

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Thursday, September 27, 2001*

The House met at 1.32 p.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received correspondence from the Members of St. Ann's East and Point Fortin requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave they have requested is granted.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Member for Diego Martin West is not here.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I ask that question No. 30 be deferred to the next sitting.

Mr. Speaker: Is that similar for the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, who is also not here? There are three questions on the Order Paper for him.

Mr. Valley: I assume that he will be here shortly. If he is not here by the time we get there, Mr. Speaker, I would ask for them to be deferred.

Mr. Speaker: All right. Hon. Members, there is a request for question No. 30 to be deferred for one week.

Mr. Maharaj: By agreement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: By agreement? Okay, it shall be deferred for one week.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Dr. Keith Rowley:

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?

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Charlotteville
(Overall plans)**

34. Mr. Nathaniel Moore (*Tobago East*) asked the Minister of Transport and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs:

- (a) Would the Minister inform this House of Government's overall plans, including a schedule of dates for the development of the port at Charlotteville, Tobago?
- (b) Would the Minister indicate whether consultations were held with the people in Charlotteville on Government's plan for the port, and if so, could he specify?
- (c) Would the Minister say what Customs and Immigration facilities are in place at present to facilitate the (almost) daily arrival and departure of yachts and other crafts using the port?

The Minister of Transport and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Jearlean John): Mr. Speaker, at present the Government's plan for the development of the port at Charlotteville are purely related to complying with the regulations regarding the facilities that must exist once an area has been designated a port of entry. The legislation in question is the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, the Immigration Act, Chap. 18:01 and the Harbours Act, Chap. 50:06.

In order to provide office accommodation for the various government agencies which must establish a presence by virtue of Charlotteville becoming a port of entry, the Government has sought to acquire eight parcels of land in the area on which to site the port facilities.

The Land Acquisition procedure has commenced according to the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act, 1994.

Consultations commenced in February 2000, between the former Minister of Tobago Affairs, the Charlotteville Village Council and the Tobago House of Assembly. At those meetings, villagers ventilated their concerns and emphasized the need for urgently required port infrastructure to cater for the village's normal developmental needs as well as those facilities to support a port, which handles many tourists. I must assure this honourable House that the process of consultation will continue.

As of September 01, 2001, the Immigration Division, Ministry of National Security, and the Customs and Excise Division, Ministry of Finance, opened offices in Charlotteville in government quarters where those divisions offer full service to both international vessels and the citizens of Charlotteville.

Thank you.

Mr. Moore: Mr. Speaker, a supplemental question please. Can the Minister tell us whether these people mentioned, with respect to the Immigration and Customs, are in attendance at the port every day of the week?

Sen. The Hon. J. John: I cannot say, I do not have a response to that, but I know that they have opened their offices as at the first of this month.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, questions Nos. 41, 43 and 44 are by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, who is not here. What is the wish of the Leader of Opposition Business?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that those questions be deferred for one week. There are also questions from the Member for Port of Spain, North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, questions Nos. 47, 48 and 49.

Mr. Valley: Yes, I know those, Mr. Speaker, but I thought the Clerk was telling me that there was one by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Speaker: Those are questions Nos. 47, 48 and 49.

Mr. Valley: I am sorry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I ask that they be deferred for one week.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, questions Nos. 41, 43 and 44 be deferred for one week as well as questions 48 and 49.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Question No. 47, I guess, would be asked by the Chief Whip?

Mr. Valley: No, Mr. Speaker, I will ask for that question—I thought we asked for those questions to be deferred, questions Nos. 47 and 48. Oh, Mr. Hinds is here, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government Business, you heard the request of the Chief Whip, how do we handle this?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Hinds is here, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, all that I can say is that the Minister is here and if the question has to be answered she can answer it. But the normal practice is that if they asked for it to be adjourned we do adjourn it.

Mr. Speaker: So therefore, questions Nos. 47 and 48 to be adjourned for one week.

Question put and agreed to.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**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? [*Mr. F. Hinds*]

**Secondary Education Modernization Programme
(Schools Constructed)**

- 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? [*Mr. F. Hinds*]

**MV Beauport
(Leasing of)**

- 47.** Could the Minister of Transport and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs provide the figures for:
- (a) The leasing of the MV Beauport for the period November 2000 to May 2001, providing the cost per day?

- (b) The leasing of the MV Beauport for the period June 2001 to May 2002, providing the cost per day? [*Mr. J. Rahael*]

**North West Regional Health Authority
(Terms and conditions of employment/Overtime payment)**

- 48.** Could the Minister of Health state:
- (a) Following on the Auditor General's report on the North West Regional Authority which revealed that a dentist employed by the North West Regional Health Authority received from August 2000 to December 2000 over \$120,000.00 in overtime payments, can the Minister of Health state how much overtime payments were made to the said dentist from January 2001 to June 2001 providing a detailed breakdown as per days and month separately?
- (b) Could the Minister state the terms and conditions of employment of the said dentist? [*Mr. J. Rahael*]

**Health Reform Programme
(Breakdown of disbursement)**

- 49.** Could the Minister of Health give a breakdown of the disbursement of the US \$5.1 million used from the IDB-assisted Health Reform Programme for technical assistance and the companies and/or individuals to whom payments were made and the purpose thereof? [*Mr. J. Rahael*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

Mr. Speaker: I see the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is here, I am prepared to revert, if there is no objection by the Members. Therefore, we have question No. 41 from the Member for Laventille East Morvant.

Mr. Hinds: I am most grateful, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members.

**Secondary School Syllabus
(Form Is Special)**

- 41. Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds** (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the Minister of Education:

Would the Minister indicate:

- (a) whether children registered for the Form Is Special for the up-coming school term are to pursue the regular Secondary School syllabus or curriculum?

- (b) If the answer to (a) is negative, would the Minister outline the syllabus they would pursue and explain the rationale for this programme/syllabus?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, let me start by indicating that syllabus and curriculum are two completely different but related matters. A syllabus is a list of topics to be studied and there would, therefore, be a syllabus for every examinable subject, for example, there is a Mathematics syllabus, English, Physics, French syllabus and so on.

For the records, there has never been a Form I syllabus whether it be for Form Is Special or any other Form I, until recently when the Ministry of Education commissioned the development of such a syllabus under the SEMP programme, forming what is now called the SEMP syllabus which is being piloted in several schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

1.45 p.m.

Previous to the operational framework being distributed to teachers, the Ministry of Education had conducted two intensive training programmes for teachers of the Form Is Special through the assistance of foreign consultants and local curriculum officers during 2000—2001. There was also continuous monitoring of the curriculum for the Form Is Special students. I am certain the Member will share the enthusiasm that I have and the confidence that all the children can learn, although they will learn at different rates. For the first time, children at lower performing educational levels are being specifically targeted and the framework for improving their abilities has been put in place.

Form Is Special are designed to accommodate children whom the system had previously excluded. We now have specifically designed guidelines to assist in the education of these children. The recent results of our Ibis High School, where over 124 students qualify to enter the regular Form Is, indicate the direction taken by Government and our commitment that no one will be left behind in our development of this nation. It should be noted that some Form Is Special, particularly at the Ibis High School and Valencia High School, have physical resources above that which some others have, for example, computers, additional teachers and remedial instructors, which may be superior to what may be considered a regular school.

Part (b) of the question, therefore, is now redundant or irrelevant. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hinds: In light of the fact that the hon. Minister has now established clearly that the students in the Form Is Special pursue a different programme of study from the regular Form Is, would the Minister agree that it is therefore not correct to say or to have said that the Form Is Special students had properly entered the secondary school system?

Hon K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member has been making this argument since last year, September 2000, when students entered into Form Is Special. The students have properly entered into secondary school.

Mr. Hinds: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. May I take this opportunity, now that I have settled in a little more, to apologize for my late arrival at this sitting.

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

43. Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the Minister of Education:

- (a) Would the Minister 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?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, there is no delay in the construction of the Biche High School. Actually, construction of that school was completed since November 2000. The delay has been with respect to the opening of the school for students. This has been because of the presence of volatile organic compounds—hydrogen sulphide, sulphur dioxide, hexane, propane and methane on that site.

In order to address the situation, the Ministry of Education engaged the services of different agencies to conduct various tests on the site. These were as follows.

- During August 2000 CARIRI conducted an exercise on the monitoring of gas emission on the school site. On August 16, 2000 CARIRI submitted a report on this.
- On August 18, 2000 the Ministry of the Environment submitted a report on the matter also.
- On August 22, 2000 the Ministry of Health submitted a report dealing with the level and acceptability of gas emissions.

- On October 23, 2000 Petrotrin/Kaizen undertook an environmental impact assessment commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment.
- November 2000 the Pan American Health Organization also submitted a report which was commissioned by the Ministry of Health.
- During July 2001 the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries also undertook a study with respect to gas emissions and safety of buildings and immediate environs.

The latest of these reports, which was conducted by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, indicates that the school can be opened following implementation of their recommendations. The recommendations and observations of that report are as follows.

- i. the Biche Government High School be opened in the September 2001 academic year.
- ii. the Biche Presbyterian Elementary School, which was situated close by, and which had also been shut down, be reopened as well in the September 2001 school year.
- iii. the four-metre wide shale bed that was exposed vertically at the school be sealed at least 15 metres away from the buildings. Sealing will be done using concrete at the surface and perforated pipes laid horizontally along the shale bed to trap and transport any gas that may migrate vertically. Gas monitoring for venting and burning, if necessary, will be conducted at extremities of the seals. The sealing of the shale must be undertaken prior to the opening of the school. Collection and monitoring of gases to be done throughout the school year.
- iv. due to the high angle of the slopes on the north and east of the school, rapid erosion was taking place. This erosion was causing exposure of the foundation of some of the buildings, which may create instability of the buildings.
- v. bagasse bales from Caroni (1975) Limited be used to stabilize the slopes around the school by constructing at least two terraces on the slope. This application is fast, cheap and safe and can be completed prior to opening of the school.
- vi. the Biche Presbyterian School be examined for structural integrity before opening.

These were the findings and recommendations of the report from the Ministry of Energy. Since then, Cabinet has agreed for works to be undertaken by the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) unit of the Ministry in conjunction with Petrotrin and those works are ongoing at the school.

Part (b) of the question—cost of construction, and furnishing. With respect to cost of construction and furnishing, the expenditure and construction of the school to date stands at \$23,867,326. However, the projected total cost of construction, including recommended works to address the matter of gas seepage, is estimated at \$25,817,281. The cost of furnishing the school stands at just over \$1 million.

Mr. Hinds: Did the hon. Minister or the Cabinet consider ceasing the operation of a school on that location altogether? This is because you have explained that the problem will continue to exist. It is just that you are taking some palliative measures. Did it occur to the Minister that, with that serious environmental problem, it might have been worthwhile considering putting an end to the entire project on the site?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Ministry of Education considered all the options. We sought technical advice from those who were experts in the matter and, based on the report from those experts, the recommendation is not for the school to be shut down. The recommendation is for remediation works to be done to allow the school to continue, and the cost of remediation works is very small in relation—[*Interruption*] No, in relation. I have given you the additional costs there. [*Interruption*] No, no, no. You did not understand, hon. Member.

Hon. B. Panday: Do not argue with him, “nah”.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I quoted to you the estimated cost of \$23 million and an additional, perhaps, \$2 million took it to \$25 million. That is estimated. The work is being done now by Petrotrin, which is also a state agency. So that all the scenarios were looked at, based on the report from the experts. The Ministry can only be guided by the report of the experts, which is for the remediation works to be done.

Mr. Hinds: Supplemental. Would the hon. Minister then agree that there was a clear case of oversight or negligence in respect of the planning phase of the construction of that school?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I do not believe that it is within my jurisdiction to pronounce on negligence with respect to this matter. I am not of the view that there has been negligence but, again, those are matters with which others with that

competence would be able to deal, but I am not of the view that there has been negligence in the matter.

**Secondary Education Modernization Programme
(Schools Constructed)**

44. Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the Minister of Education:

- (a) Would the Minister 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?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, the schools constructed under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme are as follows:

School	Capacity Enrolment
Brazil High School	525
Biche High School	525
Tableland High School	525
Debe High School	525
Coryal High School	350
Manzanilla High School	350
Matura High School	350
Valencia High School	875
Waterloo High School	875
Blanchisseuse High School	350

All these schools, with the exception of the Biche High School, are occupied and being utilized by students in Trinidad.

For part (b) of the question—the amount budgeted for construction in each case—with respect to Matura High School, the contract amount was

\$12,435,383.10. There is an increase of 16 per cent. The explanation for increases—additional works required in the areas of the playing field, backfilling, hard courts and access roadway. Coryal High School—\$15,827,000, the contract amount. There was an increase of 5 per cent in the amount of \$773,000 due to adjustment in site levels. Manzanilla High School—\$15,550,000—an increase of 19 per cent. The reasons were, adjustment in site levels, retaining wall, redesign of foundation bases and changes in sewer plant.

Valencia High School—\$24,599,790—a 5 per cent increase. The reasons: air-conditioning, roofing works and septic tank system. Waterloo High School—\$23,560,854—an 18 per cent increase. Reasons for increases: access roadway and drainage, piling works, superstructure, concrete works, wall and ceiling finishes. Debe High School—\$16,046,591—a 6 per cent increase. Increases were due to substructure roofing, septic tank system and ducting for electrical works. Tableland—\$15,218,561.79—a 30 per cent increase. This is where the highest increase was because of redesigns, additional earthworks and a retaining wall when there was tremendous slippage of land.

Biche High School—contract amount \$23,867,326.73—an expected increase of 8 per cent due to retaining walls, administration building, air-conditioning, extension, plumbing and electrical extras. Brazil—\$19,232,879.79—a 14 per cent increase due to plumbing, electrical extras, door frames redesign, construction of roadway, septic tank and additional works.

Overall, the contracted amount for these schools was \$181,238,387.26, an increase of 12 per cent, taking it to \$203,707,779.30. In many cases, the reasons for increase included things having to do with utilities, that is to say, with the septic systems, and with respect to construction of roadways and the bringing of electrical supplies in certain areas. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Since the Minister is at these figures, could the Minister possibly explain how the Ibis school repaired would cost \$35 million altogether and new schools cost significantly less?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: In the first place, it is incorrect to say that the Ibis High School has cost \$35 million, and I am glad you have asked this because it allows me to answer something that was raised previously. When several Cabinet Notes were talked about in this Parliament recently, parts of it were quoted within the Parliament and parts were totally left out. Not a cent has been paid with respect to any works done at the Ibis High School. [*Desk thumping*] Not one cent has been paid so it is incorrect to say—[*Interruption*] it is incorrect—[*Interruption*] it is incorrect to say \$35 million or \$23 million.

You know, these schools—under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme, we were told they were \$183 million. I heard the Member for Diego Martin West and Member for Laventille East/Morvant—\$500 million, \$600 million. Every time they spoke, it is the same kind of scenario that is happening with the Ibis High School. So not one cent has been paid by Government. What had happened, Mr. Speaker, is, when the claims came in to the Ministry of Education, they were brought to the attention of this Minister of Education. The Minister of Education requested an internal audit be done.

Based on that audit, the Minister of Education took it to the Cabinet and asked for this matter to be investigated for an audit to be done and that was the Cabinet Note and the audit that the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about. When he spoke about furniture for seven schools—all of that, Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet records are there; but, you see, they quoted only parts of it. They did not quote the other parts. The audit was done internally. We then took that to the Cabinet and asked Cabinet and the project unit of the Ministry of Finance and the other resources of the Ministry of Finance to do a complete audit with respect to all works at the Ibis High School. So it is incorrect to say \$35 million or otherwise at this point in time.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence for a supplementary question to the Minister. Is the Minister saying that nowhere in the Government records is there a document showing that your Ministry paid \$3.2 million on verbal authority for items not delivered to schools under your portfolio?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: That Cabinet Note, which was the one from last week and which, in fact, came to the Cabinet this week for confirmation, what that said is, we had run an internal audit with respect to furniture that should have been delivered by MTS and we were asking the Cabinet for a dollar-for-value audit to be done. That is what the Member quoted from, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence. I am asking the Minister, is the Minister in a position or prepared to say that there is nowhere a Government document, from which I quoted, which shows that the Ministry of Education paid, on verbal authority, \$3.2 million and you sent staff out who verified that items were not delivered, and \$3.2 million were paid for supplies to schools?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I am saying that we went to the Cabinet with an audit report. That is the document that I am aware of. If the Member wishes to find out whether there is another document, perhaps the last source that put it in his mailbox will put it again, but he can file the question to ask us to—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Rowley: But you are giving the impression that you had no information and that it is wrong.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:—disclose the Government document that so says. Mr. Speaker, the point that I am making—and this is what they have not been doing and have been misleading the public—is that they are giving the impression that the Ministry is corrupt, or the Ministers are corrupt. They are not pointing out, however, that the reason these matters have come to light is because we requested in the very first instance that an audit be done, so that we could find out exactly what was taking place with respect to these matters.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence for a last question—very last one, very last one. I crave your indulgence.

Mr. Speaker: All right, the very last question. Proceed.

Dr. Rowley: I thank you very sincerely, Mr. Speaker. In light of what the Minister has said and is implying, is the Minister saying that there is not a Cabinet Note in this country that says that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the State, was committed to purchase the Ibis High School for \$12 million, before the Cabinet approved the authority to negotiate for the purchase of that building?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Minister cannot at this point say whether there is such a document or not. *[Interruption]* *[Laughter]*

Mr. Imbert: It was your Note. *[Interruption]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: What this Minister was saying—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: “Is your Note coming from you, signed by you.” *[Interruption]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:—is, the memorandum of understanding clearly indicated—and that can be put to the Parliament. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Education and the owners of the Ibis building was very clear that there was an option to purchase not exceeding \$12 million—an option to purchase. It was not a commitment. There was an option to purchase.

Mr. Imbert: You are ducking. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Okay, by agreement between the Leader of Government Business and the Chief Whip they have requested that we revert to questions 48 and 49, since the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West is now here and that the Minister of Health is prepared to answer it. *[Crosstalk]* Question number 30? *[Crosstalk]* Well—one moment, please. *[Crosstalk]* The Minister is

prepared to answer question No. 30? All right, if there is agreement on both sides of the House, I call the Member for Diego Martin West.

Caroni (1975) Limited
(Annual Rent Due)

30. Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*) asked the Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs:

- (d) 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?
- (e) Could the Minister state how much money has been paid by INNERCOB to Caroni (1975) Limited as at June 30, 2001?
- (f) 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?

The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer this question because, before the Member arrived, it would have been the fifth time that it was postponed and I often wonder, when Members opposite ask questions, if they are really serious when it has to be postponed five times.

Dr. Rowley: At whose request?

Hon. M. Assam: Your request. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. M. Assam: These people are “bol’ face, yuh know”.

Mr. Speaker: Excuse me, excuse me.

Hon. M. Assam: They come to this Parliament and—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Take your seat. Members for Laventille East and Diego Martin West, it is still early in today’s sitting. I am going to ask Members not to go in that direction with “that kind ah language”, staying in your seat and making those kinds of outbursts. I am asking you to control yourselves.

Hon. M. Assam: You see, Mr. Speaker, they are so “bol’ face”. They either come late or do not come at all, and the Member for Diego Martin Central religiously asked for a deferral of the answer and now today he comes and denies it. My God! May the Lord have mercy on your souls.

The question, No. 30, asks:

- (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, could the Minister state what is the annual rent due to Caroni (1975) Limited?
- (b) Could the Minister state how much money has been paid by INNERCOB to Caroni (1975) Limited—[*Interruption*]

You would not tell me how to conduct myself in this Parliament. You are not the Minister—as of June 30, 2001. [*Interruption*] You think you could terrorize me? Maybe others.

- (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?

2.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in answer to the first part, the company’s lands leased to Innercob Industries Limited refer to two separate leases, both effective from June 01, 1998 and payable in advance. The annual rent due, inclusive of VAT, are US \$14,892.71, and US \$134,124.74 respectively. Premiums were also payable in the amounts of US \$32,375.44 and US \$291,569 respectively.

In answer to part (b), as of June 30, 2001, an amount of US \$500,801.60 has been paid by Innercob Industries Limited to Caroni (1975) Limited in respect of the premiums and lease rent. Premiums for Lease No. 15010/98, US \$32,375.44. Lease No. 15011/98, US \$291,569.

Lease rent from June 01, 1998 to May 31, 1999, US \$147,071.74. Lease rent from June 1, 1999 to May 31, 2000, US \$14,892.71. Lease rent from June 01, 2000 to May 31, 2001, US \$14,892.71, making a total of US \$500,801.60.

In answer to part (c), there are arrears owed to Caroni (1975) Limited by Innercob Industries Limited. The level of the indebtedness is as follows:

From June 01, 1998 to May 31, 1999, US \$1,942.71. From June 01, 1999 to May 31, 2000, US \$134,121.74. From June 01, 2000 to May 31, 2001, \$134,121.74; and from June 01, 2001 to May 31, 2002, an amount of US \$149,014.45 will be due; making a total of US \$419,200.64.

The company has written to Innercob Industries Limited requesting payment of the outstanding arrears. The last of such communication is dated July 10, 2001 advising that unless payment was received, steps would be taken to reenter the property in question. Innercob Industries Limited responded verbally requesting a further two-month period in which to make the payment. This request was granted by Caroni (1975) Limited, after which the lawyers will handle the matter accordingly.

This morning before I came to this Parliament I was advised that the payments would be made on September 30 and, if the payments of the arrears are not made by September 30, we will reenter the property and institute legal proceedings against Innercob Industries Limited.

I thank you.

Dr. Rowley: Thank you very much!

North West Regional Health Authority
(Terms and Conditions of Employment/Overtime Payment)

48. Mr. John Rahael (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the Minister of Health:

- (a) Following on the Auditor General's report on the North West Regional Authority which revealed that a dentist employed by the North West Regional Health Authority received from August 2000 to December 2000 over \$120,000.00 in overtime payments, can the Minister of Health state how much overtime payments were made to the said dentist from January 2001 to June 2001 providing a detailed breakdown as per days and months separately?
- (b) Could the Minister state the terms and conditions of employment of the said dentist?

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, the dentist referred to in question No. 48 in the Auditor General's report is Dr.

Khushee Sharma and she received overtime payments of \$23,612.16 during the period January 10 to January 31, 2001 when she was rostered for on call. This represented 352 hours extra duty at \$67.08 per hour. This claim was certified by Dr. Sharma, the Head of Department and the Medical Chief of Staff.

Her duties involved providing services at certain primary care centres in the North West Region during her normal working hours, 8.00 a.m.—4.00 p.m. Monday to Friday and taking calls after hours at Port of Spain General Hospital in the department of Maxillo Facial surgery. This department has always been severely understaffed because of the unavailability of dentists, and all dentists in that department are rostered for long hours of overtime in order to provide a continuous service.

The payments were made from January 10—January 31 on a daily basis. That is 22 days at \$1,073.78 per day. Mr. Speaker, Dr. Sharma resigned on March 06, 2001 and had no further claims in 2001. The terms and conditions of Dr. Sharma's contract—and I will read the highlights of it; I can provide the Member with a copy of the contract if he wishes: salary, \$10,000 per month; COLA \$50 per month; overtime allowance, \$67.08 per hour extra; transport allowance, \$1,000 per month; and refund of telephone rental, \$35.65 per month.

Mr. Rahael: You said \$10,000 per month plus perks?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Yes.

Mr. Rahael: Yet, for 22 days, the doctor in question received over \$23,000 in overtime? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Health Reform Programme (Breakdown of Disbursement)

49. Mr. John Rahael (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the Minister of Health:

Could the Minister of Health give a breakdown of the disbursement of the US \$5.1 million used from the IDB assisted Health Reform Programme for technical assistance and the companies and/or individuals to whom payments were made and the purpose thereof?

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, the \$5.1 million referred to in the question arose from an answer provided by the Minister of Finance at a finance committee meeting in relation to the Emergency Health Service. I would like to state that this figure applied to several elements of the programme, including technical assistance, and I will give a breakdown.

In July 1999, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago entered into a contract with the Government of Canada for a pilot project to establish an emergency health service in Trinidad and Tobago. The initial contract included the South West Regional Health Authority and the Tobago Regional Health Authority. Subsequently, because of the success of the project and the demands in other areas for service, the contract was amended in July 2000 to include the North West Regional Health Authority and Eastern Regional Health Authority.

A new management contract was entered into in January 2001 for the provision of services from January 01, 2001 to September 30, 2001. The cost of the original contract for the South West Regional Health Authority and Tobago Regional Health Authority was \$22,061,716. The cost of the amendment to include the North West Regional Health Authority and the Eastern Regional Health Authority was \$17,885,000. The cost of the services from January 01, 2001 to September 30, 2001 is \$14,351,000. This is a total of \$54,299,319.

Mr. Speaker, these fees include supply of ambulances, 55 in all, emergency medical equipment, radio equipment, training equipment, training of emergency medical technicians and dispatchers, salaries for the emergency medical technicians and dispatchers over the period, uniforms and insurance for the EMTs, insurance for vehicles, maintenance repairs and fleet management for the vehicles, rental of office space and utilities, and design and management of the project.

The technical assistance component which is design and management of the project from its inception—that is in July 1999 to September 30, 2001—is \$6,237,000. The contract, as mentioned, is between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Canada; and the Government of Canada subcontracted for different components of the project.

Mr. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, the question that was filed clearly states a breakdown of the disbursement of the US \$5.1 million that was under the heading of “Technical Assistance” in reply to the document that was provided by the hon. Minister of Finance which already had a breakdown of equipment, training and support systems; and those were figures that were listed separately.

Therefore, the question still remains, the breakdown of the disbursement of \$5.1 million for technical assistance, and to the companies and/or individuals to whom payments were made.

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: And I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that that \$5.1 million, as mentioned in the response of the Minister of Finance was a mistake and I am clarifying the details for you.

Mr. Rahael: Oh. Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I think we are out of time for questions. I allowed one question. We are way out of time for questions. I am asking the Clerk to proceed.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

Dilapidated Roads, La Brea

Mr. Hedwige Breaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 12(1) and (2), I hereby ask leave to move the adjournment of the House at its sitting today, Thursday, September 27, 2001 in order to discuss the definite matter of urgent public importance to wit:

The dilapidated condition of the roads in La Brea and, in particular, Lodge Street, La Brea. The matter is definite because it refers to a specific and identifiable failure of the Government to carry out its functions, namely repairs and maintenance of roads in La Brea. The matter is urgent because the state of the roads are of such, that it is impossible for vehicular traffic to use the majority of these thoroughfares and, indeed, some roads are so overgrown with bushes and debris that it is difficult to tell whether a road exists there at all.

The matter is of public importance because the state of disrepair of the said roads has been used by PTSC buses as an excuse to not go into La Brea. Taxis refuse to go along the minor roads, thus causing hardship to the travelling public, especially the sick and the elderly. Moreover, the potholes in the road are so large that they constitute a health hazard in that they provide a breeding place for the *aedes aegypti* mosquito.

Quite recently, to wit, Saturday, September 22, 2001, a resident of La Brea, Ramchand Pulchan, drowned while swimming in a pothole on Lodge Street, La Brea. [*Laughter*] This pothole still exists and constitutes a health and safety hazard to the population and particularly children. If these roads are not repaired immediately, we can expect more fatalities.

Mr. Speaker, how many more must die? I am asking this Government.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the matter the Member is seeking to raise under Standing Order 12(1) and (2) does not qualify.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

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

Whereas it is provided by section 3(1) of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01 (hereinafter called “the Act”) that where proposals for general or supplementary appropriation of public funds are made to the House of Representatives and are embodied in an Appropriation or Supplementary Appropriation Bill, the President may, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in any such Bill, by Order, provide for the imposition of a tax or the variation of an existing tax and from the date of the publication of the Order in the *Gazette*, the tax as imposed or varied shall be payable:

And whereas it is provided by section 3(5) of the Act that an Order varying an existing tax shall cease to have effect if the Order is not confirmed with or without modifications, by a resolution agreed to by the House within the next twenty-one days after the commencement of the Order:

And whereas the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001 was made under section 3 of the Act, whereby provision was made for the imposition or variation of taxes in the written laws mentioned in the said Order to the extent and in the manner set out therein for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2002”:

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved:

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001 be confirmed subject to the following modifications:

1. Clause 3 is amended in reference to section 61A:
 - (a) in subsection (1), by inserting in line three of paragraph (a), the words “submission of” immediately before the word “application”;
 - (b) by deleting subsection (3) and substituting the following subsection:

“(3) Subject to subsection (4), an application for the issue of a new driving permit whose permit had expired in excess of five years prior to the date of the submission of the application shall, before issuance of the new permit—

- (a) be required to produce a certificate referred to in section 47 to the effect that he had passed a driving test within two years prior to the date of such submission; and
 - (b) pay to the Licensing Authority the sum of two hundred dollars.”;
 - (c) by inserting the following subsection:
 “(4) Subsection (3)(a) shall not apply where an applicant for the issue of a new driving permit was absent from Trinidad and Tobago and satisfies the Licensing Authority that he is the holder of a valid driving permit issued by the relevant foreign authority.”.
2. Clause 4 is amended—
- (a) in sub-subparagraph (b)(ii)(A) by inserting immediately after the word “debt” the words “or shares not listed by a self-regulatory organization”; and
 - (b) by deleting the words “On sale of shares” in sub-paragraph (1A) and substituting the following words “On shares listed by a self-regulatory organization not sold or transferred in accordance with the rules of the self-regulatory organization”.
3. Clause 6 is amended in the “Third Column Rates of Duty” by deleting the words “\$6.18 per litre” corresponding to the Tariff Heading No. 2203.01 and substituting the words “\$5.02 per litre”.

Mr. Speaker, the Motion before the House of Representatives is for the confirmation of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001 which was published on September 14, 2001 pursuant to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Act allows the President to issue an Order for the imposition of any tax or the variation of any existing tax in order to raise revenue to meet the expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill.

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Act provides that from the date of publication of the Order, or such later date as may be specified, the tax as imposed or varied by the Order shall be payable.

An order varying an existing tax ceases to have effect unless it is confirmed by resolution agreed to by this House within 21 days after the commencement of

the Order. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001 was published on September 14, 2001. The Motion now being considered is for the confirmation of that Order, and is well within the 21-day deadline.

The measures which are contained in the Order were published on Friday September 14, 2001 when the budget was presented. Mr. Speaker, paragraph seven of the Order increases by 100 per cent, the tax payable by members' clubs on gambling tables and other devices. Members' clubs currently pay no corporation tax. They are only taxed on the gambling tables and other devices. In Trinidad and Tobago gambling is not a lawful activity, except within the context of private members' clubs, or where the activity is authorized under the National Lotteries legislation.

Considerable amounts of money pass through private members' clubs which employ a growing number of persons to manage the gaming tables and devices. The members' clubs are currently not within the tax elect, thus the reason for the increases proposed. Broad tax bases help to distribute tax burdens and contribute to lower tax rates, thereby minimizing the incidence of taxation on the average citizen.

2.25 p.m.

Paragraph three of the Order amends the fee structure for the renewal of driving permits by extending the time within which a person may apply for renewal of a driving permit without being required to pass a driving test. Prior to this amendment, the applicant for renewal of a driver's permit whose permit had expired for more than six months, but not more than three years, would be required to pay a sum of \$300 plus the renewal fee of \$200.

The total amount to be paid on renewal of a permit, which had not expired for more than three years, was \$500. The effect of the new provision is the same, in that, the aggregate payment due for renewal after the permit expired between six months and three years, remains at \$500.

Under the old law, where the permit had expired for more than three years, the driver would be required to re-sit the driving test. Under the new law, another layer is added so that a person who took up to five years to renew his permit will now have to pay \$1,000 upon renewal.

The basic difference between the old and new provisions is that the applicant is now given an additional two years to renew his permit before having to re-sit the driving test. Under the new law, the driver would have up to five years to renew his driver's permit. After five years he would have to re-sit the driving test.

Paragraph 3(2) of the Order exempts an applicant who was absent from Trinidad and Tobago between six months and five years after the expiration of his permit, from the penalties imposed in paragraph 3(1). Under the existing law, as amended by the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001, where a permit has expired for more than five years, the applicant whether or not absent from Trinidad and Tobago during the period that the permit expired, would be required to apply for a new driving permit.

The Transport Commissioner has advised that the requirement to re-take the driving test after failure by an applicant to renew within five years, should not apply to an applicant who was out of the country and who holds a valid foreign driving permit. The applicant who was in the country for a period of five years after the permit expired should, however, be required to do the driving test.

The following modifications are proposed to clause 3 of the Order in relation to section 61A of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50. At subsection (1)(a), (b) and (c), the words "to the date of application" will now read "to the date of submission of the application". This is to avoid a situation where, for instance, an applicant backdates his application to avoid having to pay a late fee.

The period of expiration of a driving permit is to be reckoned from the date of expiration of the permit to the date of submission of the application for renewal.

There are two very minor changes to be made to the resolution. Firstly, in relation to the modification of section 61A(1) of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, the new words to be inserted should be: submission of "d" and not "submission of" as stated in the resolution. In addition the resolution before the House omits the insertion of the words: "submission of d" in section 61A subsections (b) and (c). The inclusion of these words in subsection 1(b) and (c) is also important to prevent the back dating of applications to avoid the greater tax.

Mr. Speaker, we are also deleting subsection (3) and substituting a new (3) as follows:

"Subject to subsection (4), an applicant for the issue of a new driving permit whose permit had expired in excess of five years prior to the date of submission of the application shall, before issuance of the new permit:

"(a) be required to produce a certificate referred to in section 47 to the effect that he had passed a driving test within two years prior to the date of such submission; and

(b) pay to the Licensing Authority the sum of two hundred dollars.”

A new subsection (c) is to be inserted as follows:

“(4) subsection (3)(a) shall not apply where an applicant for the issue of a new driving permit was absent from Trinidad and Tobago and satisfies the Licensing Authority that he is the holder of a valid driving permit issued by the relevant foreign authority.”

Mr. Speaker, the “Stamp Duty” paragraphs 4(a) and (b)(i) and (iii) of the Order, will amend the Stamp Duty Act, Chap. 76:01, by exempting life insurance policies and deferred annuities from stamp duty.

Paragraph 4(b)(i) and (ii) of the Order, will amend the Stamp Duty Act to increase the stamp duty payable on the sale of shares to 5 per cent of the market value of the transaction.

A couple modifications are proposed in the Motion in relation to the provision dealing with off the floor trading. The duty of 5 per cent of the market value of the transaction was intended to apply only to shares which are listed by a self-regulatory organization such as the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange, but which are not sold or transferred in accordance with the rules of that organization.

Regulators in the developed markets are of the view that a stock exchange is the most appropriate place where one can get the fairest price for one’s securities and in regional jurisdictions such as Barbados and Jamaica, investors are discouraged from trading off the floor in listed securities by the imposition of disincentives such as the property transfer tax for trades executed off the floor.

Trading in the securities or public companies on the floor of the Stock Exchange will not be prohibited by law, but all the measure seeks to do is to discourage off the floor trading and encourage the sale of securities at market value on the floor of the Exchange. The Order is to be modified at paragraph 4(b)(ii)(B) by deleting the words “On sale of shares” and substituting the words “On shares listed by a self-regulatory organization not sold or transferred in accordance with the rules of the self-regulatory organization”.

As a result of this modification, a further modification at paragraph 4(b) and 2(A) of the Order is necessary. The words “On sale of any stock or funded debt” should be deleted and the following substituted, “On sale or transfer of any stock, funded debt or shares not listed by a self-regulatory organization”

Mr. Speaker, paragraph 5(a) of the Order deals with the exemption of residents who have attained the age of 60 years, from insurance premium tax where such person is the beneficiary under the policy of insurance.

Paragraph 5(b) of the Order increases by 15 per cent the tobacco tax on tobacco products imported from outside the Caricom region. Paragraph 6 of the Order increases by 30 per cent the rates of import duty on alcoholic beverages imported from outside the Caricom region.

There was a miscalculation of 30 per cent increase in the Customs Duty on imported beer from extra regional sources. The Customs Duty was originally \$4.775 per litre, this was subsequently reduced to \$4 per litre. Consequently, when the 30 per cent increase was imposed, the new rate should have been \$5.20 per litre and not \$6.18 as stated in the Order. The rate of duty for beer under tariff heading 2203.01 should, therefore, be \$5.20 per litre and not \$6.18 per litre.

Paragraph 7 of the Order will increase by 15 per cent the rates of import duty on alcoholic beverages imported from within the Caricom region.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the Minister presenting his Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I could not help but remember the Mighty Sparrow. I think it was somewhere 1960 or 1961, the year after the Mighty Douglas beat him in that competition. The Mighty Sparrow had this song, "No originality, no melody, no stage personality". One sees quite clearly that there is a complete lack of understanding and appreciation of our objective situation in Trinidad and Tobago today by that Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] So in Sparrow's words, there is no understanding, no appreciation.

For me it is really paradoxical that while the economy is slowing down, the Minister of Finance comes here to raise taxes. His colleague from Tunapuna should tell him. First of all I should say, that after the budget presentation here and the debate in the Lower House, one heard that when he went to the Senate he said, "Listen, we need to take into consideration what happened at the World Trade Centre on September 11," but he has not demonstrated that today.

A Minister of Finance who would take that into consideration, would pull that piddling stuff that he has in that Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, come here and do some serious business. The basic point, as any second year economic student would tell you, is that the first must be counter cyclical. In other words, if one is expecting a downturn in the economy, then the Government's function, the first, is to try to increase the disposable income of citizens.

In a period when things are going good, you have good economic growth and so on, the Government is supposed to try to run budget surpluses. One has to take it extremely early, otherwise you are going to find yourself in difficulty. It is very difficult to stop a slide, once it has started, because it gathers momentum.

My advice to the Minister of Finance is, in all seriousness, that rather than the piddling stuff he has come here with; rather than the 1 per cent he is talking about reducing income tax, that he has got to be more aggressive in attempting to increase disposable income, if we are to avoid a deep recession.

In the budget the Minister told us that he is reducing marginal rates of tax by 1 per cent at the corporate and personal level. I want to tell him that by that incremental approach one knows what he wants to do, just as with the old age pensioners, he wants to curry favour with the business people and taxpayers. But that incremental approach would not work in this environment. If you want to go to a 5 per cent reduction in taxes, do it now; you are going to get the benefit. You have got to bite the bullet. Similarly, if you believe that the old age pensioners need \$1,000, give it to them now; understand that. [*Desk thumping*]

While they want to sort of piggy back on the happenings of September 11, this economy has really been in a downturn even before that, Mr. Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, formerly St. Joseph.

Mr. Speaker, it is a funny thing with some people; when they cannot answer arguments, they attack the individual. They say if you cannot deal with the issues, then deal with the person. In football they say that if you cannot play the ball, play the man. That is what the Minister of Finance attempted to do with my colleague here last week. [*Interruption*] You can deal with no one; I want you to know that. You will find that out in this House. You come with your arrogance here and we will deal with you. We will deal with you. [*Interruption*] Boy we will deal with you. Yes boy, let me tell you something: we will eat you up and throw you out. That is what we do inside of here. That is what we do; we will eat you up and spit you out. Ask them about Gideon Hanoomansingh.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin Central, I know you know that the Member has a right to be in this House.

Mr. K. Valley: I know that.

Mr. Speaker: So I think those personal kinds of threats—we could do without them, and we could proceed with the substance of the matter.

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you. I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, they were not threats, they were promises.

Last week when the Member for Diego Martin West raised the issue of the change in the population, the statistics between the *Review of the Economy* document of 2000/2001, there was no answer. They changed one figure, all the others remained the same, which cannot be logical, but there is no answer how it has changed. He charged my colleague, he attacked the man, that he was attacking public servants. Up to now, that issue is not answered. I want to tell him that the GDP is the same thing.

I know finance; I know economics. [*Interruption*] I do not mind if you teach me English; I have no problem with that. The gross domestic product, if that is what it is, that is what it is. I do not have a problem with that. I have no hang-ups with respect to that. I know what I know and I know what I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, the *Review of The Economy 2000* tells us that in manufacturing—you ought to know some of these figures—it says in 1999, the GDP at constant prices 1995, \$2215.8 million and for 2000 it was some \$2456.7 million. The Minister boasted about the growth rate, over the period, of some 10 per cent or what have you. Lo and behold, when we look at the *Review of The Economy* for 2000, the figure for 1999 changes miraculously. While in the 2000 edition the figure was supposed to be \$2215.8 million, in the 2000 review it is now down to \$1877.4.

Mr. Speaker, if we accept the last year's figure for 2000—and I would put a proviso, that yes, the last year figure can change in the 2001 document because last year was merely an estimate, it was a provisional figure. When we look at the provisional figure for 2001—remember last year's figure was \$2456.7 million—2001 is \$2037.8, one sees a decline in manufacturing of some 17 per cent.

If we say, no that is wrong, because we have revised 2000, and we take the revised figure in the document for 2000, \$2042.4 versus the 1999 figure from the 2000 book, one sees that last year there was a decline in manufacturing of about 8 or 9 per cent.

2.45 p.m.

The reality is that the manufacturing sector has been in decline for a little while now. No problem, you would say. I would say it is simply a result of lack of incentives, lack of providing that enabling environment for the last five or six years.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard the Minister in his budget presentation—I do not want to go through that—but you have heard the Minister from time to time and the venture capital legislation is still not here. Market access agreements started way back in 1994—1995; one just came to the Parliament, others have been promised year after year. That is what is happening, but what is worse is the Minister of Finance, to my mind, coming here today with piddling stuff about raising taxes rather than understanding the current environment and seeing the main requirement to ensure that there is increase in disposable income.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take you back to 1987 when we were just coming off a boom period also, and oil prices I remembered dipped to \$9.00 per barrel in 1986 and there was a change in the government in that year and, rather than dealing with the slowdown in the economy that was coming, the government at that time worsened the situation. You know, in preparing for this debate, I just asked them to pull out the 1987 *Hansard* for some things because I remember that the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, not an economist, but although he did not get the whole picture at that time he was making a very important point and he was wrongly criticized up and down and I told him time and time again that he had a point but he was just not articulating it properly.

His point was that given that there was this plant and capacity available, what we needed was somehow to find the financial resources to put it to work and of course, that led him into—he started talking about printing money and all sorts of things—some difficulties, but he had an important point.

His government came in 1986 and in their first budget of 1987 made such a catastrophe that led to the closure of the National Commercial Bank (NCB), the Co-operative Bank and the Workers Bank, formation of First Citizens Bank (FCB) and also led us to the IMF.

I want to quote one or two things from the 1987 budget contribution and the point he was making here. He said:

“Our third difficulty with the budget is that though on the face of it, it appears to be expansionary, in fact if the measures are implemented, the effect on the economy would be a further decline in economic activity and extremely high inflation. In other words, we would have stagflation; meaning increasing unemployment, low incomes, higher prices and a complete drain on the reserves. The budget is simply an open invitation to the IMF.”

This was the first budget of that government and that was the observation made. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that by 1988, the IMF was here in Trinidad and Tobago. A word to the wise is sufficient.

Now I have seen that with respect to expenditure for the year, personal expenditure for example is supposed to increase by some \$700 million. Most of it, I assume, relates to the increments and other payments to the public service. I want to ask the Minister to try to effect that as quickly as possible. In this period, the obligation of the Government—if one is to attempt to deal with the slowdown—is to try to improve disposable income realizing that personal debt capacity is now shut and that is what, to my mind, is of extreme importance Mr. Speaker.

The basic issue is whether they can afford it, and I am saying that this economy can afford it if only we would avoid the level of corruption that is now commonplace in Trinidad and Tobago. A while ago, my colleague was speaking about schools with payments made now being audited and so on. A similar situation I understand occurred at the Chaguaramas Development Centre (CDA), where related to the Miss Universe contest, the CDA was given the approval to raise some \$12 million to do some renovations and that eventually turned out to be \$20 million. From \$12 million which was approved by Cabinet, it turned out to be \$20,458,961.54 and the thing about it is, after spending \$20 million on refurbishing that centre, they are now renting it at \$200,000 per month which they are not even getting. Do you know to whom they are renting it? Call names, I will whistle. They are renting it to friends, \$200,000 a month that is not even sufficient to service the interest on the loan and it is not even being paid. Not one cent!

Even the call centre where they are supposed to be paying some \$50,000 or \$60,000 a month, the last payment was somewhere in March or April. *[Interruption]* They know to whom they are renting it. So wherever you turn you are seeing the corruption, and while they pursue their individual agendas, the economy is sliding and we have a Minister of Finance who comes here and deals with piddling stuff.

Mr. Speaker, we hear all types of “ol” talk about diversifying the economy. When we look at what has happened over the years, we look at 1996 when the oil sector was contributing 24 per cent to the GDP, we look at 2001 figures and the oil sector is still contributing 24 per cent of GDP. There has been no diversification of the economy.

You look at manufacturing in 1996, which was contributing 8 per cent to the GDP. In 2001, manufacturing is still contributing 8 per cent to the GDP, no diversification of the economy away from oil and gas despite the “ol” talk you hear from those on the other side. This lack of initiative, the lack of leadership is what bothers me because my friend, the Member for Naparima would know the

music there was between 1991 and 1995 when we were busy shaping the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Minister comes here and is claiming things that he knows not of the origin. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, he was on that mission to Venezuela and Colombia. Do you remember when we signed the memorandum with Colombia and we went on to Mexico? [*Interruption*] Partial scopes were there, but remember we went to Colombia and we signed the memorandum with respect to the trade agreement. Speaking about partial scopes, Mr. Speaker, the whole change away from partial scopes agreement, was based on our exceptions agreement because we told them it makes no sense selecting the product which would qualify for re-entry. What we ought to do is the other way around, let us take those products which will not, and therefore, the list must be shorter and that is our initiative to move from the partial scope to the exemption list and he knows that, the Member for Tunapuna was there.

Mr. Assam: I give you credit for that.

Mr. K. Valley: No, no, I do not want any credit from you. The central point I am making is that, one, we need to get serious about our economy, we need to have leadership, we need to get things done quickly. We are tired of waiting and hearing every year that this is not done for some reason.

We heard about the Fair Trade Act, and the Competition Act in 1996, 1997 and then it just stopped appearing in the budget document. What has happened with it—competitive legislation? In 1995 it was mentioned on page 14; 1996, it is mentioned on page 8; in 1997, it is mentioned on page 7. Since then we have heard not a word about our legislation with respect to competition policy. In 1998, not a word in the budget statement; 1999, nothing; 2000, nothing; 2001, nothing. Now we are hearing about raising tax on members' clubs. They are not even legal, but the critical issue you need to look at is the legality of the thing. You come telling me about piddling things about raising it by 100 per cent. "Yuh" wasting "meh" time. This is a Parliament that must deal with serious stuff, or you are reducing tax by 1 per cent when we have serious things to deal with, Mr. Speaker. There is a lack of intellectualism in that Government. [*Desk thumping*]

What has happened with the Foreign Investment Act? What has happened with the mutual fund legislation, what has happened with it? What really has been going on with the Government?

During his budget contribution, the Minister mentioned something about the short time he spent at the Ministry of Trade—16 months, only then did I realize it was only 16 months I was at the Ministry of Trade, but he should look at the

record in that 16 months, that is what he should look at. I remember going to Canada to speak with the Minister of Trade and Industry about the Bilateral Investment Treaty and he is telling me that we are 64th on the list, and why do we need this. [*Interruption*] You just have to put in your own legislation that the investment comes in free. A week later I got a note stating that you are now 16th on the list, and a few months later we were signing the Bilateral Investment Treaty as well as the Investment Protection Agreement.

I remember the NAFTA issue that we used to motivate the manufacturing sector. NAFTA was not simply old talk; it motivated our manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago because we motivated them to let them know that you cannot do it. [*Desk thumping*] After this guy, Gary Bus—even Gary Bus was making all types of noises when we removed the negative list, and do you know what he did? He rationalized his operation and he had his own trade zone up there. [*Interruption*] It might very well be, but while he is fighting and saying it is not good, he is making adjustments and the whole manufacturing sector—but understand, the problem is that he does not understand.

In this age of globalization the firm must rationalize; they may simply concentrate on one or two lines and import the others. Do you understand? We are talking about a global market so if it is soap they are making, they want to make soap for the whole world, and they may stop making milk and import it from somewhere else. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: You do not understand it, and you never will.

Mr. K. Valley: Understand, you are in a different ball game entirely, so that the firm must look at the global market, rationalize its production, decide that perhaps it may want to concentrate on one or two items and import the rest. That is the competitive stance they may have to take. That is the reality.

Mr. Speaker, with all the work I have to do, I really do not want to waste time and I really feel that this Bill which the Minister brought to the Parliament this afternoon is a waste of my time, quite simply, and an insult to the whole Parliament. [*Interruption*] Whatever it is, it is a waste of time.

I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister would really consider our own economic situation and what is happening in the world around us and realize his responsibility to the nation as the Minister of Finance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, I echo the sentiments of my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, because one really has to wonder what is the thought process that went into the whole question of this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Why these issues suddenly come out of the woodwork? Taxes payable on gambling tables and other devices—from where did they come? The Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, and the changes in the regime of taxes for alcohol and tobacco. Where is the explanation from the Minister as to why he is doing these things? Where is the policy statement of the Government on gambling, for example? You know we had another Minister of Finance who used to like gambling so he did not deal with the issue.

3.05 p.m.

We have a problem in Trinidad and Tobago where we have a Gambling Act which outlaws games of chance and allows games of skills, like poker, so that persons can say a game like poker involves technique and talent and thought process, so that when these people sit down in their little clubs all over Trinidad, clubs that have mushroomed within the last five years under this administration; all of these private members' clubs that you see throughout Woodbrook, down Ariapita Avenue, all of these clubs that they frequent. They sit down there and they are very clever in terms of evading the restrictions imposed by the Gambling and Betting Act.

They have roulette tables—someone was telling me the other day, you can have a particular type of roulette table, as long as it is not mechanical; and you can have certain types of card games and so on. But what is the Government's policy on gambling? There are entire economies of countries and cities like Atlantic City, which are based on gambling. There is the whole concept of casino tourism that is linked up with high-income tourists. What this Government wants to do is to allow gambling in a surreptitious way, in an underhand, sneaky, deceitful way—all of these members' clubs pretending that they are not gambling dens because people from that side, supporters of that party, frequent these gambling dens. They want to allow this because they do not want to deal with the issue. They do not want to make a categorical policy statement as to whether this Government is supporting casino gambling or not.

They want to hunt with the hounds and run with the hares at the same time. They do not want to offend the churches or the religious groups in our country. They do not want to come outside. Yes, hunt with the hounds and run with the hares. It does not matter. It is a metaphor I am using. They want to run with both of them.

I notice in this current Minister of Finance a continuation of this backward policy. You are going to charge \$4,000 per year for a poker table. There are fellows on that side who lose \$4,000 in a night.

Hon. Member: You want to charge them \$400,000?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, \$400,000. I am against gambling. That is why I say there should be a policy statement from people on that side. Let us debate it. We are either for it or against it. Not this half-baked potato. Not this surreptitious, devious attempt to allow gambling in Trinidad and Tobago under another name.

Of course, I do not expect, as my colleague said, there is no philosophical underpinnings; there is no intellectual thought; there is no coherent thought in these measures. So it was \$3,000 last year so they make it \$4,000 this year. Big deal! And this brings me to the whole question of what they are doing with alcohol and tobacco. What is the intent? I heard somebody bleating about 'for health reasons'. They want to increase taxation on alcohol and tobacco. Have any studies shown that by increasing the taxation on alcohol and tobacco, that the consumption of alcohol and tobacco would be reduced? Has anybody ever proved that? No. All you would do is encourage smuggling and bootlegging. This is what went on in America in the 1920s in the era of prohibition, when it was outlawed.

If you look at the consumption of alcohol in the United States during the era of prohibition, when alcohol was outlawed, I am sure there was more consumption of alcohol during that period than in any other period in America's history. You do not think, you are just backward. You raise the taxes on alcohol. So what? How is this going to deal with the problem of excessive consumption of alcohol? They raised the tax on cigarettes. So what? How does that deal with the serious problems and the diseases that flow from the use of tobacco? Problems of lung cancer; increased heart disease and so on. How are you dealing with that? Nothing! There is no complementary demand reduction programme to go with the increasing taxation; there is no fund, for example, where the taxation on alcohol and tobacco is placed into a special fund to deal with an awareness programme; to deal with an addiction reduction programme for alcohol and tobacco; to assist NGOs in this country. I would deal with NGOs again in a little while. There is no sensible programme but you are taking all of this money that you think you are going to collect from increased alcohol and tobacco taxes and use it in the system to deal with a reduction in demand for alcohol and tobacco. There is no coherent thought whatsoever. It is just a knee-jerk reaction, typical of this Government. This is their reaction to everything. They feel they can come with a superficial,

trivial and infantile approach to serious problems, like alcoholism and tobacco addiction. This is why the Ministry of Social Development is a disaster. Quite apart from the fact that the Minister is limited in terms of his capability; quite apart from the fact that he is a most unsuitable person to be in charge of such an important matter. The Ministry is a disaster because there is no philosophical thought, no intellectual thought in that Government. The whole Government is bankrupt of intellectual thought, with perhaps, the exception of the “gang of four”, with perhaps the exception of the gang of “three and a half”.

I really wish that the Minister would not treat us with such contempt in this Parliament. He comes here and wants to tinker with taxes. Is he telling us that interfering with the tax on poker tables by penalizing people who take more than three months to renew their driving permits; and increasing the tax on a bottle of wine from \$25 to \$32 is the philosophical basis for driving the economy? For the stabilization of the economy? For the generation of economic growth in Trinidad and Tobago? Is this what it is all about? They looked at a whole range of taxes in Trinidad and Tobago, including corporation taxes, income tax, consumption tax, and taxes on goods and services and all they could do to fix the economy of Trinidad and Tobago for the current year, is to put a 5 cents on poker tables and 10 cents on a bottle of Carib beer? That is his contribution to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. I am disgusted.

The Minister took three hours to read a campaign speech, bereft of any intellectual analysis or discussion whatsoever, of our economic situation; of the world economic system; or the impact of the world economic situation on our local economy and what he is doing, as a new Minister of Finance, to stimulate those sectors of the economy that are required to generate sustainable economic growth in Trinidad and Tobago for the foreseeable future.

3.15 p.m.

We have to come here today to talk about sparkling wine, \$22 a litre. Utter rubbish! This is why every time I see one of them talking on the television, I really have to wonder. There is a minister who is now in a public fight with the Attorney General over his contract and the money that he got. You have to wonder; you have to try and understand what is going on over there, when this is the kind of trivia they have to bring to the Parliament. There is a Government Minister who, it has been confirmed, was in receipt of two sources of income, or received money from two sources, and apparently one is a stipend. At what point in time does a stipend not become a stipend; after it crosses \$10,000 per month? When is a stipend not a stipend?

So one character is trying to excuse the fact that he is getting \$18,000 from the Office of the Prime Minister, and God knows how many other thousands of dollars from the North West Regional Health Authority. The first thing he says, he tells us that his contract allows him to engage in other employment. When the Attorney General publishes the contract and it is discovered that this is a massive untruth and that he must devote his resources fully to the task at hand—he must not be caught working on other professional matters during his normal working hours, he comes with this gem that all of the work that he did for the North West Regional Health Authority, and everybody else, was on the weekends, in the night and probably at 3 o'clock in the morning. He takes us all for a pack of “corbeaux and jablesses”. That is the only conclusion I could come to.

So how on earth would he interface with his client, Sen. Tim? How would he interface with his client to do all of this valuable labour relations work? At midnight? So he will call up Tim 10 o'clock in the night on a Sunday and say, “ay Tim, you know that work ah doing for yuh, well here is the report—”

Mr. Speaker: Member, I really think you are beginning to stray. I am having a difficulty seeing what this has to do with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. I could understand a few references, but you are really beginning to stray. I suggest you come back to the Order.

Mr. C. Imbert: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I mean, after all, the \$18,000 a month that fellow was getting was taxpayers' money, collected through taxes like this and we have to know what they are doing with our money.

The whole point is, we come here to debate about collection of taxes which will generate revenue, which will go into the national budget and be used to pay salaries, wages, contracts, stipends, et cetera. So naturally, if I have to pay \$32 for a bottle of wine now instead of \$25 as I had to pay last month, I want to know where that money is going and what is being done with it. This is why I am very concerned that taxpayers' money that had been given to the North West Regional Health Authority, and has been given to the Office of the Prime Minister, is being squandered in this fashion. This is why I am so concerned that a Government Minister could be so economical with the truth when he is talking about taxpayers' dollars. It is taxpayers who are paying for that—all of that stipend and that \$18,000 a month—all of these nancy stories!

We had another Senator getting \$6,000 a month, tax free—tax free—and we have to wonder why it is that people have to pay extra money on various items.

Why it is on a bottle of beer someone has to pay an additional sum of money in this budget, but we have Government Senators who are getting money from a health authority, tax free. I need to find out how come he “ain’t” paying no tax!

Hon. Member: He is a winner.

Mr. C. Imbert: He is a winner, not a loser. I do not even want to talk about that fellow any more. They are embarrassing. There are some members of Government who feel they could say whatever they want; they are very, very careless with what they say; they feel that nobody is paying attention; they feel that nobody is taking notes of what they say. I have seen it over the last two weeks, all on television. Every time one member of the “gang of three and a half” came out with something, you have somebody on the next side who is under fire, jumps up and tells us anything they want—say anything they want—and they hope that people would just forget about it.

Like the Member for Chaguanas, we had an issue with a particular property come up in this Parliament and then a couple days later the Member for Chaguanas jumps up. He seems to be an expert in rentals. Perhaps he has seen the rental agreement. Perhaps he knows how much it is; what is the rent per month; who is paying for it. It is amazing the things people will say in this country. He “ain’t” see no document, you know; he “ain’t” see no rent receipt; he “ain’t” see no rental agreement, but he knows what is going on and he “jump up” and “bawl”. How does he know that is true? How does he know the people are not staying there free? It is amazing the things that people will just jump out and say, causing confusion.

It is like the US \$50,000 cheque. The Member for Diego Martin West produces a cheque—an instrument—in the amount of US \$50,000 in the name of the Member for Couva North, asked for an explanation, and up jumps Sen. Tim again. “We raised it and we gave it to him to do whatever, as he saw fit at his discretion.” What he had to say that for? Why they don’t keep their mouth quiet? Do they not realize when they jump up like jack-in-the-box, that they complicate the issue and make it even worse?

So somebody receives a cheque for TT \$312,000 during election to use as he sees fit at his discretion, for election purposes. That would seem to me to be an election offence. I thought that the maximum amount of money that a candidate could spend was \$50,000. That is what I thought. I was in this Parliament and I know that we raised the amount of money for a candidate from \$5,000 for an election to \$50,000. I know that, but I then have to learn that somebody raised

money for a candidate in an election and the person spent it as he saw fit, and it was \$312,000.

It would seem to me there is a prima facie case of an election offence and I would ask the Attorney General to look into that, because, you see, whereas individuals and parties, and so on, can spend money, candidates could only spend a certain amount of money during an election. We have an admission here that a particular candidate spent money as he saw fit.

Mr. Humphrey: What is the limit to the parties?

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, but he said he spent it as he saw fit, at his discretion. That is the whole point I am making about the Member for Chaguanas—jump up like a jack-in-the-box to say that certain people's children are renting a basement flat in London. A basement flat? That is not a basement flat. Does he know anything about terraced housing in London? I will spare him, you know, if he has never been to London. But the flat on the ground floor has access to the garden. It is the most expensive floor in any terraced building. So that the basement flat, as he has called it, is really the garden flat, and it is the most expensive part of the building.

I would ask the Member for Chaguanas to call the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in London. He wants to talk and complicate issues and make things more difficult for his “boss-man”.

3.25 p.m.

One man said he got \$300,000 to use at his discretion, another man said the people are renting the place. You all are so eager to jump up, rally and support that you are putting your feet in your mouth. If they are renting the place, how much is the rent? It is amazing. You should say nothing or say they are living there rent free or something like that but, “Nah, dey renting”. The whole thing just amazes me. Who is the rent paid to? Is it an economic rent? Is it the going rate? Is it a market rate? If it is not a market rate, how come it is not a market rate? What are you opening your mouth for? Everything that this Government says or does is driven by vested interest. Even while this Government is under threat of collapse—[*Interruption*] It is alright, bawl. I heard you calling on the phone during the debate last week when you were bawling, “Heat in the place!” [*Laughter*] You were on your phone talking to the secretary in your office or something, saying, “Woo, heat in the place, boy”. You thing we are stupid over here?

Mr. John: So, you were eavesdropping?

Mr. C. Imbert: No, he was making noise. He was loud. He was shouting!

Even so, while this Government is on the brink of collapse, men over there are still cutting deals. Mr. Attorney General, I want you to listen. While this Government is on the brink of collapse, there are supporters and friends of the ruling party still cutting deals. They are still doing things. They could not care less whether the Government has a month, six months or one year to go, they do not care, they are cutting deals.

Mr. Speaker, I must tell the Member for St. Joseph that I have heard a very disturbing rumour.

Hon. Member: Rumour?

Mr. C. Imbert: A rumour—I hope it is a rumour. *[Interruption]* I hope it is a rumour. I hope it is not a fact that he is supporting and promoting the blocking off of certain streets in the St. Clair area to create a private residential enclave—is that the correct pronunciation, “enclave”?

Mr. Speaker: I am forced to stop the hon. Member once again. I am afraid I cannot see the relevance of those things to the matter at hand. Let me, again, ask the Member to come back to the matter that is being debated.

Mr. C. Imbert: Most certainly, Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph spent a couple million dollars widening the road in the area of the Kapok Hotel—they call it the highway to go nowhere. As you come from around the Savannah and you head down the Boissiere area there are now four lanes instead of two. *[Interruption]* No, it was after the elections.

The Member for St. Joseph, in his capacity as junior minister in the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, spent his time doing this work which was actually completed after the elections. So, there are now four lanes going nowhere—going into Stanley’s Nursing Home, which apparently they are unable to remove, and I hope they certainly do not remove that. I understand this is all part of a grand plan using taxpayers’ dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I have to come back to this same issue. We are talking about raising revenue and interfering with the taxation system. We are talking about collecting taxes. We are talking about imposing taxes—removing some in some cases, increasing some in other cases and implementing new taxes. All of this goes into the consolidated Fund from whence money comes to do what has been done in the Maraval Road and Boissiere areas where four lanes lead into two. I understand that is not all they are going to be spending taxpayers’ money on. I

understand they want to spend taxpayers' money—the money they get from tax on Carib Beer, Vat 19 rum, DuMaurier cigarettes. They are taking those tax dollars to erect a barrier across Wainwright and Newbold Streets, all to create a little private residential enclave to assist one of their favourite friends; one of the supporters and financiers of the UNC party. When they do that, all traffic between the Maraval area, which is my constituency, and the Woodbrook/St. James area would now have to go around the Savannah or down through Long Circular Road and so forth. I am letting the Minister know that I would resist that with all the resources at my disposal. I will not condone the blocking-off of public roads to favour very privileged people in this country. [*Desk thumping*] It is a warning I am sending to the Minister, that is why I am hoping it is a rumour.

Coming back to what my friend from Diego Martin Central said, there are ways to deal with issues. Everything this Government does has a knee-jerk reaction. There are competing interests in the constituency of Diego Martin East and in adjoining constituencies such as Port of Spain North and so forth: residential areas, commercial areas, mainstream traffic, taxi traffic, schools, ordinary members of the public, upper and lower income residential areas. They are all competing interests.

What is wrong with this Government is that whenever it does something, it does not look at all of the interest groups in the country. Everybody deserves attention. Everybody deserves to get Government resources, maybe, some in larger quantities than others. Poor people, of course, deserve the bulk of Government's resources and action, but when one is dealing with an issue where there are competing interests—people in a residential area complaining about traffic in front of their homes when people who have to drive to work every day dealing with one-hour traffic jams on their way to work—you must have a holistic viewpoint. There are solutions to everything where, to some extent, you can satisfy the problems of people in the residential areas and, to a larger extent the ordinary commuters who have to go to and from Maraval and Port of Spain in their daily runs to drop their children to school and go to their minimum wages jobs, as my colleague from Port of Spain North would say. All we have to do is balance the interests, but not this Government. They pander to the oligarchy. When a very wealthy and influential person goes to you and says, "I want X" whether "X" would cause immense suffering to 10,000 poor people or not, it does not matter—he will get "X".

I am warning the Minister to be very careful. He is going to cause serious problems in this society if he proceeds with his plan to block off those roads

which are major access routes, and have been public thoroughfares for over 100 years. [*Interruption*] No, the problem can be solved. There are ways and means of dealing with these issues. They can come up with suitable and appropriate alternative routes and have proper dialogue with the people instead of insulting them and telling little taxi drivers and poor people in Belle Vue, Dibe, Dundonald Hill and Boissiere that they are unimportant and that you do not want to hear what they have to say because you are only dealing with what the rich people have to say. You can have a proper forum where you can bring everybody together—the rich, poor, taxi drivers, single mothers, parents and so forth—for discussion.

Mr. Speaker, I come back to this issue. Really, I have a difficulty just as the Member for Diego Martin Central, in debating whether the duty on beer and stout should be six dollars per litre. Whether it should be five, six, seven or 98 dollars—[*Interruption*]

Imagine that. We are trying to develop tourism in this country, but they want to increase the price of the things that tourists come to this country to consume. I have a difficulty.

3.35 p.m.

The other difficulty I have with this Government is that it does not understand the strength of the non-governmental organizations in this country. It would not let go. There are so many social services which can be done better by non-governmental organizations. In so many ways the poor can be assisted and helped by non-governmental organizations such as established charities and churches. There are so many things to deal with single mothers, homeless children, street dwellers and the same problems with alcoholism and tobacco addiction. So many of these things can be channelled through our non-governmental organizations, which are better at dealing with these issues than state agencies and ministries.

I have spoken to the Minister about certain things which I believe will assist non-governmental organizations and established charities in being more productive and reducing the cost of their operations and expenditure. He knows what I am talking about. I am not seeing anything in here to help charities, churches and non-governmental organizations. I am assuming that the Minister has forgotten. I ask him to look at it again, so that when this Order is finally approved, we can deal with assistance to non-governmental organizations.

Thank you.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, if I was late in getting up, I was expecting that the Government would have had somebody to say

something to us about the issues before us. This is why I hesitated, to see if we would have been graced with somebody from the Government side to say something to us about the budget's contents. The Order relates to the Government's intention *vis à vis* what was said in the budget statement.

On the way here this afternoon, I heard on the radio that the Prime Minister of St. Lucia has taken the initiative to prepare his country to deal with the current impending climate that all Caribbean countries and, in fact, all countries in the world, face. The Prime Minister has taken some concrete steps to face what is coming. They have an appreciation that yesterday and tomorrow may not be the same in terms of what the people were and what they can have. Not in Trinidad and Tobago. We seem to have the impression that we can go along very merrily and that God is a Trinidadian. I have great difficulty in understanding why we are meeting as a Parliament to deal with our expenditure and revenue problems and promised potential. This Order is really an indictment and an indication, that the Government is either not aware of, or does not care what happens in this country.

Insofar as this Order has anything to do with any tax whatsoever—I do not care whether it is salt fish, blue soap, sparkling wine or champagne—once it says taxes, I am against it. That is the mood I am in. This Government should not be allowed to levy one farthing of tax on one soul in this country unless we can have accountability for our taxes. From that standpoint alone, I am opposed to any new tax.

This country should take note. What we have on the other side is not a government. It is a collection of fellows and a friend. This country does not have a Cabinet. In any decent environment, this Prime Minister would have let this bunch out of office, so we can go to the polls and elect a government. [*Desk thumping*] It happens all the time. In Europe, Italy, Belgium or Holland, whenever that Cabinet disintegrates, the decent thing to do, is to go to the President and tell him, "I have lost control of the situation, let's go back to the people." You cannot tell me that the Government comes here to talk about taxes. It wants to tax the people, but every night the Attorney General, the Prime Minister, this one and that one are fighting among themselves in this way, and I must put them in charge of \$16 billion and they want to raise more taxes! They could not be serious.

I want to say something to the Minister of Finance. I do not have any personal problems with the Minister of Finance, or any one of them for that matter. I have a problem with the conduct of public business. I raised some issues with the Minister of Finance that are pertinent to taxation. There is a purpose behind

taxation. It is to raise money to spend on public service. In this case, he said that he wants to cut down on drinking, so he raised the price of beer. At the end of the day he would have raised money which is supposed to be used for public service.

I am wondering whether there is something very wrong in public administration, or there is something very deliberate. When I raised the matter of the variation in the numbers of last year's document and this year's document, instead of giving me a proper explanation for it, as Minister of Finance, he attacked me personally and accused me of being wicked, because by pointing out that there is a great discrepancy between the two documents, I am attacking public servants. I want to go back to that subject. As a Member of Parliament, I am concerned that the Parliament may be clearing something which is either wrong or something which none of us understands.

In last year's *Review of the Economy* brought by this Government, we were told that for the year October 1999 to September 2000, Government's liability of guaranteed debt was \$9.1 billion. We have a Ministry of Finance and the first thing that the Minister of Finance did, was to praise public servants for the quality of work that they had done. We have all the records of Government's borrowings and guarantees. I presumed that this was a serious figure and I took it seriously. This year, I got another document by a new Minister of Finance who now tells me that liability of guaranteed debt for the same period is \$7.5 billion. I am not attacking the Minister of Finance personally. Do not take personal offence. I am asking my colleagues on the other side, did the Government reduce its liabilities of guaranteed debt by almost \$2 billion in the last fiscal year? Not a soul on the other side would answer me that.

As a serious country with a \$16 billion budget, you have a discrepancy of almost \$2 billion in government guaranteed debt and as far as I am concerned, the Minister of Finance does not even know anything about it, because he has just appeared on the scene. If I were angry with him, it was because I was saying to him, "you do not know what is going on and do not play you know what is going on because you would get into trouble." If this Government has done something to reduce the liability on guaranteed debt by \$2 billion, it should be easy enough for somebody in the Government to say what they did. We know for a fact that state enterprises are borrowing like mad, left, right and centre, spending those moneys in an uncontrolled way and the bulk of the corruption washing the country is in those enterprises. They bring a document to the Parliament, make it available to me and when I question what the document contains, the Minister of Finance accuses me of being wicked. It is not once, not twice, but virtually every

line in the budget. He comes to raise taxes to get money to spend. I am asking: Why should I approve taxes if he is not going to tell me about a \$2 billion discrepancy?

Look at the total public debt. Last year we were told that in the period October 1999 to September 2000, the public debt was \$29.967 billion. The Government must know what it owes. Let us say \$30 billion. Something happened in the reporting of that same year, the same period, October 1999 to September 2000. In a new document, you are telling me, no no, it was not \$30 billion; it was \$28.3 billion. That is another \$2 billion discrepancy. I am asking somebody on the Government side, for heaven's sake, tell us how you explain that. Why is there a \$2 billion discrepancy between the reported public debt of last year and what is reported this year? I think I know why. The Government wants to give a picture that all is well when all is not well. By reducing it to \$28 billion, and reporting \$30 billion for the last period, it looks as though the public debt has only increased by \$2 billion. They backed down on the previous year by \$2 billion so as to be able to report in this red book, that the public debt is \$30 billion. When I say that they are crooks, they get offended. The numbers are here.

Last week I showed the same thing with the population. My colleague talked about economic growth. If this Government, in preparation for the year ahead with our expenditure, revenue and how we should handle taxes—if it was serious, somebody on that side would have made mention of the real indices, Appendix VIII. Look at what is happening in this country. My colleague supported the point I made last week that we may already be in a recession. Certainly in some decline. Today, he demonstrated that we were and we are in some kind of decline.

Look at the Government's document, Appendix VIII. Why are they trying to give us the impression that everything is hunky-dory and this is all we need to do now to remain in the land of milk and honey? The consumer price index having been 3.4, 3.5 and 3.0 for the last three years jumped to 5.2 per cent. The prices are going up, but the index of average weekly earnings—if we use 1995, as 100 to start the index, in 1996, it went up. Average weekly earning improved by 7.5 per cent. The following year it was 6.5 per cent. In 1998, it was 6.7 per cent. In 1999, when we believed that the downturn really started, it dropped by 6.1 per cent, in a growing economy where “we are leaving nobody behind”.

Average weekly earnings fell by 6.1 per cent. It jumped back up for elections. It was 9.1 per cent, elections expenditure, but October 1999 to June 2000, it declined by 1 per cent. It is worrisome. The following October 2000 to June 2001, average weekly earnings fell by 14 per cent. That is what is happening to people

in this country. Forget the old talk of this Collection of Taxes Order and the Minister's campaign. This is the reality. Check the index of minimum wages. While they are telling us that all is well, the numbers are telling us something else.

3.50 p.m.

The people of this country had better get up and take note—Mr. Speaker, through you, this Government, this absent Cabinet, this disgraceful group—that what in fact, is happening is that the people's business is going to hell in a hand basket just like the ruling party and the Cabinet.

We are going to wake up one morning and find ourselves in a very difficult situation where the public debt the average weekly earnings that they are hiding; the \$2 billion they would not explain and would not even talk about, we will come face to face with it when it confronts us in a way that we can no longer hide. That is what we are facing.

My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, pointed out that what is needed is for the Government to keep supporting the economy, even those who are least able to help themselves, the weakest of the weak, those who are suffering the most from this fall in average weekly earnings. Do you know what the Government does? The Government is saving money in the Unemployment Relief Programme. When we ask them how come you could tax people and give that money to some character, my hon. Friend from Nariva, to do as he pleases with, and not show it in the budget for us to see what is going on, they gave us this leaflet. Do you know what it says here?

It says that the Unemployment Levy Fund is the Fund that supports the most needy people in the country, in every constituency, in every part of the country. This Fund was not brought about to make us wealthy. It is a tax to support the neediest of the needy, and while the Government's fat cats are buying new belts—because their stomachs are getting larger—and their friends are counting in the hundreds of millions, the Government is “chinksin” on the Unemployment Relief Fund here. You will see projected revenue for 2002 in the Unemployment Relief Fund—\$166 million. They will spend \$130 million from it and they will carry forward the difference so the Fund would have in it extra moneys of \$167 million which are not spent on the needy. They are refusing to provide the base of the population with the support that they need from the Fund that was intended so to do—in my own constituency not a single development project in the community so that they can be doing something—those persons who need that help, improving their community while earning a small wage. No! Leave it in the Fund.

Let the recession come in, let them suffer, but in the Prime Minister's office some imp can tell me that a job that is ill-defined—God alone knows what the job is—he can earn \$18,000 a month and is free to go by his uncle's friend Tim for another \$10,000 or thereabout.

Mr. Speaker, do you understand what is happening in this country? Here is the Government denying masses of poor people the benefit of this money. We had to pull it from them like teeth in order to be told what the Fund contains. As we see the information we now can accuse the Government of starving poor people while they have grass growing—then somebody in the Prime Minister's office to monitor some policy that God alone knows what the policy is, he is so important in there, that “make-work”, he can earn \$18,000 a month.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say something today, and I am speaking for myself. I am not here talking for anybody but myself. My time is valuable, and the job that I do, I think I do it well. This country's Constitution says how I should be paid. The Commission has reported what I should be paid and I want it now because I have no money to thief. Whatever the Commission says I should be paid, I want it now because my time is valuable. [*Desk thumping*] And I want back pay, too, and I want it now! Do you know what is happening? The Government has found ways to fund itself and we sit here like fools, not knowing that the Government is earning money under the table. A loser is a Senator. The same \$18,000 a month job is also being done by a Government Senator. You understand what is going on and you want to tell me that this country has a problem with a Member of Parliament?

In fact, what is worse, the Commission has said that a Member of Parliament should earn \$8,000 per month. And some joker goes into the Prime Minister's office, has not even a job description and he gets \$18,000 a month. I am affronted by that! And then he goes off to another part of the Treasury and takes another umpteen thousand and says stipend, and that word “stipend” pricks up my ears immediately. The last public official who described this largesse as a stipend was the CEO of NIPDEC and I discovered the stipend was \$15,000 per month as part of the airport scandal. Somebody must tell us what is Mr. Moonilal's stipend. I cannot believe this Government.

The Minister of Education comes here today to support this Collection of Taxes Order, I am sure, jumping up in the Parliament to say that a Member of Parliament who brought a Cabinet Note here and read from the Cabinet Note, in fact, is not speaking the truth because the Cabinet Note is not the truth. Not only

is there no Cabinet, but the Cabinet Notes are not saying what they really say. That is what the Minister is saying.

I just happen to have in my possession the *Sunday Guardian* of April 15. You heard the Minister today, Mr. Speaker, saying that I was saying that the schools cost more, it is some policy of inflating the figures. We were saying \$183—and she does not know where the hundreds of millions came from, giving the impression that the Opposition was putting out and bandying about inflated figures to give the impression that Government was mismanaging.

Mr. Speaker, I did not print the *Guardian*. April 15, 2001, *Sunday Guardian*. “Schools Construction SEMP pilot costs \$300M.”

Not \$183 million as she said this afternoon. Let me quote two paragraphs. It is a story by Camille Moreno.

“The final project cost for ten Government high schools built in the past 12 months is \$309 million.”

Not the \$183 million she stated this afternoon to give the impression that we were inflating the figure. It goes on to say:

“The National Maintenance Training & Security Company Ltd. (MTS), however, defends this VAT-inclusive sum saying that higher market prices for construction, expensive furnishings, unforeseen site problems and late infrastructure works, pushed the original budget across the \$300 million mark.”

This is MTS speaking to the press about the project saying it has been beyond the \$300 million mark, and a Minister of Government came here this afternoon after I read the Cabinet Note from her own Ministry, to give the impression that the Opposition’s position was misleading. Mr. Terrence Kalloo is the CEO of MTS. It goes on to say:

“Breaking down the figures, Kalloo explained, that when the Ministry of Education assigned MTS as project manager for the 10 schools, the first batch to be built under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP), construction estimates amounted to \$143 million.”

A contract was awarded for \$143 million. That was the estimate, and he is confirming that they were built for over \$300 million and the Minister comes here this evening to try to mislead the public. Mr. Speaker, you understand we have to

control ourselves because when we face this, we know that the Cabinet is a detriment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Kalloo said:

“Based on the lowest bids accepted from the nine winning contractors, construction of the ten schools was originally priced at \$183 million plus Vat.”

She knows she did not just pull that figure of \$183 million out of a hat. She knows about it. And what I am telling you here Mr. Speaker, you might not know but she knows it. And these are the actions that we are supposed to swallow, and I hear people telling me we must come together with the Government in one harmony in this period.

My job is not to come together with them, my job is to expose them. Could you imagine what could happen if we had come with them in one loving embrace? Who would have told you this? How would you have known that? When they come and tell us all is well with the economy and we are doing fine when, in fact, they are suffering poor people by hiding the money from them. I want nobody to tell me to come together with the Government. My job is not to come together. My job is to examine, expose and report Government’s actions and misconduct. And as I do that I want the money that goes with that, and I want it now. I have no other source of income for the work I do. Do not waste my time. I am not doing charity for the Government. The people in the Government find a way—

Mr. Speaker, I find it painful. I raised the point about the utilities last week. I pointed out the serious problems that attend WASA and the Airports Authority. I pointed out to the Minister of Finance that there was no information on T&TEC in the budget document. You think he took me on! He wound up the budget debate and gave no explanation and made no reference whatsoever to a \$1 billion enterprise that has borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars, made absolutely no reference to the issue I raised, except to tell me that I am a wicked man.

I have documents here about liability of Government guaranteed debt. I ask the Minister again: As you are raising this piddling sum of a few dollars here, the sum that you reported as the guaranteed debt, does this include the T&TEC borrowings? I cannot know because he has not told me in the budget document. I want to know, I need to know, I have to know because I represent the people of Diego Martin West and they want to know. Did you include the T&TEC borrowings in that figure? Because if you did not, then this figure is an under reporting of Government guaranteed debt liability. And if it did include it, why does it not appear in the other documents of the estimates?

I am not in the Government, but I know T&TEC went out there and borrowed \$500 million in one go at one time. Where is it in the budget document? And interestingly enough, even as I was making that point in the Parliament, Minister Gillette was telling the country that Government intends to make T&TEC viable and Government intends to increase private sector participation in T&TEC. It raises two questions: Firstly, is T&TEC not viable? Since when is it Government's assignment to make T&TEC viable? Is it that what you have hidden from us in this budget document is that T&TEC is on the verge of some financial difficulty? If not, why is your colleague saying that Government intends to make T&TEC viable—and we know about the InnCogen arrangement. We now hear about deepening private sector involvement in it. I ask the Government: Are we to expect more InnCogens? Are we to expect more power plants along that line? What is this deepening of private sector participation in T&TEC?

4.05 p.m.

Does the Government intend to privatize T&TEC's distribution and transmission? These are major policy decisions that have not been addressed by anybody in the Government except some fly-by-night minister who represents nobody in this country but himself and his interest, but he is telling us that the Government intends to deepen private sector participation. I am saying to you that there are serious implications if the Government intends to privatize the transmission or the distribution system.

This country has taken a position before that we will have some private sector involvement in the generation aspect of it. That is national policy. If that policy is now to be changed, then there ought to be some level of debate, openness and transparency. I do not want to get up one morning and hear that we have InnCogen II. That is why, when I see the Minister hiding the T&TEC information and I hear the other Minister talking about making T&TEC viable and deepening private sector involvement, I am suspicious because I do not trust this Government. I want somebody in the Government to answer these questions. Silence is not an option. They cannot run this country on silence.

You look in the newspapers. The entire newspapers are taken up with “he say, she say”—Government bacchanal. I suspect that the Prime Minister is very happy with that because insofar as the country is distracted by their nefarious actions, the real “ramajaying” is taking place out of public glare. I advise the media, while it is interesting to follow the bacchanal in the UNC, do not lose sight of what they came into office to do. They are not there to glorify themselves and to polish one another's egos. They came in here to manage the country's affairs.

When you examine what they are doing with the country's affairs, if you think that their personal behaviour is bacchanal, the bacchanal is in the budget documents. That is why we are so concerned that on a day when we are meeting to discuss the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, the single largest paragraph in there is about losing a driver's permit. If a permit is lost, it is lost. Whether it is lost for one day, one week or one year, if it is lost, it is lost. It takes a certain kind of mind to say that if it is lost for one week, \$10; if it is lost for a month, \$20; it is lost for one year, \$100; it lost for three years, \$1,000. What absolute rubbish!

So, they bring the Parliament out to tell us that if someone discovers that his driver's permit is lost and the date of expiration is one year—\$1,000 for more than three years. What is the relevance of how long it is lost? How is that a consideration for levying taxes? Only the Member for Tabaquite can do this. This could not be as a result of Cabinet deliberation. Something to do with taxes, I presume, would pass Cabinet. Do they want to tell me, Mr. Speaker, that all these people sat in Cabinet and this came there and not one of them queried the relevance between length of loss and the amount of taxes that are paid? This is absolutely ridiculous! If the country does not understand what is passing for governance, this symbolizes it. They can understand that.

The biggest thrust in this Order is that if you have lost your driver's permit for three years, you must pay the Government \$1,000. I must ask why. What did the Government do to earn \$1,000 because I lost my driver's permit? I have lost my driver's permit. I have come to comply with the law to get a new one. Why does the Government want to profit from that? Why does the Government want to extort \$1,000 from somebody who finds himself in that position?

If you ask the Government what has happened to the \$10 million that the Airports Authority paid to a company—what the \$10 million was paid for, up to now not an answer. However, we find the Prime Minister receiving money from one arm of the party. While I am not concerned about what happens to the party funds—in fact, if someone steals all the party funds, I would be very happy. My concern is that those funds are not generated as they would have us believe. Those funds, more than likely—and there is evidence to show—have come from the Treasury. They have made a roundabout route right back to those persons who should be protecting the revenue.

While they are not protecting the revenue, they are trying to raise pittances. This budget is a budget about pittances: take VAT off salt fish and \$1,000 added on to the loss of a driver's permit in an economy in which the Government would not own up to its true state. We are talking about issues where other countries far

less at risk are prepared to take action to protect their prosperity. Not my hon. friends on the other side! They somehow believe that it would take care of itself. I am putting this country on notice that the UNC is putting this country at risk. To add insult to injury, the Prime Minister goes somewhere to talk to our children and purports to apologize on my behalf.

I would like to tell the Prime Minister of this country something. He is not authorized. He is “farse and outa place” to try to apologize for anything I have said. Any statement I make in this Parliament, I am responsible for, Mr. Speaker. Insofar as any apology is required from anybody in this House, when the Prime Minister apologizes and says that he apologizes for the mess that the country has been brought to, we should take notice.

The only interest they have is in our finances, in our money. I say it without any apology. This group of individuals, their only interest is in having their hand on the people's money. They are not about national development. Anybody who has any concern about national development would have been driven at this time to seek to put safeguards in place to ensure that we are buttressed against that ripple that might turn into a wave, a tsunami that might come to our shores. Where is the buttress? Where is it?

What amazes me is that there are people in this country who should know better. Our President made a comment a while ago and he said that part of this country's problem is that our professional class is failing the country. We have to depend on our professional class to do analyses and to provide us with some guidance as to what the details mean. I do not expect the average person to know what $E=MC^2$ means. I do not expect the average person to be an expert in algebra. They depend on people in the community—the leaders, the professional class. They depend on them to tell them what the story is. It bothers me when people who should know better, instead of standing and calling a spade, a spade, where this Government is concerned, they are prepared to rush to see if anything is left in the trough. When that happens, you ask yourself who is going to protect us from these developments.

This Government is not only guilty of sins of commission, but it is now guilty of sins of omission. [*Interruption*] If I were you, I would keep quiet, you know. I am trying to be nice to you. I would keep quiet.

Mr. Speaker, what contributions would these provisions make to the economy? I do not think that the Minister himself has any appreciation of it, or he would have known the trivial nature of the matter. In the presentation of the

document, when he read the budget speech, there were a number of instances when he spoke about measures relating to taxation, either giving relief or taking. It makes no reference to what that means in terms of dollars and cents in the budget. That told me that he was simply making words. If you are going to give a benefit, you must have an idea what it will cost. I am not even going as far as to say what it will do because even though they are guessing or “vuping”, at least they must have an idea of the cost.

I want to say something to the Minister. They are raising some taxes here. I would have liked to see what this means in relation to the 5 per cent tax on interest that he has given up. We may very well find that he has given that up trying to collect here. I do not know because I have no idea what the sum collected here will be, except that I support the measure of not charging people tax on their interest.

The reason I support is that I always had a problem with it. I was part of the Cabinet that put that in place. I supported it because it was a different environment. At the time that tax on interest was put there, there was a Minister of Finance who was looking for revenue to service the country. It was a period of almost a decade of economic decline. A Minister of Finance operating then had to look around to see where he could raise \$1 million or \$10 million. Even so, I did not support the idea.

If someone drinks out his salary and another puts half of his in the bank, the one who puts his money in the bank must pay interest on it. I had a problem with that, but we had to look for revenues. The measures we have put in place in the interim have been successful. Good fortune in the external environment allows us to now enjoy a greater period of prosperity, so this Minister of Finance is in a position to remove that. It is no longer required. On that score alone, I think that must be the only place in the budget document where the Minister has done something which indicates some sort of understanding. I do not think it was that. I think it was something people do not approve of, is done. It is something that ought to have been done and, having done it, if there is credit to be given, I credit him for that 5 per cent off taxes and so on. How much money is involved? They have an idea because it was published before.

I want to ask whether, in fact, we are convinced that this Government knows what is going on with public expenditure. If it does know what is going on with public expenditure, some of the things that the Government is saying and doing, somebody in the Government ought to be able to say that it does not make sense. I am not seeing that.

4.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for the extension. I hope that before the afternoon is over, if the Government believes that there is any merit in the issues we have raised, I am appealing to Government Members to enter the debate and provide the population with the relevant information. Without information we cannot judge actions. We can only put the worst face on your actions, if you are deliberately withholding information. It is my view, as we seek to levy taxes on people to collect more money—small sums as they are—that the persons who are aiming to do that—calling themselves the Government—do not understand what is right and what is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, how do you explain a member of the Government being accused by the Attorney General—of all persons—of violating a state contract into which he had entered? His response is, he wants a debate between the Attorney General and the Leader of the Opposition. How do you come to that position? You stand in the Parliament, you mislead the country, and when the Attorney General—who is supposed to be a responsible officer of the State—points out your infractions, rather than humble yourself and beg pardon in the other place, you want a debate! That is why I say, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Government Members have taken leave of their senses.

Mr. Speaker, another high-ranking Government official is found to be secreting money from a disgraced agency, and his response is: “I have to live.” Do we not all have to live? I want us all to live! But there are actions that are palatable, and actions that are not. It is in that context that we have in this very House one of our colleagues who today will vote for this measure like a robot, telling us that he sees nothing wrong with the scandal of the North West Regional Health Authority, where those two Government Members have been feeding at the trough. So you understand, Mr. Speaker, why I believe that Government Members have all taken leave of their senses.

Take my friend from Chaguanas this is a Member of our House whom the Prime Minister, himself, has labelled as a nobody. He said: “I have taken a nobody to fight Chaguanas.” The average person will feel insulted. He feels like

the best “pot-hound” to defend the Prime Minister. [*Laughter*] So the Prime Minister is not saying a word in his defence. In fact, when the Prime Minister is voluntarily placing himself on the scene of the crime, my friend from Chaguanas gets up and tells us that somebody's children are renting a house in London. I want to ask him how he knows that. That is part of the Government's deviousness. I will not be sidetracked from that as they attempt to levy taxes on us—large taxes or small taxes.

The reason why the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas is the mouthpiece for saying who is renting in Campden, is because the real interested party dares not say what the fact about Campden is, because that could be, in future, confounded by future information. But you want the public to believe something, so you put it in the mouth of the Member for Chaguanas, who puts it out. But the person who is involved does not say so, because that is the only way—if they get up and say that and then other information is produced, you understand? So we are not being fooled. There is method in their folly, and I want to find out what method is contained in these pages? What method? Or is it just plain folly. My Thursday afternoons are very important. I would love to have been doing something more important than this, but I have to come here and perform my duty.

Mr. Speaker, football: I am afraid to go there. If I go there I might have to listen to my friend from Siparia again. [*Laughter*] I might have to observe the classless crassness that associates itself with those who are responsible for leading us. I crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to point out that as we levy taxes—take some of these taxes and hire an usher, so that whenever you invite the former presidents to any public function, for God's sake, do not humiliate them.

I was in the stadium, and I was shocked to see a former President of the Republic thrown in the crowd like any old hand basket and at break time the organizers, the Speaker, and the Minister, they go off to have courtesies and drinks and leave the President sitting there with his wife. I was never so ashamed of my country. Then they came back about 20 minutes later and only then invited him to join them, you know! A President of the Republic! They invited the Ambassador from Nigeria and left her and her husband sitting there, and all of them got up and went off to pay homage and to drink their liquor. Mr. Speaker, we as a country have to begin to develop some class!

I looked in the crowd and there was another former President, running from the leaking roof because where he was sitting, the water was coming from the roof and falling on his head. He was running for shelter! This is the man who

wrote our Constitution! While that is happening all kinds of—as the Prime Minister himself would say, to use his own words—nobodies were down there parading themselves under our flag, and doing nothing for the upliftment of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Get some class! We need to address these things! We are fast becoming a backwater community. If the leaders do not see when things are wrong—there is a point of view being advanced by the Prime Minister that the PNM has embraced the Attorney General, and that there is some conspiracy between the PNM and the Attorney General. I want to put on record that I hold no brief for the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. I hold no brief for him whatsoever! In fact, he is my political opponent. We can banter about it—he is in the UNC and I am in the PNM. He knows his job and I know my job. But what he is saying in Trinidad and Tobago today, what all decent citizens are saying, is that in so far as standards are concerned, principles are concerned, accountability is concerned, enough is enough. [*Desk thumping*] That is all he is saying! We in the PNM are sufficiently experienced to know the difference between the messenger and the message. We are with the message—the message that was our message. We have been giving this message to the country a long time ago, that these people are only interested in the Treasury. If today there are voices in the Government saying, and providing evidence or more evidence to support what the PNM was saying, all I can say is that that proves the unsuitability of the current bunch to run our country and I am calling for election now. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker: We shall suspend for tea. The House is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m: *Sitting suspended.*

5.01 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Diego Martin West was on his feet. He spoke for 10 minutes in his extension.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I understand that there is a very good game going on at the stadium and I would not like to detain my colleagues much longer. I think the point is made. Thank you.

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I want to join this debate on the Motion with respect to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001. I see at clause 3 in this Order reference is made to motor vehicle licences and we are collecting taxes for those purposes, whether it be from persons who have not licensed their vehicles or who have not renewed their

licences, whether it is for three months, six months, or six years. Vehicles require roads to run upon, Mr. Speaker, and as I said in the budget debate, and I repeat, the constituency of La Brea, in respect of roads, has been marginalized. The people of the La Brea constituency pay their road improvement taxes, own vehicles and cannot drive them home.

I know at one time when I made a similar plea in this honourable House I was told about the geology of the constituency of La Brea, especially the village of La Brea, but for an area that has, over a number of years, provided sustenance in terms of road-making material to Trinidad and Tobago, and today even provides road-making material to places abroad, we still have total neglect of the roads. When I was here in this honourable House speaking on the budget, I did not know that the words I had said here might prove to be prophetic. While I was speaking here and we were discussing the budget, on Saturday at around 2.00 p.m., I know of a man, a resident of La Brea, who was drinking, and he left his home and went to take a bath, to take a swim, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sudama: In the road?

Mr. H. Breaux: Yes, yes, and that is what makes it ridiculous. He went to take a swim, Mr. Speaker, and he had to do that because we have a water problem; but I am not talking about the water problem here today. A man went to take a swim in the road—in Lodge Road, Mr. Speaker. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker: I suspect the Member is cleverly trying to debate his definite matter of urgent public importance that was brought up earlier in the sitting and which I denied. Now, I know we are debating a matter that is wide and references could be made to many things, but, if you are going to talk about that same issue again, all I am going to ask you to do is to relate it to the matter at hand because I will have to rule that you are being irrelevant, okay? So could you relate it to the matter at hand?

Mr. H. Breaux: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: All right, thank you.

Mr. H. Breaux: *[Desk thumping]* Yes, Mr. Speaker, you know me. I am the most amenable and cooperative person. I do not know if it is since the hon. Member for Princes Town was there and since we are accustomed meeting each other at the Bar table that I have become so mellow and so on. I am guided, Mr. Speaker, by anything you tell me.

At the beginning Mr. Speaker, you will notice I started off by pointing out earlier that we are dealing with motor vehicles and road traffic, and that persons have their licences and so on and we are going to collect taxes. Those taxes that we will collect have to be put into the Consolidated Fund, the general revenue of the country and to be utilized for the roads and the infrastructure of the country. I am pointing out that if this Government is coming here to raise more taxes, they should tell us how they utilize the money which they collected, which should have been utilized for road repairs and so on, and tell me why is it, notwithstanding having collected previous sums before, I am confronted with a situation like I am going to explain. So I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that it requires a lot of money to put into La Brea to do these things but this man, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Pulchan—Mulchan—I want his name. I am going to take it from the newspaper.

Mr. Ramchan Pulchan went into this place, in the road, and drowned—dived in and—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I want to read it. I am going to read what the newspaper said. It is dated Monday, September 24, 2001. [*Interruption*] I am reading from the *Express*. [*Interruption*] No. I am not joking, “yuh know”. I am very serious. I would not come here—[*Interruption*] If you—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, this was reported in the *Guardian*, it was reported in the *Express* and I did not write it.

Mr. Speaker: Member, why are you so easily distracted? If you address me and you focus on what you are saying, you would not be so easily distracted.

Mr. H. Beraux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am guided. I just wanted—you see, I could understand the consternation of Members about what is happening. I do not see the Member for St. Joseph here at all and that is the man whom this Government brought and gave the mandate to fix the roads in this country. He knows very well what I was going to speak about and he has fled, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] He has gone somewhere. What I am saying here is not singular in respect of southern constituencies. The Member for Oropouche had to complain about the same thing and I know he is speaking the truth, Mr. Speaker, because I pass through the constituency of Oropouche from time to time on my way to my own constituency.

I was saying, Mr. Speaker, this man—they were having a few drinks, that is true, but hear what the neighbour said:

“There was no water in the pipe when he went to bathe, so he just went straight to the pond.”

They call it the pond, Mr. Speaker.

“‘It’s not really a pond,’ said Sookram. ‘It was part of the road with a depression and then the back-hoe just dumped all the waste there. It is about 12 feet. When rain started to fall it just filled up and has been like a pond ever since.’”

That is the road. That is Lodge Road, Mr. Speaker. Look, to tell you how I am amenable to anything, I am calling here first to just tell them fill it up so that nobody else will die there. I “doh” want anybody else to die. The reason is, you see, when it happens again, trouble usually comes—they are twins, you know. When that happens again, I want it to be quite clear to this honourable House that I came here and I pointed it out and I want there to be a record of the kind of neglect that has been meted out to La Brea over the years. I also want it to be—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: How long? How many years?

Mr. H. Breaux: Well, only six years, because while I was the MP, I made sure nothing like that happened. [*Interruption*] While the PNM was—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Khan: You are still the MP.

Mr. H. Breaux: Yes. I am the MP, but while the PNM—between 1991 and 1995 I made sure that nothing like that would happen, but that too is significant. What is also significant, the present Government gives full control of the Employment Training Programme (ETP) to the hon. Senator who, the best he did was to lose. He is in control of the ETP but they “doh” see about that part of La Brea because they have no votes there, according to him, so they deal elsewhere, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at the taxes payable on gambling tables—and as I look at that I recall that the hon. Minister indicated he was going to put together a team from his Ministry with the intention of checking on people who were evading taxes and to look at conspicuous consumption. First of all, I want to tell him that if he has to look at conspicuous consumption, unfortunately he has to start with the Government Members and a number of their cohorts and their friends. Also to give you a bit of assistance, you will never be able, and you take this from me, to deal with conspicuous consumption and, in that way, tax people, as long as there is no tax on gambling winnings. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, when I am talking about important things, the hon. Member for Chaguanas has a nickname which, but for the hallowed nature of this honourable Chamber, I would have called him, but I want to tell him leave me alone. I am

speaking to the Minister of Finance. You “cyar” understand what I am talking about. Unless you tax gambling winnings, you cannot succeed in dealing with conspicuous consumption. I will tell you why. If you notice, a number of people about whom I have question marks as to their earnings, always allege to be big gamblers, or they own clubs, and the reason for that is, whenever they are approached as to how they have acquired the money that they have, they use as an excuse, they won it, and, since “yuh” not taxing the gambling, that is what happens.

I am not going to indicate names or anything like that but I want you to bear that in mind. If you do not fix a tax on the winnings from gambling, you will never be able to deal with people on conspicuous consumption. Take it from me. “Dah” is why the United States taxes gambling winnings. I just wanted to make those couple points in order to deal with the roads and so on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Nathaniel Moore (*Tobago East*): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I want to just make one or two brief remarks on this Motion. I am going to speak mainly about the taxes that we are going to impose, or I should say additional taxes we intend to impose, upon what I will call beverages and cigarettes. It is not that I am making a plea against taxing these items, but the question that comes to my mind first is, the earnings that the Government gains from the taxes on tobacco and alcohol, are they greater than the losses we suffer from the illnesses, the road accidents and other accidents resulting from the use of some of these drugs, the loss of man-hours and some of these other setbacks in the society which occur mainly as a result of addiction to the drugs containing alcohol or the beverages containing large amounts of alcohol and from cigarettes?

The point I am trying to make is that, somehow, I believe that the cost to the community of having to deal with the ills associated with the use of tobacco and alcohol in their various forms is greater than the benefits we gain from the taxes on these products. That is my belief from my observation.

5.20 p.m.

Even if we are getting a profit, let us say, from the business and the taxation from alcohol and cigarettes, I still think the case for putting a programme in place to stop the consumption of these drugs would be more beneficial to the society. Somehow, we may say that perhaps, in the case of tobacco, it is not the worst of these drugs, but what we have learned is that the use of tobacco leads, sometimes, to the use of harder drugs. Some of them would be perhaps as hurtful as the

tobacco, because so often, people overlook the fact that the use of tobacco does a great deal of harm to the well-being of a society.

We tend to indulge in the smoking of cigarettes without a compunction, but we hide when we try to use things like marijuana and other goods that are—let me call them goods that are smoked. I think it all came because of the attitude of the law to these commodities. We must remember that the use of tobacco is very hurtful to the body. We are not thinking only about the person who uses it and the effects upon him or her, but upon the children as well.

When I was an active teacher in the classroom, it used to bother me a great deal when children came to school without schoolbooks, and they would tell you their parents cannot afford the books. When the parents come and I observed, I noticed that some of them smoked. Sometimes I had to ask these parents if they deny themselves the luxury of smoking, and they spent the money to buy schoolbooks for the children, do they not think that it would be money better spent?

Because sometimes I would ask, “How much do you smoke per day?” When the answer was given, I would calculate how much it would cost the person in a month and a year and, sometimes, I found that in about four or five years, if they kept smoking, the money they spent on “smokes” could build a house. This shows the seriousness of the situation.

Really, people keep smoking, I guess, when they are addicted to it. Not that it necessarily does a good, but some people say that they have to indulge in some kind of vice and this is their vice. I think the better attitude would be to stay away. So, this, perhaps, with the question as to the policy of the State in its attitude to the use of tobacco and use of alcohol. We perhaps use it as a means of raising money. Somebody will tell me, “We use it as a means to discourage the use of it”, and perhaps that is true and it is a laudable effort, but I think that we have to, as a government, face the difficulties there are in trying to direct people to refrain from using these drugs, because in the long run we will have a healthier population and a happier people. [*Desk thumping*]

When one thinks about it, people who are addicted to the use of these drugs cause harm to the family in the way I have mentioned. The habit sometimes becomes so gripping that these people have lost their enthusiasm to do serious work and, sometimes, you find some of these people cannot see about their families, not because they are spending money on the alcohol or the cigarettes, but because of their addiction, their attitude to life is all gone wrong. These people

cannot see about their families. They are disoriented and they cannot take on the responsibility of their family which they set out to see about earlier. As a result, their wives suffer, their children suffer, or the husbands, as the case may be.

And so, the case against these drugs is a very serious one. One thing that worries me, Mr. Speaker, is that we are expecting the young people to exercise greater self-control than the adults who should have had greater experience. When I say this, I mean, we are saying that all right, we are not selling alcohol to children under 18. We are not selling cigarettes to minors either, but we are permitting these products about the community. Alcoholic beverages are available, tobacco products are available, and that is a temptation to the young people, especially as they see older folks indulging in the consumption of these.

We expect that these children would use self-control and a will to avoid using the drugs, but we do not want to take the responsibility as adults to create a situation where the drugs are not made available to the children, or we face what we think is the prospect of earning some money from making these drugs available. I hope I have made myself clear. What I want to say when I said that we are expecting too much of the young people is that we expect them to use all the control but we are not expected as adults to use the control to assist them.

As I said before, if not today, but before, we must as adults set the right example, for people learn better and people are more impressed by example than by being given orders. On the other side of it, sometimes you speak for the ordinary people in the society and the community and you encourage them to work hard.

There is this situation in the country where I find people are working two hours for the day and then going home and saying they have worked. You try to tell them that is bad for the country and you know what is the first answer most of them will give you? The big boys have a way of getting the money easily and do not work for it. They are getting it, and we are required to work so hard to get it. If we could get it in the way we do it, let us accept that. So, this is the poorer example which I am trying to draw to your attention in the community, that the poorer example would be so strong that it could be for great good in the society, and it could be for great evil.

Long ago, I read in the newspapers where a local tobacco company had decided they would no more advertise their tobacco products, and I say that is a step in the right direction. But we must also remember that in the matter of the use

of tobacco products, particularly cigarettes, I am not sure that advertising helps their case so much, nor does it hinder their case if they do not advertise, because the lure of smoking is in the first and, perhaps, the second smoke. That is to say, when people get addicted to cigarettes, you do not have to advertise it for them. So as good as the idea of not advertising might be, it might be a good thing if somehow we try to discourage the use altogether.

Mr. Speaker, I thought I would make this observation because I think that it might be able to guide somebody and, if it is reported, then somebody would take my bit of witnessing and my advice and, perhaps, save their life. At the same time, I say it because I want to draw our attention to it as people who make the laws and people who implement them, that we can do something better than we do to safeguard the health and the well-being of our community. It would help our people by having the right policies in regard to these harmful products like alcoholic beverages and tobacco.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I saw in the Schedule, malt beverages and I always thought that these were nonalcoholic. I do not know if I am wrong, but I see too, a tax on it. I am saying that if it is nonalcoholic and there is no harm in the use of malted products, then I think they have placed it in the wrong company here, because it is giving the impression that it is one of the alcoholic drinks as well. I do not know if the Minister would look into this and, perhaps, take it out from that company and perhaps tax it in a different way if they have to tax it, but if it really is not alcoholic, we should not give the impression that it is by putting it among the alcoholic beverages.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make these few observations.

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, I want to place on record my concurrence with the sentiments expressed by those on this side as they made their very useful contributions to the debate regarding the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. I do not wish to belabour the point that has been made in respect of the way the Government has been conducting its affairs, but I merely wanted to place on the record, in addition to the lot that has been said, that \$18,000 per month represents a figure that is even more than the Prime Minister's basic salary. Permanent Secretaries receive roughly \$10,000 a month. Directors of ministries who report to the Permanent Secretaries earn some \$9,000, or so, per month.

It is interesting. I was reading over the last, I would say, year or so, very many of the comments from the Chief Personnel Officer (CPO) and from those who

represent public servants in this country. There was a running battle between them as they negotiated increases for public servants who have been labouring under very small pay packets for many years for reasons that some of us know well. It is interesting that the CPO would find it convenient to pay that kind of money under a contract to the hon. Member in the other place, and the question remains, for what?

It is no wonder, when I saw in the *Newsday* of March 13, a headline on page 16, Dr. Moonilal, "I am no loser. I am a winner" I wondered what this meant, but now I understand. I saw it in pure political terms. He was trying to convince himself, having been roundly beaten in San Fernando East, that somehow or the other, he won. Now I can understand, although he lost, he still won. He is still really a winner. He is getting more than even those of us who legitimately sit here. So, this is a serious situation.

Mr. Speaker, we heard some contributions today about taxes, because taxes have to do with, of course, revenue and revenue in general economic principle or in some economic theory equals expenditure, and that sort of thing. One area of our operation in Trinidad and Tobago that must have accounted for a considerable amount of public revenues is that company known as TIDCO.

I have, at the moment before me, a few questions that are to be filed with the Clerk of the House, and many of them have to do with the operations at Tidco. I look forward to the responses when they come. I am confident that Tidco has spent a tremendous amount of the revenues that we raised last year and, at that rate, they will spend a lot of revenues that we raise this year, unless something serious has been done.

In keeping with that, Mr. Speaker, I received only yesterday, in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant, the *Tidco Times*. A very glossy document; we all received it, and the gloss reminds me of the gloss that I saw on the UNC's Manifesto of the last elections. In one interesting area of this *Tidco Times*, a monthly publication, I see here an editorial, and the rubric is, "Vishnu Ramlogan, A legacy of Service".

The article went on to point out a million and one very nice things about the goodly gentleman. Beautiful things. Those who are not as intimately involved in what is happening in this country; those who have not been looking on at what is happening with the FCB; those who are not aware of what is happening in Tidco might read this article and come away thinking that the gentleman, as CEO of that organization, has been doing a very fantastic job.

I was surprised sometime ago to learn that his income is in the region of \$75,000 a month.

Mr. Imbert: What?

Mr. F. Hinds: Yes. I read that. The Minister responsible can confirm or deny this. It is open to him to speak, but I read in the newspaper sometime ago that he is earning \$75,000 a month. That is only basic. So, when I heard the Minister, the line Minister speak of thousands and thousands, I know what he is speaking about—thousands and thousands!

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I was listening to a meeting last night and I heard a lot about interlocking directorates. It is the same CEO who, as Chairman of First Citizens Bank (FCB), granted the facility of some \$14 million unsecured to someone we know well, and FCB is a state institution. State participation. It is the same Vishnu Ramlogan who extended, at least, a \$100 million facility to someone who was responsible for a second failed airline in this country; a lucky fellow. So when we come here to raise taxes and pretend to be doing the people's business, we are only, perhaps, doing that in a small part, but we are doing a few selected persons' business in a larger part.

In fact, I am advised that that salary of \$75,000 represents four times the amount he was earning when he assumed the position in the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation. His salary quadrupled over that period under the watch of this Government, as it clearly selects persons; *[Interruption]* yes, the Member for Tunapuna in particular.

Mr. Speaker, I drive a vehicle that is worth about \$120,000, at most, a little Mazda 323. I am told that the goodly gentleman drives a company vehicle valued at something in the region of \$600,000, TIDCO's vehicle. Before I come back to that, let me take this opportunity to say that fancy vehicles, expensive classy toys, status symbols as they are, is another way that the revenues that we are talking about are being drained from the public resources.

I am aware of a vehicle, PBL 3305, owned by someone in the Ministry of Education who has it for his or her personal use. The Ministry's logo was placed neatly on the vehicle. I am told that it was removed to facilitate the use of it by a certain person. *[Crosstalk]* I am hearing mutterings from the last Minister of Education if he is willing, he can join the debate and deal with it. Join the debate.

As we talk about vehicles, I spoke about the one owned by the former CEO of the same TIDCO. He just resigned I think but, of course, those who come after him will expect similar perks and they would want to improve them.

I heard the Member for San Fernando West in his very brief presentation during the budget, his very ineffectual presentation, his very sly presentation, his very shifty presentation, tell the country that he was intent on taking strong action against persons who are unable to pay \$100 or \$15 per month under the National Housing programme. But in that same Ministry, for all the persons who operate, from the Director to some of the persons who work with the former Land Settlements Agency, there is a fleet of vehicles. I could call the numbers: PBJ 2361, PBJ 2362, PBJ 2363, PBJ 2515, a Mazda double cab and PBJ 4155. All these are brand new, very expensive vehicles owned by the NHA but taken into personal control and utilized by officers of that department and they are collecting travelling I am advised.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, that Government has lost the moral authority to talk about poor people. That is only rhetoric on dealing with poverty, because talking about the same NHA apartments in my own constituency, I raised it here sometime ago. The Member for San Fernando West was quick on his legs to make another promise that he would repair an elevator that had gone bad in the nine-storey at Almond Drive. He told us that he would repair the lights on the staircase and make good the path of those who occupy that building. But so far I still wait.

Tenants of the National Housing Authority complain to me; there are many such units in my own constituency. They feel a sense of resistance to pay any rent because their landlord has not been doing anything to improve their circumstances for the longest while. While the Government complains now about a lack of resources, it is this kind of vehicle madness that surrounds us.

I would like the Minister of Education to tell me something about the vehicle PBL-3305 that is owned by the Government and, more specifically, the Ministry of Education. Why was the logo of the Ministry removed? For what purpose?

We are talking about revenues and expenditure of these revenues by the Government and through governmental agencies like TIDCO. I am told—and it could be denied; the Minister is free to get up and say differently—that the same CEO flew around the world first class along with his friends, high officials in the Government, carrying a heavily loaded credit card with a facility of up to US \$100,000, as they went on their shopping trips. I would like to hear more about that.

So when they come to talk about a legacy of service, either on his part or on the part of the Government, there are many more questions than answers, but as I said, I have before us—and it will appear on the Order Paper soon—about five questions dealing with expenditure at TIDCO. I hope that if the Minister does not have the courage or the information to enter the debate this afternoon, he would answer at that time. *[Interruption]*

I almost forgot; thank God for memory, a beautiful gift. I understand that the former Minister of the Ministry of Housing and Settlements also enjoyed that kind of facility. We do not know anything about the vehicle now, maybe he could get up and tell us, if he is listening, the Member for St. Augustine. I would like to hear about that. It is what I call “vehicle madness”.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Government selects the boards to run the state corporations and companies and agencies in which the State has some involvement, but what we are seeing now is crazy compared to that which went for government in this country before. I must, in that context, make reference to an article in the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Friday April 6, 2001, written by Prof. Syam Roopnarinesingh. He was commenting on the fact that two Government Senators, sometime ago, were in the Senate and had some rather foolish—that is my word—unkind things to say about the PNM as a party and as a government and most of all the contribution of Eric Williams.

I want to quote it because I feel it necessary to place this on the record. This is not coming from the PNM; this is coming from an independent thinker in the society.

“Two Senators in their zeal to denounce the People’s National Movement (PNM), are reported to have said in Parliament that the ‘the PNM cannot speak of any accomplishments during their 30-year reign.’

Such an assertion demonstrates a bankruptcy of ideas. It is not merely inept. It is as uneducated as it is unacceptable.

In my view, they have demonstrated a startling ignorance of our political history. It is recycled and solidified rubbish...”

I could not have put it better.

He went on to say:

“One is tempted to conclude that in their attempt to show how ardently they support the present regime, these Senators are enveloped in a chrysalis of adolescent daydreams or have reached cerebral menopause.”

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I particularly like those words and I would try to remember them, so that when the Member for Tunapuna gets on his high horse and speaks a similar language in future, I will remind him that he suffers from “cerebral menopause” according to the great doctor.

I want to compare another article, because we are talking about governance and managing the country's resources and this is why we are here today. Had it not been about raising taxes to run the affairs of the country, we would not have been here. I want to quote a commentary article in the *Trinidad Guardian* Monday, February 05, 2001, written by one Bukka Rennie; a small quote. Hear how interesting it is, and I might tell you in advance that I agree entirely, I concur. He said:

“Panday as a politician is neither clever, skilled nor special. In fact he is most ordinary and the regular run-of-the-mill type many of whom have ‘graced’ this landscape for decades.”

You would want to know what is the relevance of that, Mr. Speaker. The relevance is simply this: It is the Government that selects members of the boards that run the organizations that spend a considerable amount of the money that we raised in revenues last year and we will raise this year. If the goodly writer is correct, it talks about being inept and ordinary and it is quite clear that this is what is happening in the country today. There is another writer, Donna Yawching, but I do not want to quote her; I will save it for a platform outside of here. She was much more strident in her description of the Prime Minister.

What really most interests me is that I heard the Prime Minister mention the fact, in this Parliament, that he had allocated \$10 million to the Elections and Boundaries Commission, some time ago, in order to conduct an update of the very corrupted present electoral list. I want to begin by saying that that is a substantial amount of money, \$10 million, though we have argued that \$10 million is far from enough.

A name that we have heard a lot within recent times, Raoul John, a member of the EBC—I remember reading in the *Newsday* of February 22, 2001—that he went to a luncheon somewhere and is on record as saying that voter padding simply did not happen. So before any enquiry was made, before any proper investigation was done and before the allocation of the \$10 million to deal with expenditure out of the revenue to adjust the circumstances in the EBC, he had already, as a commissioner, prejudged the situation. Raoul John, telling the country that voter padding just did not happen.

I remember its previous spokesman, Howard Cayenne and the Chairman of the EBC, when the PNM was taking objection to what had happened and continues to happen in the EBC, before the Prime Minister allocated the \$10 million of our revenue, they told us that the computer programme down there could not be hacked. It was the Member for Diego Martin Central who said, "But listen man, you could get the entire programme on a little disk, which you could leave the office with in your pocket and go back there at any time; as a matter of fact, people can get into your computers from outside of the country." It has happened and it happens, but they were sure that it never happened.

That reminds me of a comment made by a top banking official, Richard Young, when issues of banking fraud came up in this country he as well said that you could not tamper with the bank machines. The bank computer system and the bank machines are such that you could not tamper with them. Some people continue to live in denial. The next thing you know, Mr. Ronald Harford of the same banking fraternity—a man who I am sure the hon. Minister of Finance would know quite well—President of the Bankers Association, admitted to the country that bank fraud in this country had gone to enormous proportions.

What is significant to the point I wish to draw, is that Ronald Harford was pointing out here—and I want to quote him as a backdrop:

"the scale of 'individual fraud attempts and organized efforts' left no doubt that highly-organized groups were operating to defraud banks of large sums of money."

Harford later said that he did not want to cast aspersions on the banking sector's 8,000 employees, the majority of whom were hard working, dedicated and honest, but it was quite clear that this activity must have been done with the participation of a few bank employees.

The point I am making is that for a person to say that you cannot interfere with the computer system at the EBC, on which we just spent \$10 million of our revenue, is to live in a state of denial, because employees of the EBC could quite easily, just like employees of the bank, be bribed, paid, coerced or for any other selfish reason, get involved in assisting those who want to defraud and run racket with our electoral system. So we are very concerned about what is happening and we would like more to be done.

You will remember the *Express* of October 28, 2001; big front page article, high ranking UNC officials, because that is an institution on which we spend a considerable amount of our revenues on an annual basis.

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[Member displays newspaper photograph]

This must be the real gang of four; look at it:

“Cops raid UNC bigwigs”

The Member for San Fernando West, Sadiq Baksh; Suzanne Seepersad; Rodney Charles; Steve Ferguson, a former big shot, top notch at the National Gas Company. I was shocked when I read in the newspaper a couple months ago that he had tendered his resignation, as Chairman of NGC, when the amendments to the integrity legislation were passed. He did not want to become the subject of scrutiny under the integrity legislation and for that reason he resigned. What commitment does he have to this country? What commitment does the former Minister of Finance have to this country?

The last Minister of Finance in this country came in here—I do not remember him giving a lecture to a group of primary or secondary school students anywhere, up and down Trinidad and Tobago. He came here. He smoked his cigars. He sat there for five years; laughed at us; walked out of the Government and is spending money all over St. James and the west now, while we are here to deal with the problems left behind.

This is what we have warned this Government about all along: when they would have long gone, it would be the PNM and the poor people of this country who must pick up the pieces and carry it like a burden, like a yoke, after the UNC would have gone. UNC raiders I call them.

6.00 p.m.

We want answers to these things. I want to tell the Government as we raise taxes, I am very disappointed that more money was not allocated in the budget, or some specific tax imposed in this Order to raise money, specifically for a due and proper inquiry into the affairs as they transpired in the UNC.

And as I spoke of Suzanne Seepersad, and a signature to an internal memorandum from the Party Administrative Support Unit (PASU) office, I just want to quote to you one line in this document. A document from one Suresh Maharaj dated August 16, 2000, and the subject is “Getting The Job Done” and in paragraph 7 I quote:

“Assistance in the convening of an urgent meeting between myself and Mr. Ganga Singh since he has expressed to you his willingness to help in the Voter Registration Exercise.”

Paragraph 9 is the most interesting of all as we spend money on the EBC. Paragraph 9 of this internal memorandum to Suzanne Seepersad, the sister of the NP Chairman, Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, and a person who is in business with Ishwar Galbaransingh in Platinum Motors.

Hear paragraph 9 of this correspondence, Mr. Speaker.

“Listing of the twenty persons from yourself who expressed an interest to be transferred from Diamond to San Fernando West.”

And I have a pile, Mr. Speaker, so when I stand on this side and I look on that side I feel horrible. It is nauseating, you all just look like a bunch of dishonest people. Perhaps you are, perhaps you are not, I will cast no judgment, but it is frightening.

Mr. Speaker, as we talk about revenues, I want in passing to read from Wednesday, March 29, 2000 “Netanyahu Facing Jail”. [*Interruption*] Yes, I know the man, the former Prime Minister of Israel. Both he and his wife, as this article pointed out, were to be put on trial at that time for raiding the treasury of that country. Fraud on the public coffers.

I simply put this on record to let all those on the other side know that when you leave ministerial office, that does not mean the end, that will represent only the beginning.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about raising revenues and I want to bring to this honourable House, a matter that has come to my attention because this is a matter that the Member for Tunapuna should pay particular attention to, and, of course, the Minister of Finance, since the Customs and Excise Division falls under his portfolio.

Mr. Speaker, I have a memorandum from the Comptroller of Customs and Excise, to the Deputy Comptroller ‘Operations’ dated 12th April, 2001. I want to quote a small piece of the letter.

“Letter dated April 3, 2001, and attached correspondence on the subject matter refer.”

The subject is “Customs and Excise Reform—Open Warehousing”.

“In this connection, the Comptroller of Customs and Excise wishes to inform you that the matter was discussed with the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance who indicated that the Minister of Finance is in favour of the proposal submitted by the Company.”

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The company meaning Angostura in which—well I do not want to call any names but we have heard his name so many times over the last few years, he was on platforms. The man who calls the shots for the Member for St. Joseph, the man who took over his liabilities recently. The big man in CL Financial, he has his hands interlocking directorates in Angostura now and the Minister of Finance is in agreement with the company's proposals. And I continue to quote.

“Furthermore, the Permanent Secretary has instructed that this Division runs a pilot project along with the current system. Consequently, no staff will be displaced at this point in time.”

This pilot project was to design a project for open warehousing at Angostura Limited. Mr. Speaker, you may not know, but open warehousing system is a term used by Her Majesty's Customs in describing a process through which major responsibilities are placed in the hands of UK distillers to account for proper recording of production, warehousing, blending, bottling and sales of spirits they produce. This is a system that runs counter to the traditional system where the customs and excise will be at their work place at the factory monitoring production and sales and making its findings with respect to the applicable taxes, revenues for the State.

This open warehousing system allows—and we are told it is failing in the United Kingdom—the company itself to run the operation to assess its own taxes and make payments to the government accordingly. It requires a tremendous amount of trust. Needless to say, the introduction of the process of open warehousing would have been preceded by thorough, professional, objective and independent evaluation of the integrity of all the accounting, inventory, sales and other operating systems whether manual or electronic which are to be used.

So you just cannot go into a system like that, you have to prepare for it because it can involve, as you will see in a short while, a tremendous amount of revenues and excise duties, but according to the memorandum, this system was to be introduced on a pilot basis and it was to be for full implementation by January 01, 2002. But, this Government, under the watch of that Minister of Finance in its usual typical UNC way will find an opportunity to subvert the system and so today, without any of the safeguards, without even observing the timetable that has been set, the full system is now on full throttle at Angostura.

The memorandum had said that none of the Customs and Excise Department staff would have been displaced until the mechanisms were put in place to protect the country from loss of revenues, but not so with this Government. All but one of

the custom officers had been moved off the scene. So that the full implementation system has been put in place mere weeks after the request by Angostura.

The request was made on April 02, 2001 and it was to come to full implementation as I said in January 2002. A committee was set up to look at the matter and deal with it and make sure that the right procedures and safeguards were put in place but, as I said, the officers have all been removed and it is now a full-scale programme. The nation's revenues had been virtually abandoned by that Government.

Mr. Speaker, what kind of figures are we talking about? Before we come to that, the very company when it wrote to the Minister of Finance asking for the opportunity to go to that system pointed out that they would have anticipated legislative changes, and this is a matter for the Attorney General. In order to implement that system, it would have required amendments to the Spirits and Spirit Compounds Act, Chap. 87:54; amendments to the Warehousing of Spirits Regulations with respect to fees; amendment to the Excise (General Provisions) Act, Chap. 78:50 and an amendment or amendments to section 76 of the Excise Fees Regulations.

To this day, notwithstanding the implementation, the full programme removed the custom officers who were there as watchdogs for the State's interest, paid by the State, with no amendment to the necessary pieces of legislation, and the country's revenues, as I have indicated, have since been abandoned. That is not the end of it. We have seen in a multiplicity of examples that they just do not abandon it. They used to accuse the PNM of selling out the country's patrimony, they do not sell out the country's patrimony alone, they recycle it unto themselves on a paper trail. Bob Lindquist has broken ground, the Attorney General continues to break ground, all anti-slopers will be found out, if not now, later. So who have cocoa in sun, rain coming.

Mr. Speaker, and they measure alcohol in terms of what they call LAV, litres of alcohol by volume. I am informed that the company of which I spoke produces something like four million litres of alcohol per month. Of this amount, some 10 per cent is re-exported and the present excise duty levy the Government receives is \$43.44 per LAV. So we are speaking here—if you calculate the figures—of revenues on four million litres of something in the region of \$173 million.

Now coming from the mouth of one Mr. Patel, an operator at Angostura, who claimed when this issue was being debated—and it is in the correspondence here which went to the Minister of Finance—that the company pays \$90 million a year in revenues and duties to the Government, which works out to be about \$7.5

million for the month. That is small compared to what is being lost, and I call on the line Minister to take a close look at this. I am not accusing anyone of anything, but I just want to highlight this so that all will be put on notice and we can think seriously about the country's revenues in times like these.

What is more frightening, Mr. Speaker, is that it could only be a matter of time before Caroni Rum Division—if it manages to get past the Attorney General—is sold and Carib Brewery and others want to follow in the footsteps of Angostura. What would that mean to the revenues of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Speaker, the Government cannot plead ignorance at this stage. It has been brought to their attention; many other things have been brought to their attention during the course of this debate today. We—as the Attorney General said correctly—can ask questions, we can raise issues, we can complain, we can address the national community on all your misdemeanours, but at the end of the day, you are in Government and the people of this country are not being well served.

Mr. Speaker, enough has been said for this country to know that the UNC is the worse threat to the economy and politics of Trinidad and Tobago that we have ever seen. Rather than protect the public's interest, it is quite clear to all of us on this side that this Government has been exposing the public's interest by making it available to those for whom they have special favours and privileges. That is an untenable situation and we look forward to a very swift departure of this Government from the corridors of power so that we could put Trinidad and Tobago back—not only into the safe and sober hands of the People's National Movement—but on a steady course to economic, social development in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to enter into this debate because I had already spoken at length during the recent budget debate and I thought that the only person who was really qualified to speak this afternoon on this Motion was the Member for Diego Martin Central. I use the word “qualified” in a very special way. I do not mean qualified in the sense that he has the ability, or the competence, but that having denied himself the opportunity to join the budget debate because he out-manoeuvred his own self on that particular Saturday morning that I thought it was only fair that he joined the debate this afternoon and give expression to some of his concerns which he would have expressed during the debate last Saturday.

So I forgive him for whatever he said because in a very real sense, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central is not a bad fellow, he is a fellow with a good heart, except that he has a short fuse and sometimes he speaks of things of which he knows not, thinking that he is an expert in so many different areas: Finance, investment, trade, economics, statistics and so on. There is nothing wrong in the Member for Diego Martin Central feeling that he has this plethora of knowledge except that when he opens his mouth he betrays it. Notwithstanding that, there is really nothing to respond to on the other side.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will not detain this House any longer because if I had to respond to all the matters that were raised—in fact, non-matters that were raised—we will spend perhaps another hour or so in this honourable Chamber.

I have risen merely to propose an amendment to the Motion in conformity with Standing Order 32(3) which states:

“An amendment to a motion may be moved and seconded at any time after the question upon the motion has been proposed by the Speaker or Chairman, and before it has been put by the Speaker or Chairman at the conclusion of the debate upon the motion when all amendments have been disposed of the Speaker shall then put the question on the original Motion or the Motion as amended as the case may require.”

So I move the following amendments:

“In the resolution by deleting paragraph 1(a) and substitute the following:

- (a) in subsection (1)—
 - (i) in paragraph (a) by inserting after the words “to the date of”, the words “submission of the”;
 - (ii) in paragraph (b), by inserting after the words “to date of”, the words “submission of the”;
 - (iii) in paragraph (c), by inserting after the words “to the date of”, the words “submission of the”.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Seconded by Hon. G. Singh

6.20 p.m.

Question, on amended Motion, proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Members who have already spoken can speak only on the amendment.

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Speaker, the Motion before the House is for the confirmation of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001, which was published on September 14, 2001, pursuant to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01.

This Order was made as a result of the Budget Statement that was fully debated in this House last week. There is nothing more to add to the debate. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001, be confirmed subject to the following modification:

1. Clause 3 is amended in reference to section 61A:
 - (a) in subsection (1)-
 - (vii) in paragraph (a) by inserting after the words “to the date of”, the words “submission of the”;
 - in paragraph (b), by inserting after the words “to date of”, the words “submission of the”;
 - (viii) in paragraph (c) by inserting after the words “to the date of”, the words “submission of the”.
 - (ix) in paragraph (c), by inserting after the words “to the date of”, the words “submission of the”.
 - (b) by deleting subsection (3) and substituting the following section:

“(3) Subject to subsection (4), an applicant for the issue of a new driving permit whose permit had expired in excess of five years prior to the date of the submission of the application shall, before issuance of the new permit—

 - (a) be required to produce a certificate referred to in section 47 to the effect that he had passed a driving test within two years prior to the date of such submission; and

- (b) pay to the Licensing Authority the sum of two hundred dollars.”;
 - (c) by inserting the following subsection:
 - “(4) Subsection (3)(a) shall not apply where an applicant for the issue of a new driving permit was absent from Trinidad and Tobago and satisfies the Licensing Authority that he is the holder of a valid driving permit issued by the relevant foreign authority.”
2. Clause 4 is amended—
- (a) in sub-subparagraph (b)(ii(A) by inserting immediately after the word “debt” the words “or shares not listed by a self-regulatory organization”; and
 - (b) by deleting the words “On sale of shares” in sub-paragraph (1A) and substituting the following words “On shares listed by a self-regulatory organization not sold or transferred in accordance with the rules of the self-regulatory organization.”
3. Clause 6 is amended in the “Third Column Rates of Duty” by deleting the words “\$6.18 per litre” corresponding to the Tariff Heading No. 2203.01 and substitute the words “\$5.02 per litre.”

RELATED MOTIONS

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: We would debate both Motions at the same time but we would put the questions separately.

EXCISE DUTY (ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES) ORDER

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

Whereas it is provided by subsection (2) of section 13 of the Excise (General Provisions) Chap. 78:50 that the Minister may by Order impose any

new excise duty or increase duty and from the date of publication of the Order in the *Gazette* and until the expiry thereof the duties specified in the Order shall be payable in lieu of the duties payable thereto:

And Whereas it is provided by the said subsection that every Order issued under that subsection shall, after four days and within twenty-one days from the date of its first publication, be submitted to the Senate and House of Representatives and the Senate and the House of Representatives may by Resolution confirm, amend or revoke such Order, and upon publication of the Resolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives in the *Gazette* the Resolution shall have effect and the Order shall then expire:

And Whereas the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2001 was made under subsection (2) of section 13 of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, and first published in the *Gazette* on the 14th day of September 2001.

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it Resolved:

That the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2001 be confirmed.

Question proposed.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2001 be confirmed.

6.30 p.m.

EXCISE DUTY (TOBACCO PRODUCTS) ORDER

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 3 standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (2) of section 13 of the Excise (General Provisions) Chap. 78:50 that the Minister may by Order impose any new excise duty or increase duty and from the date of publication of the Order in the *Gazette* and until the expiry thereof the duties specified in the Order shall be payable in lieu of the duties payable thereto:

And Whereas it is provided by the said subsection that every Order issued under that subsection shall, after four days and within twenty-one days from

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the date of its first publication, be submitted to the Senate and the House of Representatives and the Senate and the House of Representatives may by Resolution confirm, amend or revoke such Order, and upon publication of the Resolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives in the Gazette the Resolution shall have effect and the Order shall then expire.

And whereas the Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2001 was made under subsection (2) of section 13 of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, and first published in the *Gazette* on the 14th day of September, 2001.

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved:

That the Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2001 be confirmed.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2001 be confirmed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the House do now adjourn to September 28, 2001 at 1.30 p.m. It is Private Members' Day and therefore Government will respond to the debate in respect of the Elections and Boundaries Commission Motion.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.32 p.m.