance must be put in their way besides the hindrances consistent with the law. They are saying that you have not given Tobago enough money in its annual budget. Somehow, the people in the Ministry of Finance could come up with a statement saying that the allocations given to Tobago over the years are in keeping with what was recommended by the Dispute Resolution Commission. Somebody is really not on the earth because, let us suppose that a particular formula was used to arrive at the 4.05 per cent that is mentioned in the report, how can you use a different formula to tell me that, yes, I have enough? In other words, the formula we are using and that the Dispute Resolution Commission agreed upon, is a percentage of the gross budget for that particular year. Use the amount allotted to Tobago—the amount for the whole country—and express Tobago's portion as a percentage of the total. Somebody in the department worked out a different formula to use the same figures that the Dispute Resolution Commission said was not enough and they said we have been giving them more than that.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, my advice to the hon. Minister is, if indeed the allocations for Tobago have been more than 4.05 per cent, then the problem might not be the percentage. Let us be consistent with the formula we are using to arrive at the percentage. To me, commonsense would dictate that you use the same formula that the Dispute Resolution Commission used and would say, we are giving 4.05 per cent but we believe that is enough for Tobago, and then we would know what your intentions are.

4.15 p.m.

Do not tell us you have been giving us more than that, letting the country believe that we are getting a certain per cent of the budget, when, indeed, you are using a different formula, so that the figure you are talking about is not the one we are talking about at all, and it is not the one the Dispute Resolution Commission is talking about. I suggest that the formula the Dispute Resolution Commission used is the allocation to Tobago as a percentage of the gross budget.

Let us use that. If you think that the formula is wrong, then suggest a formula that might be used so that everybody is on common ground and we do not speak two different things. We want to be sincere to one another in dealing with this matter. I say that with all sincerity. I want us to appear to the country to be fair. If we appear to be unfair, the country will judge us and deal with us accordingly.

I want to remind us—I think I said it already, but I am going to emphasize it—that the people of this country elected a government to look after the business of the people. This is exactly what we expect them to do. Any time we do not feel like looking after the business of the people and we want to look after our own business, I think we should leave the Government, form something private and look after our business there. If we are not doing the business of the people adequately, then we are seeking our individual benefit and neglecting the business of the people.

There is too much wrangling, dissension and animosity among the people here who were selected to do the people's business. My humble advice is that we put aside these personal things about who wants to be the boss and who wants to fill a vacancy that does not exist and get down and do the people's business, especially the people in Tobago. I ask that you consider this very seriously because I am presenting the case of Tobago as a special case.

We were left undeveloped and neglected for a long time. We want to see a government that will recognize this and take steps to remedy it. The people of Tobago will be eternally grateful to you for that. It is not that we are begging. We

are asking you to be aware of your duty to a part of the country that needs your attention. [*Interruption*] The time will come when I will speak about those other things. I like to be as relevant as possible. I will speak about stadium and other things in time. When we are building houses and we expect to throw stones, let us not build them with glass and fragile material. Let us build them solidly.

I advise our dear friends, who are trying to heckle me, to consider themselves and not try to impute to others what they themselves may be guilty of; and do not vie with evildoers to see who can do the biggest evil to get a mark. If they think that others have done evil to Tobago, they should not try to justify themselves doing evil because of the evil that others have done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to make this short intervention on behalf of the people of this country. What satisfies Tobago will go a long way in making life more meaningful in this country because no one would like to know that certain parts of their country are unhappy. We are seeing every day people of this society are not happy because for some reason they are deprived or believe that they are deprived and they are going all out to see that we are as unhappy as they are. I speak particularly in relation to crime in this country. There are people committing crimes on law-abiding people in this country because they feel that somebody gave them a raw deal and they are going to get back at us. Quite apart from the wrong example we give them as leaders, they feel deprived.

Do not allow the second half of your country to feel deprived and that you are deliberately depriving them. If you do that, you are treading in the wrong path. Do the right thing and let us live together as a happy people and let us by all means show the right example to our neighbours in the Caribbean and elsewhere of how we might govern with magnanimity, even-handedness and integrity. We would have proved ourselves to be a good government.

I thank you.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you very much.

I sat here and I listened to the presentation of the Minister of Finance and to my colleagues on this side. I have to conclude, given the Minister's presentation, that it appears to me that the socialization process in the UNC is extremely efficient. An individual may come in there with all his integrity, but very quickly it is gone.

We heard, very early in the year, this Minister of Finance telling the national community that there would be a moratorium—

Mr. Assam: Standing Order 36(5). How can the Member say that the integrity of the Minister is gone? He has to withdraw it. We must not tolerate that any more.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member?

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. I am developing my case.

As I was saying, very early in the new term the Minister of Finance made the point that there would be a moratorium on further borrowing. Those were the words—that he came in and that the debt stock was 60 per cent of GDP and there would be a moratorium on further borrowings. Today, we are hearing that, “I said that there would be a moratorium on further borrowings other than some things in the pipeline.” That is the first thing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, then we are told, this afternoon, that, in fact, what he wants to do—that is what he is telling us if we cut all the frills—over the next five years or during this term of the Government, it is to borrow an additional \$10 billion.

Understand that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He tells us that in different ways. He said that the debt stock is now 60 per cent of GDP and at the end of the five-year period, he is going to reduce it to 50 per cent of GDP. We simply have to look at the *Review of the Economy*. Current price GDP at present is \$50 billion, debt stock \$30 billion. When we look at the growth of GDP over the last five years, we see that it grew by 56 per cent—current price, not real GDP.

If we assume a similar rate of growth, GDP at the end of the five-year period would be \$76—\$77 billion. He told us clearly that he wants to reduce that debt stock to 50 per cent of GDP at the time, which means we would go from \$30 billion to \$39 billion additional debt, in an environment where oil prices are \$27 per barrel and we are making a surplus. One would think that if we are making excess revenues, we would reduce our debt stock, but this brilliant person who is the Minister of Finance is increasing his debt stock and attempting to criticize the Leader of the Opposition for doing the same thing. He is not fooling anybody—definitely not the national community—when he is borrowing billions of dollars and saying he is putting \$600 million in an Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund.

My colleague said it and he is not a finance person. He knows it. He is making a book entry, but he cannot put what he does not have. If we have to borrow billions of dollars, then it means we do not have the \$600 million to put in the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. He is really borrowing money and saying that he is putting it in the fund. This is doublespeak, for which this Government has become so well known. He comes here feeling he can fool people. That is

nonsense, utter nonsense, that because sometimes the oil price is \$9 and other times \$35, he cannot determine a normal oil price. He does not even understand the concept of a normal curve and he is our Minister of Finance. He does not even understand the concept of central tendencies. Basic! This is what one would read in any first-year statistics book. That is our Minister of Finance. That is what this country has come to. Understand that!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are you casting aspersions? Do you have evidence?

Mr. K. Valley: I am not casting aspersions. I am stating facts. This is what he said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do you have the evidence that he does not know?

Mr. K. Valley: He said it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is probably an appropriate time to suspend the sitting of the House. The House is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.27 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, about seven minutes of your time was used before the tea break.

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you, I thought you were about to tell me that I had seven minutes left, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, no, seven minutes have gone.

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When we took the adjournment, I was making the point that, really, we have been treated here to some sleight of hand, that while in one breath we are being told that we are going to be having a moratorium on borrowings and those sorts of things, the reality is that no such thing is planned, coming from the Minister's own words and that, in fact, over the five-year period, the plan is to borrow a minimum of some \$9 billion or to increase the public debt by, at least, \$9 billion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us look first at the Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act. This Act which was first established with a limit of some \$50 million was increased in 1979 to \$5 billion. As the Minister said, in 1995 the amount borrowed under this Act, or the amount guaranteed, rather, was some \$2.4 billion or \$2.5 billion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government document, the *Review of the Economy*, indicates that as at September 2000, the amount guaranteeing the liability of this

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Act was some \$9.1 billion. Now, if this figure is correct, it means that, in fact, the Government has been breaking the law, because you cannot guarantee; you cannot have contingent liability of \$9 billion when the enabling legislation has a limit of \$5 billion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, when I speak of the doublespeak concept, the Minister told us that this Government, over the five-year period, guaranteed a further \$2.2 billion—\$2.5 billion plus \$2.2 billion will take us to \$4.7 billion. Who is correct, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Is the *Review of the Economy* correct, stating that, in fact, the amount guaranteed is some \$9.1 billion? Could the Minister tell us what the facts are with respect to this? Is this why we are now increasing the limit to \$10 billion, to allow for this \$9.1 billion? What is the situation? It is doublespeak, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is another issue with respect to this Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act. My colleague touched on it. When you say that Caroni (1975) Limited is borrowing, backed by a Government guarantee, you are really playing with words. You have read this, as he said, off a balance sheet, but, in fact, it is a direct government obligation because you know and I know that Caroni (1975) Limited does not have a hope in hell to get the revenue stream to repay that indebtedness. In fact, it is the Government that would be called upon to repay that indebtedness. It is really a Government direct obligation dressed up nicely. Is that not so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you talk about UDeCott that has, perhaps, a desk and a chair; you are guaranteeing a UDeCott loan of \$250 million. Is that not a joke? You know clearly that UDeCott does not have the revenue stream to repay that obligation but you feel, perhaps, you could fool the IMF and say, “Well listen, no, no, no, we are keeping our budget in order” and pushing it off balance sheets. But that, in fact, is a direct obligation of the Government. If the Government does not give UDeCott the funds to pay that indebtedness, there is not a hope in hell that it would be paid.

What about Tidco, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that nice company that we formed to promote trade, industrial development and tourism in Trinidad and Tobago—inward investment? We see two Ministers fighting over it now, and such a nice child. I do not know why she got herself involved with these people. I will never understand it, I am sorry, but so be it. *[Interruption]* That is like what my friend from Ortoire/Mayaro said—I am sorry, I am not breaking the confidence. I mean, he said it in public but, really, it spoke a million. *[Interruption]* My friend for Ortoire/Mayaro said a while ago, “Listen, if I am going to war and I see any politician in my back, I am killing him first. *[Laughter]* That has been his experience, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a young man who has just come in and in

a short space of nine months—understand his experience. I am sure the hon. Senator feels the same way. You did not know it was like that, eh? You will mix with people like Assam? You did not know what you were doing?

Mr. Assam: Why not, she would not mix with Valley.

Mr. K. Valley: You know, telling you in front of all the staff of Tidco: “Get out, you have no place here”, that he got something from the President saying that Tidco is his; he owns it! You understand?

Hon. Member: Did he say that?

Mr. K. Valley: He did! He said he has an instrument from the President saying, “Tidco is mine”, so he does not know anything about any Minister of Tourism. But he is vexed because tourism has been moved from his portfolio. Do not worry, my dear, you must learn to swim. You see Sadiq? Learn from him. Learn from Sadiq!

Mr. Assam: You feel by giving basket to all these people you would—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. K. Valley: Basket? Me, giving basket? I am advising them, because let me tell you, Sadiq is dancing and dancing. No side knows where he is. [*Laughter*] When you watch him so, you say, “Well boy”. He could always say, “But I said so and so”, and if this side say anything, he would say, “But I said so and so” and he is staying right there. I do not know if you all listened to the programme on Monday night, he made sure he told the national community that 17,000 persons voted for him—17,000! [*Interruption*] You would not say that, you are a good Aquarian. You see, he has the sides. He says, “Listen nah man, is both of them ah ketching”. He is coming through the centre. I am telling you to watch your case. “Yuh tink it easy?”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tidco is borrowing \$175 million to pave roads. What are we really doing? Why are we corrupting that institution? Why are we doing that? You would not give Tidco sufficient funds so that it could promote Trinidad and Tobago; to attract inward investments; that they could build a good tourism base; you have them paving roads, so all your senior people are leaving the place for greener pastures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it hurts, because when we were doing the restructuring of the IDC and the EDC and so on, I took a lot of blows. It is the former Minister of Trade who started the process, but it was a Cabinet decision and I agreed with the approach; that given our move into the 21st Century we had to restructure the old

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IDC; we were moving away from the negative list concept; we were now trying our best to be integrated into this global economy, but the employees were not happy and the unions gave me a lot of blows and I took it. To see now the corruption of that institution, it hurts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see your work just going down the drain, simply because there is a Minister there who believes, in his arrogance and with his ego, that he could trample over people.

The stories came out about the altercation between the Minister and the CEO and the CEO said, “I will have none of it”, so his godfather took him and I understand that he is going in his godfather’s office and he is going to make him your boss. [*Interruption*] I am telling you, that is what is coming out. As soon as you see this thing is settled, he is going to be your boss.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Mr. K. Valley: Who is that? Vishnu. How you mean, he is going to be your boss. You treated him badly and his godfather decided that he would save him—\$175 million.

Mr. Partap: Where are you getting those things?

Mr. K. Valley: Where I am getting these things? I sit in my office, minding my own business and people come, and I am a good listener; they tell me that. The sum of \$175 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tidco cannot repay. So this is really a direct obligation of the State. This is not contingent liability, so they are just fooling us. The critical issue is whether, in fact, this Government is in breach of the legislation where the limit—and the Attorney General has to answer for that—is supposed to be \$5 billion but the borrowing—the amount guaranteed under the legislation—is \$9 billion. They may have it in letters of comfort, and so on. You know they like to give letters of comfort up and down the place, rather than the guaranteed document.

We go next, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the—let me make another comment on this. The other night I was returning from Barbados and was listening to the news. My friend, the Member for Tunapuna, was having a press conference. He was criticizing the Member for Oropouche. He said, “You cannot accept tickets to attend the beauty pageant and then talk about how we wasted \$80 million”. Then he said it was not \$80 million, it was \$70 million. Now, if you waste \$70 million; if you waste \$80 million; if you waste \$100 million, we would have preferred that you did not waste a cent. That is the issue that my friend from Oropouche was making. It does not matter if it was \$70 million, \$80 million or a \$100 million; it was a bad idea from day one.

5.15 p.m.

When the Member for Couva North came to you with that stupid idea, you should have run him; but no, brown tongue!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member!

Mr. K. Valley: I apologize. I take it back immediately. But you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, do not worry. I know a little about finance and insurance. I am not too good at English. Give me a better word. Please. You know what I want to say. You tell me. Give me a better word. You understand?

Why would he want to do that? In fact, the expenditure, finally, is over \$100 million, and he knows it. As my colleague said, immediately they want to get rid of all trace, and so forth, so the company closed down immediately after the Miss Universe Pageant; and they expect the people of Trinidad and Tobago to have confidence in them. After they do all of that, they know they cannot win the election; they pad the place up and down and playing they are government. They are no government, and everybody knows that. Ralph knows that. Ramesh knows that. Trevor knows that. And Sadiq half knows that. *[Laughter]* I love him. He is too nice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, understand that all of this is happening in an environment of high oil prices. When they provide guarantees for InnCogen, understand what is happening. Understand that a big part of that goes into somebody's pocket; short pants man and his friends and so on. Understand that. Understand that when we provide guarantees for the \$1.6 billion airport with the fancy tile—you know, I went to the airport on Monday and there was a guy watching and shaking his head and saying, “My God! Oh God! They coulda take, but it did not have to be so bad. Look at these tiles! Not one matching!” *[Laughter]*

That is why earlier today I had to speak about what happened yesterday, because we have to understand that, listen, we are merely passing through. I want nobody in here again to tell me not to smoke. When we saw what could happen yesterday, let me smoke. I enjoy smoking! Let me smoke! Because the next thing you know, you are in the World Trade Centre and some mad man could come and blow up the whole damn thing and you are gone in any case! You understand? We have to understand that.

We are here today, gone tomorrow, and while we are here, we must do things to make our life worthwhile. I was in Standard 4, *A Psalm of Life* by Longfellow, it really just touched me and remained with me. That:-

“Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,

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Is our destin'd end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day."

It is not simply to get up and thief and sleep at night, but to make a contribution so that when we meet our maker we can say, yes we have done something for mankind. That is what it is.

I am so happy, and I would hope that more of you over there would see the light and say, "Listen, you see me; I want no part of this corruption." That is why I have to take my hat off to the Member for Couva South; my good friend from Naparima. He had no problem with the PNM. He simply had a difficulty with our leader and, from time to time, we have difficulties with people with whom we work, but he had no problem with the PNM. He is PNM through and through! That is known. That is a fact.

Sometimes the leader is wrong, you know, as in their case at present. I am saying, sometimes leaders are wrong. Understand that. The next chat we heard this afternoon—You know when people come to this House and talk about things they know not about. He tells us that they reduced the reserve requirement which had the effect of increasing the monetary base by some \$400 million, but the Government sterilized it immediately by doing a bond issue for \$400 million. When the Government got that \$400 million, what did they do? Take it and put it in their pocket, or spend it in the economy? If they spend it in the economy, is it not coming back out? There might be a time lag. Yes. [*Interruption*] It does not matter. It is coming back into the economy.

Mr. Assam: You do not understand the thing. If they spend it productively—

Mr. K. Valley: You are talking nonsense. Let me teach you Economics. If you put the money back in the system—

Mr. Assam: You will teach me?

Mr. K. Valley: I will teach you Economics! Because I can! If you put it back in the economy, it is back in the economy. It does not matter. The only thing is if you take it and import—if you buy capital goods, import, well then it is lost.

Mr. Assam: What school did he go to? He wants to teach me Econ?

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, where are we? Minister, go back to first year Econ. Only if they spent the \$400 million on imported capital goods so that they lose it via foreign exchange, they import leakage; but as long as it is spent,

whatever part that is spent in the economy on goods and services, manufactured goods, or what have you—plant and equipment—as long as it is spent in Trinidad and Tobago it is back in the money supply; in the monetary base in Trinidad and Tobago. That is simple. To the extent there is a leakage via foreign exchange, well that is lost.

Mr. Assam: It is simple to a simple man like you.

Mr. K. Valley: Well I am glad that I am not as complicated as you are. That saves me from being as stupid.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me wind up. [*Desk thumping*] I am saying that we will not support these Motions. They are based on untruth. The Minister is saying one thing and giving us something else. Doublespeak! We are saying that in this period, given oil prices, this is a period in which we ought to have really a moratorium on borrowing. That we should be using our excess revenues as we did in our time to repay indebtedness. That this is not a time to increase the public debt of Trinidad and Tobago. That if when you have—imagine you have and you are borrowing. What are you going to do when you do not have? I do not understand this. If you have, you have excess revenue and you are borrowing—

Mr. Assam: You must establish your credit rating.

Mr. K. Valley: That has been done. We did that in the 1970s, so we are not doing that now. How the hell do we have all this money and we are borrowing, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I do not understand it. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let the Member speak.

Mr. K. Valley: I do not understand that at all, and especially given what happened yesterday. I do not know whether the Minister of Finance has really considered what has happened yesterday and the effect it could have on financial markets. Already in the major economies, in the United Kingdom, there is the talk of recession. We have it in Trinidad and Tobago. I said that. [*Interruption*]

I said the TT dollar will go to \$12? Stranger to the truth, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a fact, in Trinidad and Tobago at the retail level, there is recession, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, not true? Business is down this year from last year, and last year it was down from the year before. That is the reality. The only place there is growth is in the energy sector.

Mr. Assam: Rubbish!

Mr. K. Valley: The point I am making, however, is that the projection for the future does not appear, given what is happening in the world economy; given

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what happened yesterday on top of that, one expects that the Minister of Finance would be extremely conservative in his approach to deficit over the next year or over the next medium term, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Understand that.

This thing about giving approval to increase borrowings by some \$10 billion is just not on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I thank you.

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me begin by saying that I never came to this House to ask for permission to borrow any money. All we are seeking to do is to get the limits for borrowing to be increased. The very way that in 1979, when under the same Development Loans Act the limit was increased from \$1 billion to \$5 billion, I am sure that people would have questioned why the Government in 1979 wanted to increase the Guarantee of Loans Act from \$1 billion to \$5 billion. The very way, we are not asking to borrow any money.

In fact, I just want to challenge a statement made by the Member for Diego Martin Central. I am not too sure that he understands what he says, and neither does he hear what people say. I have never said that we were going to put a moratorium on further borrowings, full stop. I have always said, always said, that the moratorium on further borrowings will be to the end of the year first, and secondly, that the moratorium was also to recognize the fact that there were things in the pipeline and the moratorium did not include certain things that were budgeted for.

I have always been consistent in what I have said, and for the Member for Diego Martin Central to come and question my integrity here, if they do not talk about my wear, they want to raise integrity, and they are going to raise competence and raise all kinds of issues, but they cannot raise issues—only one set of irrelevance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have said that, and in fact, during the period 1990—1995, the debt stock to GDP hit a high of 60 per cent. The fact that it is at 60 per cent now should not suggest to anyone that there is any excessive borrowing or excessive guarantee of loans. It is a well-known fact that the more you earn, the greater your capacity to borrow, and once you manage your debt within your capacity to earn, then that is where it is at. The international benchmark for debt stock for countries is 50 per cent, and we have committed ourselves to reducing our debt stock from 60 per cent to 50 per cent by the year 2005. I have also said earlier this afternoon that during the course of the year 2001—2002, that percentage will be reduced to 57 per cent; well on the way to the 50 per cent that we announced.

So, to come and suggest that the numbers that we are quoting here, first of all, that we are going to be borrowing \$10 billion, I just want to talk about that \$10 billion. Two billion dollars of the \$10 billion has to do with the Treasury Bills and Treasury Notes Act that is really to give the Central Bank the capacity to handle monetary policy. There could be no question that over the past couple years, the Central Bank has done an extremely good job in managing monetary policy in Trinidad and Tobago.

When you look at the economic indicators, the exchange rate stability that we have been enjoying, the rate of inflation, the gross international reserves, how those have grown, there could be no question that monetary policy has been extremely well-managed by the Central Bank. In fact, when you compare the management of monetary policy here, as compared to our neighbours, and you understand the trauma and the difficulty and the economic hardships that have been experienced in Guyana and Jamaica by virtue of the kinds of things that have happened there, we should appreciate that the Central Bank here requires the support to continue to manage monetary policy, and that is two of the \$10 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Of the loans, in the case of the guaranteed debt, a lot has been said of Tidco, its inability to service debt and what have you. Whenever we speak of the debt stock and we speak of 60 per cent, we include all direct/indirect borrowings of Government and state-owned corporations; and when we speak of our debt service capacity, we speak of the fact, and we include the debts of Tidco and other agencies of Government which would have debt on the book that they cannot service. To suggest that we could fool the International Monetary Fund by hiding numbers, and so on, is really not on.

The fact of the matter is that in April of this year, the International Monetary Fund came and did their Article 4 consultation. The reports have been published and they have commended the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the management of the economy, and which included incidentally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a very careful evaluation of the debt stock of the Government, including indirect debt below the line, as the Member for Diego Martin Central will keep referring to.

In addition to which, we have received over the past two years from the international rating agencies, investment grade ratings, and we had a visit immediately after the International Monetary Fund consultation from Standard and Poors. We expect that we shall retain our investment grade rating, which is to suggest that in spite of the fact that the debt stock of the Government went up

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over the past two years, that both the International Monetary Fund and Standard and Poors have been extremely satisfied with the explanations we have provided and with the policy positions that we have outlined to them. If we should, and which we will, retain the Standard and Poors international investment grade rating, it is really to suggest that all these suggestions that are being made by the opposite side really are just a bunch of words with absolutely nothing behind them.

Mr. Valley: Would the hon. Minister give way? Just a simple question. I wonder whether the hon. Minister of Finance can explain, given our oil wealth and so forth, why is it that Barbados has a better rating from the same agencies than Trinidad and Tobago?

Sen. The Hon. G. Yetming: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are aware of a number of weaknesses in our economy. They did not suddenly arise. They did not just come about from 1995 to now. They existed way before that. Therefore, whatever those weaknesses might be, we know that we have some work to do, as the Government, to try to get an improvement in our rating, and we shall pursue those initiatives to get an improvement in the rating.

The fact of the matter is that we have got to increase our spending and our investment in social and economic infrastructure. It is a fact that we are not spending enough on our infrastructure, and our Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) last year at \$980 million is inadequate to have this economy on the move and improving. We are doing whatever we can to increase our spending on our social and economic infrastructure, which is why we need the flexibility in the Development Loans Act to be able to increase our spending on infrastructure issues.

5.35 p.m.

The issue of corruption came up. I want to let this honourable House know that two days ago I received the report from Personnel Management Services Limited, following their commissioning, after I had received the report from the Auditor General on the North West Regional Health Authority. That report will tomorrow be handed to the Chairman of the Northwest Regional Health Authority for action to be taken, as recommended in the report. The report also recommended that the report be handed to the Fraud Squad so that it could facilitate whatever the Fraud Squad may be doing, arising out of the original report having gone to them.

Tomorrow, the Minister of Health, the line Minister responsible for the NWRHA will be handing the report to the Fraud Squad. The Minister of Health has also been directed to hand a copy of the report to the Director of Public Prosecutions

and he shall do that tomorrow. We are probably going to be laying a copy of the report in Parliament on Friday.

Mr. Bereaux: Probably.

Sen. The Hon. G. Yetming: I have, in fact, also directed the Divestment Secretariat, which the Member for Diego Martin Central will be intimately familiar with, to open up itself to the media, relative to the Caroni (1975) Limited rum transaction and to Tanteak. [*Desk thumping*] A briefing has been prepared for the media outlining the transactions from the inception to date. This media briefing will be sent to the media and the media will be invited to meet with the Divestment Secretariat at a subsequent date so that they can raise any questions they wish on the process.

The point is that as far as we are concerned, whatever transaction that crosses on this side which requires intervention, we will provide it. In the case of NIPDEC, I have received the report and the auditors were sent in. I am expecting the report of the auditors any minute now. The board of Caroni (1975) Limited, on my direction, I think yesterday, commissioned some work by Ernst and Young to do a comprehensive review of the financial affairs of Caroni (1975) Limited, which would include some forensic work on matters that have come to our attention. I want to assure this House that whatever has crossed, has been appropriately attended to.

On the question of Tobago, I think that the events over the past couple weeks have overtaken the Member for Tobago East. I have had at least three meetings with the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly and my last meeting with him was about two weeks ago. The matter of the amount of the allocation for Tobago was discussed and, I think, satisfactorily revolved. The question of the THA's ability to access grants and to borrow money has been satisfactorily resolved to a point. There has got to be some further consultation between the THA and the Ministry of Finance to work out some of the details of how those transactions, the grants and loans, will need to be accessed.

As far as I am aware, the Chief Secretary of the THA and I, are not in conflict and I would say that so far Tobago has been very fairly [*Desk thumping*] and very sympathetically treated. I say sympathetically treated because immediately after assuming office, the Chief Secretary of the THA came to me with a plea that bills and debts assumed by the former THA to the tune of, in excess of \$150 million, had been inherited by this new THA. He came to plea for help so that, at least, the new THA would not have had that burden around its necks to be able to carry Tobago forward.

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I would like to think that I responded positively. I am sure that the Member for Tobago West could confirm that I acted positively when they were given an additional grant which was covered in the last Supplemental Bill for which we came to this House. Furthermore, the question of how the THA will satisfy the balance of the amount they inherited, I believe, has been satisfactorily resolved. So for the Member for Tobago East, I think, events have overtaken him.

I would say in response to the point that the Member for Diego Martin Central made, that I really do not know what is in that document on the state of the economy for last year and what might have been quoted as the total of the guaranteed debt. All I will tell you is that the number I quoted today of a guaranteed debt total, within the ambit of this particular Act, is about \$4.6 billion and there has been no breach of any legislative cap by this Government on the guaranteeing of loans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the aggregate amount of all borrowings by companies that are guaranteed by the Government under the Act shall not exceed ten thousand million dollars. [*Crosstalk*]

**DEVELOPMENT LOANS ACT
(INCREASE IN BORROWING)**

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is provided by section 3(1) of the Development Loans Act that the Government is authorised, *inter alia*, for the purposes of financing general development in Trinidad and Tobago, or repayment of borrowings effected for general development, *inter alia*, by a statutory authority within the meaning of the Statutory Authorities Act, Chap. 24:01 or by an enterprise that is controlled by or on behalf of the State, from time to time borrow money externally or internally in a sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate seven thousand, five hundred million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago and thereafter such sum in such currency as may from time to time be specified by resolution passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives:

And whereas by resolution of Parliament in Legal Notice No. 15 of 2000 the Government was authorised to borrow a further sum not exceeding in the aggregate two thousand, five hundred dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago:

And whereas it is necessary for the Government to borrow further sums of money for the purposes stated in the said section:

Be it resolved that for the purposes stated in the said section, the Government is hereby authorised to borrow money externally or internally in a further sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate three thousand million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That for the purposes stated in the said section, the Government is hereby authorised to borrow money externally or internally in a further sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate three thousand million dollars in the currency of Trinidad and Tobago.

**TREASURY BILLS ACT
(INCREASE IN BORROWING)**

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is provided by section 2(1) of the Treasury Bills Act, that the Minister may borrow in Trinidad and Tobago such sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate, two thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies and such further sum or sums as may be specified by resolution of Parliament, or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies, by the issue of Treasury Bills:

And whereas it is provided by section 2(2) that the Minister may borrow further sums for the purpose of paying off at maturity, Treasury Bills issued under subsection (1), by further issue of Treasury Bills:

And whereas it is necessary for the Minister of Finance to borrow further sums of money for the purpose stated in the said section 2(2):

Be it resolved that for the purpose stated in the section 2(2), the Minister of Finance is hereby authorised to borrow such further sum or sums in Trinidad and Tobago, not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

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Resolved:

That for the purpose stated in the section 2(2), The Minister of Finance is hereby authorised to borrow such further sum or sums in Trinidad and Tobago, not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies.

**TREASURY NOTES ACT
(INCREASE IN BORROWING)**

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is provided by section 3(1) of the Treasury Notes Act, that the Minister on the written advice of the Governor of the Central Bank may, for the purposes of promoting monetary credit and exchange conditions most favourable to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, borrow money in Trinidad and Tobago in such sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies and such further sum or sums as may be specified by resolution of Parliament, or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies, by the issue of Notes:

And whereas it is provided by subsection (2) of the said section that the Minister may borrow further sums for the purpose of paying off at maturity Notes issued under subsection (1), by further issue of Notes:

And whereas it is necessary for the Minister of Finance to borrow further sums of money for the purposes stated in the said section:

Be it resolved that that for the purposes stated in the said section, the Minister of Finance is hereby authorised to borrow such further sum or sums in Trinidad and Tobago, not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That for the purposes stated in the said section, the Minister of Finance is hereby authorised to borrow such further sum or sums in Trinidad and Tobago, not exceeding in the aggregate one thousand million Trinidad and Tobago dollars or the equivalent thereof in any foreign currency or currencies.

**MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC
(AMDT.) REGULATIONS, 1999 VALIDATION BILL**

The Minister of Transport, Tourism and Tobago Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Jearlean John): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to validate the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Regulations, be now read a second time.

The Bill before this honourable House seeks to validate the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Regulations made on September 09, 1999, by the President that was approved in the House of Representatives on July 29, 1999, and the Senate on August 10, 1999, and published as Legal Notice 197 of 1999.

The Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50, at section 100 provides for the making of regulations subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament. However, by virtue of Act No. 25 of 1997, section 100 was, in fact, amended by removing the power to make regulations from the President and placing same in the Minister with responsibility for transport matters.

The regulations that were approved in Parliament were signed by the President who is no longer recognized under the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act as the regulation-making authority. It has therefore become necessary to procedurally correct this flaw by means of a validation bill in order that the vehicle inspection process can be resumed with full force. This shall alleviate those private garage owners and their employees who have suffered much financial difficulties as a result of the decreased rate of inspections. More importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the inspection regime shall then be properly empowered to conduct its most important work, the preservation of life and limb and the facilitation of safer driving and safe roadways in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Bill itself is very simple; it has only two clauses. Clause 1 is self-explanatory. Clause 2 seeks to validate Legal Notice 197 of 1999 by deeming those regulations to have had effect from the original date of approval in the Parliament as if made by the Minister with whom responsibility for transport has been assigned.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (Diego Martin Central): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am going to be short on this Bill, but this makes a point. I simply have to ask: Who was the Minister of Works and Transport when this happened?

Mr. Assam: What date?

Mr. K. Valley: 1999.

Mr. Assam: “Yuh pardner”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order!

Mr. K. Valley: Sadiq “meh pardner”. We on this side know that the hon. Minister was engaged in other activities at that time. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Deputy Speaker jumps to his feet*]

Mr. K. Valley: “Yuh jumbie”, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, go ahead. [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Joseph: What is wrong with “other activities”? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Valley: As the Jamaicans would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, “You are brevious.” Wait, I might get there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say that there is a perception that the Minister—and I think the Prime Minister made the point a while ago—that they are leaving their ministries unattended and going to San Fernando, setting up office and doing all types of things; you know, moving people from here, there and everywhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think now you are perilously close to—[*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Valley: But I am not there yet. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I humbly suggest that you are perilously close to it.

Mr. K. Valley: “Ah” going so now, because I think that the point is made because, really, this is a simple thing, but it can happen only when one is engaged in other things and not focused on the work. That is the point that I have been making. [*Interruption*] They are doing important work; very important work.

Mr. Bereaux: Voter padding.

Mr. K. Valley: You understand; very important work; and all types of information. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you were not here, but I am sure that you heard it on the ground too; but we are not getting into that. People were meeting us all about and telling us that people were moving from Oropouche and San Fernando West. [*Interruption*] I am not saying he did it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is irrelevant; Standing Order 36(1). Kindly confine your observations to the subject that is under discussion; thank you.

Mr. K. Valley: But I am doing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 36(1).

Mr. K. Valley: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You are testing me.

Mr. K. Valley: I am not testing you; I will never do that. Both of us get put out of this House; “yuh” think I want that to happen to you. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] That would be a kind of thing if you put me out. [*Laughter*] I would not test you.

The only point I am making is that, the nexus is, the Minister of Works and Transport goofed. I am saying he goofed because he was not focused on the Ministry's work. I am wondering what he was focused on; that is the only point I am making, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Nathaniel Moore (*Tobago East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be very short. I want to tell you that people in the private garages and private testing stations are going to be relieved considerably by this action of ours today because some gentlemen really began to complain.

As the Minister has said, in Tobago we have only four of these testing stations and the vehicular population in Tobago is relatively small, and somehow when the loophole in the law was discovered and the people learnt that they could not be prosecuted for not having their “P” vehicles inspected, then the rate of inspection fell off considerably and some of the private garage owners were complaining that their business was in jeopardy because they were encouraged to start their venture.

Some of them complained that they borrowed money to establish these garages and have them equipped to the required standard, and not having any income from it for a long time imperiled their investment. Just yesterday I was speaking with one of them and when I told him we were likely to be dealing with this today, he was very much relieved and so we can only imagine how these people will feel when they hear at the end of today that this amendment is made.

In Tobago, as I said, there are four of these private testing stations and the owners of these believe that in normal times they will be paid. The volume of business they will get will pay them for their efforts. They thought that in the future it may be a good idea to expand a bit, I do not know what the people in Trinidad will be saying about this, but the actual fact in Tobago is that the

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gentlemen feel that the volume of business would be increased slightly for the four, although they do not believe that having five or six would be good enough, it might be too many stations to cater for them.

They are looking at the operations of the Licensing Department there and I think—if I remember the Act—that this might be really under the Tobago House of Assembly, but I know where the establishment is concerned, that the Central Government would have to come into play to some extent.

The problem is that testing in the Licensing Department is very slow in Tobago. I tried to find out the reason and there is only one person there who is qualified to carry out the testing and that is the officer in charge himself and he has so many other things to do that he cannot devote enough time daily for the testing. What they need is perhaps additional staff to assist in the testing there or, alternatively, what they could do is allow the private garages to test the light vehicles like the hired cars and the light “Ts” and that might ease up the burden on the Licensing Department in Scarborough and that might solve the problem.

I just thought I would bring that to the attention of the House and the Minister so that these are points that could be considered in the future if Tobago might be treated as a special case to allow them to do additional work by doing the lighter vehicles, or having an additional officer competent and qualified to test the vehicles so that the Licensing Department over there could increase its output to a satisfactory level to cater for the needs of the people. And as the Minister has said, it would not only assist the private testers but it would also ensure greater safety on our roads in that part of the country.

Mr. Martin Joseph (*St. Ann’s East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be very brief. I want to go beyond the passing of this measure, which means that garages will now be in a position to inspect the vehicles and the licensing officers will at some subsequent time be on the roads to ensure that drivers have the appropriate stickers, or are in conformity with the legislation.

Madam Minister, my question is: What decides when licensing officers are going to carry out their responsibility to stop and inspect cars? I am just curious because as a citizen, it seems to me that these exercises seem to be done at—I do not want to say at the worst time, but it seems to be—the peak hours either in the morning or evenings as if they are designed to create as much inconvenience as possible to road users. I do not know what is their *modus operandi*. I do not know if it is at that time they get the most number of motorists or what, but it seems to me that it is always at rush hour in the morning or rush hour in the evening that

these exercises are conducted and, as a result, bring about as much inconvenience as possible. I am just curious as to how we can conduct these exercises in a way in which the culprits are brought to bear, but at the same time there is a cynicism amongst citizens in our society in that it seems as if the Authority in exercising its authority does that almost in the worst way.

Sometimes in the morning rush hour you have garbage collection in the peak parts of the city, again designed to inconvenience as much as possible. So I am just curious Madam Minister, as to what drives the conduct of these exercises. Why does it always seem to be conducted in a way and at a time in which it creates the greatest amount of inconvenience to motor users?

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make a very brief intervention. I want to say that there is a peculiar difficulty where we have these vehicles to be inspected and they need to get their certified copies. I happen to be operating from San Fernando and there is a computer in San Fernando that either does not work most of the time, or when it works, if you happen to have a vehicle like my vehicle which was bought with a government loan then there is only one person who knows the password to give you a certified copy because of some government loan.

I have been to that office about four times trying to get a certified copy for a vehicle which I bought with a government loan and paid off for it years now and I still cannot get it. At one time, if I was not such a charitable person, I would say that it is because they saw me and recognize me as a Member of the Opposition that they are not helping me. [*Interruption*] I said if I was not a charitable person. How every time—you come like goat filth on a hill, as soon as you say something you are ready to roll down. [*Laughter*]

I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am prompted to say this not so much because the Minister is here, but because I see the Chief of the Transport Division here, so I know when he hears it he could take the necessary steps.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Transport, Tourism and Tobago Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Jearlean John): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. Members for their contributions. I am very pleased that this Bill had only two clauses and if this is an indication of how we conduct ourselves when Bills have only two clauses, maybe I should only come with Bills with two clauses.

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I am very grateful; I am indeed aware of the hardships experienced by the owners of the inspection garages. I have visited some myself and of course, I therefore look for support for this Validation Bill from Members of both sides of the House.

The Member for Tobago East spoke about the limited number of vehicles to be inspected in Tobago. I am aware of that and we are looking at expanding to rental as you suggested and light "T", but we want to get this system working right first and thereafter we will see what we can do.

In response to the Member for St. Ann's East and whether the Licensing Division deliberately sets out to make your life or that of the general population difficult. I do not think so. The Transport Commissioner is here and I know he tries to exercise some level of discretion in undertaking his duty. We are aware, that it is not every day. Basically, I guess during the peak hour there is a bigger catchment at that point in time.

The Member for La Brea talked about the access to certified copies. I wish to advise that right now the tender for the computerization of the Licensing Division is in the hand of the Central Tenders Board and basically, what I intend to do thereafter is to network the 17 inspection garages with the Licensing Division, so when you go to any inspection garage, they will pull it up on their screen. I am hoping that will sort of extend the project a little further.

Having said that, I wish to thank you all and Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Preamble ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

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

Adjournment

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ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now stand adjourned to Friday, September 14, 2001 at 1.30 p.m.

There are two Motions on the Adjournment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, as you remember on the last occasion, the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant had a Motion and at this time the hon. Minister of Transport, Tourism and Tobago Affairs will respond to it.

**Priority Bus Route/Pashley Street, Laventille Junction
(Lack of Safety Apparatus)**

The Minister of Transport, Tourism and Minister of Tobago Affairs (Hon. Jearlean John): The Motion moved by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is as follows: The injuries to persons and loss of property suffered by the residents of Beetham Gardens, Laventille and other users of the road at the Junction of the Priority Bus Route and Pashley Street South, Laventille caused by the failure of the Government to install a traffic light and/or safety apparatus at this said junction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the Member for bringing the Motion. I read the *Hansard* and he talked about his own experiences with his constituents in that area. I too had attended funerals of persons who died within that area and I wish to advise this honourable House that traffic lights were installed at the junction of the Priority Bus Route and Pashley Street South, Laventille several years ago. However, the complete aluminium cabinet together with the controller, conflict monitor, relay and lead switches were stolen not once, but twice.

The Traffic Management Branch of the former Ministry of Works and Transport then installed a flashing unit at the same location, once again the unit was stolen. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, notwithstanding the above, the Traffic Management Branch of the Ministry of Transport has given priority to the reinstallation of traffic lights at this intersection within the next three weeks.

Although it was suggested that the lights be placed overhead, they must be grounded somewhere, so then the copper is still there. I am advising that we are encasing the light itself in some kind of burglar proof kit but I am also advising the House that it just might be stolen again because it has to be grounded

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somewhere, but we are doing our best and I am committing to this honourable House that within three weeks we will have the lights there again.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Member for Arima also has two Motions for us this afternoon.

Blanchisseuse Secondary School (Opening)

Miss Penelope Beckles (Arima): Mr. Deputy Speaker, my first Motion has to deal with the severe hardships caused to the residents of La Fillette, Blanchisseuse, Morne La Croix, Paria and environs by the delay of the Government in opening the Blanchisseuse High School.

Let me first of all say that it was originally promised that this school would have opened in November 2000 and the assurance was given by the hon. Prime Minister that the school would have opened in November. An extension was then asked for one month for the school to be opened in December 2000, and then a further extension of two months and three months, and the school was due to open in September for the normal school term and they had asked for one week which has gone, and they have now asked for a second week.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will understand the concern of the residents of that district because of the several promises that were made. And in the next two months it would be almost a year since the promise was made for that school to open.

6.15 p.m.

I visited the school on Sunday just to ensure that what I am saying today is accurate and there is still a considerable amount of work to be done. I am just urging the Minister that it is one of the schools that needs to be looked into.

A couple months ago a wall fell and it has since been replaced. There are also some concerns about the drainage. Every time there is rain—as you know, the school is built a couple hundred feet above the level of the road, so whenever there is rain there is the problem of water flowing down into the road. Whilst they have constructed a drain, it is a slipper drain and it is not able to carry the water across the road into the dry river, in order to ensure that there will be no flooding.

I know the Minister is aware that the Blanchisseuse community centre has been the alternative accommodation made for the students and, of course, they have had to travel some distance away. The concern there, of course, has to do

with the agreement that was made between the Ministry and the Community Council, as it relates to maintenance. That agreement has not been kept. There are problems with the burglar proofing and the overall maintenance of the community centre, for the time the students have had to occupy the centre.

The final concern is that there are not sufficient teachers, even in the community centre. The school does not have the full complement of teachers.

I do not know when the school is going to be opened. From my visit I know that there is still quite a lot of work to be done for it to be brought to the level that even the Minister would be satisfied that it has been completed in a manner in which the students would be relatively comfortable.

I would not want to put myself in the position where I say to them it would be opened in one week or one month, having regard to the history of the delays. I think that they understand that the efforts that have been made have been to ensure that when the school is opened, it would be the quality school that they would all be proud of. The anxiety is certainly there and I think it is justified, having regard to the fact that promises have been made over time and have not been fulfilled. Thank you.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I understand the anxiety of the residents, the parents and the children of Blanchisseuse, La Fillette and environs.

I recall very early in my tenure as Minister of Education, visiting the Las Cuevas primary school, I was told of the grave difficulties that the parents had to get their children into secondary school previous to last year, because the children of that entire region had no secondary school anywhere within their community and they had to come to school in Port of Spain. I also recall one parent talking about having to get her child up at 4 00 a.m. to get to school in Port of Spain, at the Belmont Junior Secondary School.

Because of that this Government took the very bold step to build schools in all the rural areas. So whilst I share the Member's concern and the concern of the parents, it is so ironic that the hon. Member on that side would raise the delay of the construction of the school now. *[Interruption]*

Let me finish. Let me finish. It is very clear that it is only because of the action we took that the children of that area started secondary school last year in the community centre. So we have had some difficulties, given the location of the school, but three weeks ago, before the school term commenced—the hon. Member said, “They promised the school would be opened the first week.” Three

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weeks ago, I made it very clear that the Blanchisseuse Secondary School would not reopen on the first day of the term, but it would be opened within the month of September. At that time I also indicated—this was at a press briefing with releases sent out. The principal was informed; the students and their parents were informed. Again, it is so ironic that on the eve of the opening of the school, we have this great concern with this Motion. Because the school is going to be opened next week. It is ironic. She has raised this Motion today, knowing very well that the school will be opened next week.

I am advised that at the moment the outstanding works include cleaning of the compound, installing of a telephone system, security light, the final rendering on the retaining wall, the play field and the garden. I am advised, as of yesterday, that these are the outstanding matters. Most of these would be completed in time for the school's opening during next week. Note what I am saying. I am not saying on Monday. I am saying during next week. We would advise the parents and the principal, accordingly.

The point is very clear. We had issued this statement three weeks ago, prior to the beginning of the school term, indicating that the school would not open on the first day of the term, but would be opened during the September term. We give no date for the very reason that we could not have the parents—I have seen from my experience with construction, that if you fix a date, it is not always that you can meet that date. So we said, within the September term the school would be opened. We are working towards opening the Blanchisseuse Secondary School next week. I thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Arima has another motion, to be responded by the hon. Minister of the Infrastructure Development and Local Government.

Guanapo River (Collapsed Bridge)

Miss Pennelope Beckles (*Arima*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My other Motion has to do with the adverse consequences and severe hardship experienced by the residents of Wallerfield, Arima, caused by the collapse of the bridge on the old Agua Santa Road, Arima.

Last week Monday this bridge collapsed. The National Alliance for Reconstruction Government repaired it in 1987 and on Monday last the bridge gave way and the residents in that area are actually cut off. The mud and other sediment from the side of the wall of the river have fallen inside the river. They

have placed, where possible, pieces of concrete to enable them to get from one side to the other. The river referred to here is the Guanapo River.

It appears to me from visiting the area that the job that was done in 1987 was not a very good one and with the increase of the flow of water, over time, erosion has continued, therefore, that is responsible for the collapse of the bridge. Whenever there is a lot of rain, the residents are unable to pass from one end of the road to cross the river to the other side and they often have to sleep and benefit from the good nature of some of the residents until the following day.

A private citizen has actually offered to donate some planks in order to speed up the repair of this bridge and those planks have actually been deposited in the area close to the river. I am hoping that offer would be accepted because it would go a long way in repairing the bridge.

I know that this expenditure would not have been included in the estimates for the fiscal year 2000/2001. I am hoping that through some emergency fund that the Minister would be able to, at least, give an indication to repair the bridge.

6.25 p.m.

All the residents are asking for even now is simply a temporary measure, at least to be able to cross and go safely to their homes. I know they do realize that it may not be possible for the Minister to do a total repair to the bridge, but once they are in a situation where they can, at least, temporarily, get from one side to the other, even that would be sufficient.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Food Production (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, but I think this issue falls within my responsibility.

First of all, let me say that I deeply sympathize with the residents who have been cut off. As you know, this situation arose as a result of the recent heavy rainfall and, as you rightly said, it was not planned for in any construction work to be done.

I have asked my technical officers at the Ministry to investigate and look at it and they have recommended that a clear span bridge with dimensions 30 metres long, by four metres wide, by three metres high be constructed to replace the previous structure. A bridge of these dimensions and associated road approach modifications is expected to cost in the vicinity of \$300,000.

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As you rightly anticipated, no provision has been made in the budget for the year 2000/2001 for this, and we would look to see what funding is available in the next fiscal year. But I have asked my land and water development division and the regional administration, north, to investigate the possibility of constructing some temporary structure to alleviate the problem on a very urgent basis, and I am sure that we will get some immediate response. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.28 p.m.