

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, November, 08, 2002*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the parliamentary elections held on Monday, December 10, 2001. [*The Deputy Speaker (Hon. Hedwige Bereaux)*]
2. Fourth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 and the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, Chap. 25:50 for the purposes of local government elections. [*Hon. H. Bereaux*]
3. Fourteenth Annual Report to Parliament by the Integrity Commission for Trinidad and Tobago Activities for the year 2001. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
4. Report of the Teaching Service Commission for the period January 01, 1999 to December 31, 1999. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
5. Report of the Teaching Service Commission for the period January 01, 2000 to December 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
6. Report of the Public Service Commission for the year 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
7. Report of the Police Service Commission for the year 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
8. Inaugural Annual Report of the Tax Appeal Board of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
9. Annual Report of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission for the year 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
10. Annual Report of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission for the year 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

11. Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the period October 01, 2000 to September 30, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
12. Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the period October 01, 2001 to September 30, 2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
13. Administrative Review of the Ministry of the Environment during the Fiscal Year 1999—2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
14. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Tobago House of Assembly for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
15. Annual audited financial statements of National Helicopter Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
16. Annual audited financial statements of National Quarries Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
17. Annual audited financial statements of the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended December 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
18. Annual audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
19. Annual audited financial statements of the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
20. Annual audited financial statements of the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
21. Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad Nitrogen Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
22. Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
23. Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

24. Annual audited financial statements of Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
Papers 14 to 24 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
25. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a special audit of the accounts and internal controls of the New City Mall, Ministry of Local Government. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
26. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a special audit of the operations of the National Family Services Division formerly of the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
27. Report of the Auditor General on the public accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year October 01, 2000 to September 30, 2001 and on other selected audit activities. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
28. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Deposit Insurance Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
29. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the audit of the financial statements of the Institutional Strengthening Programme of the Women's Affairs Division of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs (now Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs) for the period January 01, 1998 to September 30, 1998 and the year ended September 30, 1999. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
30. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the period January 01, 1998 to September 30, 1998. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
31. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a special audit of the Financial Assistance Programme of the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
32. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a special audit re: Compliance by the Eastern Regional Health Authority with the Regional Health Authorities Act No. 5 of 1994. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

33. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 1995. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
34. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 1996. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
35. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 1997. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
36. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the basic education project for the year ended September 30, 2001 as required by Loan Agreement No. 3956-TR between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
37. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Central Marketing Agency for the year ended December 31, 1984. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
38. Annual report inclusive of audited financial statements of the National Insurance Board for the financial year ended June 30, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
39. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the audit of the accounts and financial statement of the Assistance to the National Drug Abuse Demand Reduction Programme for the year ended December 31, 2001 as required by Project Document AD/TRI/96/910 between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). [*Hon. K. Valley*]
40. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1996. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

Papers 25 to 40 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

SPATE OF FLOODING IN THE NATION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Franklin Khan): Mr. Speaker, I make this statement to this honourable House on the spate of flooding which occurred in several areas across Trinidad and Tobago on November 04 and 05, 2002.

As you are aware, on November 04 and 05, Trinidad experienced abnormally intense rainfall over a very short period. That is to say, that while it rained continuously over a two-day period, the actual heavy downpour occurred over a mere four-hour period on November 04, 2002. A total of 73.9 millimetres of rainfall was recorded at the Meteorological Office at Piarco during the 24-hour period, from midday on November 04 to midday on November 05, 2002.

Significant flooding occurred in the north-east, south and central areas of Trinidad. In the northern region, the most affected areas were those situated between the Uriah Butler and Churchill-Roosevelt Highways intersection and the Tacarigua River. In the ward of Tacarigua, Paradise Gardens, El Dorado Village, Macoya Market and the Trincity Industrial Estate were affected by floodwaters, which have since receded. Serious disruption of traffic flow occurred causing a pile-up as far west as the Beetham Highway in Port of Spain on November 04. Major flooding of homes occurred in North Valsayn and various communities going eastwards to Trincity, while the compounds of the Cipriani Labour College and Nestlé held several feet of water. There was also serious flooding in the car park of the Grand Bazaar Shopping Complex.

Several low-lying areas, particularly in the communities on the northern side of the Caroni River, Bamboo Nos. 1, 2, and 3, were under floodwaters. The areas of St. Helena, Kelly Village and El Carmen, which are located adjacent to the Caroni River, on its upper reaches, were also under floodwaters.

In the southern area, Barrackpore, specifically along the Rochard-Douglas Road, was affected by floodwaters. In addition, two other areas in South Oropouche Basin experienced flooding. They are Debe and Woodland. Floods also occurred in the following areas:

- Penal Rock Road in the vicinity of the 2.2 and 5 mile marks;
- Clarke Road, Penal, in the vicinity of Oliviere Drive;
- Siparia/Erin Road, in the vicinity of Batchiya Village in Penal;
- Siparia/Erin Road, in the vicinity of Lowkie Trace;
- San Francique, in the vicinity of the 1 and 2½ mile marks;
- Murray Trace area, in the vicinity of the 1 mile mark;
- Mohess/Laltoo Trace, Penal;
- Gasparillo, in the vicinity of Hunger Mart Extension Nos. 1 and 2 to the upper Charles Street area; and

- Gasparillo, in the vicinity of Parforce Road and surrounding areas.

Government responded swiftly to the flooding that occurred over this period. A ministerial team, headed by the Minister of National Security and comprising the Ministers of Works and Transport, Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and Local Government, was appointed by the Prime Minister to assess and evaluate the flood damages and make recommendations to the Cabinet. Concurrently other agencies of government were mobilized to address this emergency. They all provided invaluable assistance and I would like to put on record the Government's deep appreciation for their efforts.

The relief effort was co-coordinated by National Emergency Management Agency. The Drainage Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Local Government, through the regional corporations, provided yeoman service by mobilizing their workforce, equipment, both in-house and contracted, and their technical staff to assist in mopping-up operations and to bring some form of immediate relief to citizens; so too the Fire Services and the Coast Guard. These efforts are continuing.

After reviewing the severity of the flooding throughout the country, the ministerial team has determined that the damage done must be assessed in three distinct categories because of the nature of the relief response required. These categories are as follows:

- (1) agriculture, including food crop and livestock farming;
- (2) residences;
- (3) physical infrastructure.

Agriculture is considered critical to sustainable development as it provides food security, employment generation and economic growth and contributes overall to the diversification of our economy. As a consequence, incidences of abnormal flooding, such as this one, are always detrimental to the fortunes of the sector. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you and others have been touched by the media reports of loss of crops and livestock.

With regard to buildings and homes, a flood of this nature disrupts the livelihood and welfare of households and destabilizes the normal operations that occur within commercial establishments. It therefore has dire consequences for the social and economic well-being of the country.

The third area is that of infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, as you are aware,

infrastructure plays an important role in achieving social and economic development, therefore maintaining its integrity is a prime responsibility of the Government. Based on the foregoing, a strategy has been developed to ensure that complaints from victims are addressed expeditiously. Details are as follows.

With regard to agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has been designated the coordinating agency. As a result the Ministry will focus its attention on assessing the damage to crops and livestock to facilitate the relief effort. The process will involve the Ministry's extension officers and the farming community.

With respect to residences, the Ministry of Local Government is the designated coordinating agency. Its field officers, together with those of the Ministry of Community Development, will receive claims, which will be evaluated for appropriate action. The intention of the Government is to seek to provide assistance tangible and intangible to flood victims. In this respect the following social agencies will be mobilized to facilitate these efforts. They are:

- (1) The National Commission for Self-Help. Assistance will be facilitated through the provision of minor repair grants and the provision of building material.
- (2) Social Help and Rehabilitative Efforts—SHARE. This agency will facilitate relief by the provision of food hampers to families in the affected area.
- (3) Urgent temporary grant scheme. Under this scheme, grants will be provided in deserving cases.
- (4) Family services in which counselling will be provided on request to citizens who are affected.

With regard to the overall assistance to the flood victims, the Government has allocated \$20 million to assist in deferring expenses to households and the rehabilitation efforts of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with regard to the floods we have experienced on November 04 and 05.

Government's programme of relief will also include the continuation and intensification of the clean-up campaign initially launched in the aftermaths of the flood. Additionally, the Department of Public Health, with specific reference to the Insect Vector Control Unit will mount an intensive spraying programme in all affected areas.

With respect to infrastructure, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the designated agency will reactivate the National Drainage Plan successfully negotiated with the World Bank in 1994, which I will return to in a minute, while initiating short-term and ameliorative measures to address the immediate concerns.

Towards this end, Cabinet yesterday reviewed the allocation to the Drainage Division for fiscal 2002/2003 and has agreed to reallocate an additional \$50 million to start key projects in the National Drainage Plan. In addition, in fiscal year 2003/2004, additional resources will be made available to the Drainage Division to continue the drainage programme pending finalization of our efforts to resuscitate multilateral funding for the comprehensive drainage programme.

Let me now deal with the long-term drainage programme. It is important that I remind this honourable House that during the period 1991—1995, the then PNM administration formulated a comprehensive drainage plan as part of a water sector institutional strengthening programme. This programme was funded by a TT \$400 million loan concluded with the World Bank in 1994. Two major projects were developed to address the following:

- Priority problems of flood control in urban and agricultural areas that needed urgent attention.
- Construction of the remainder of works defined under the drainage and flood control programme. These included the Caroni River, the Ciperio River, the Oropouche Lagoon and the North Oropouche River, to name a few.

While some activities were undertaken, the majority of the programmed work remained outstanding. It is my understanding that during the implementation phase of the water sector institutional strengthening programme, that is from 1996—1999, the period of the UNC administration, a significant portion of the funds was transferred from the drainage and flood control component to the Water and Sewerage Authority to be utilized in its operation under the interim operating agreement. This was to satisfy “Water for all by 2000”, boasted by the hon. Members on the opposite side.

For reasons best known to hon. Members opposite, the loan was terminated in 1999. The unfortunate consequences of this were that we do not have water for all even in November 2002, but rather substantial flooding for many of our citizens at this time. Having said that, this Government intends to utilize a holistic approach with respect to the provision of adequate drainage and infrastructure.

To this end, we will seek to reopen the discussions with the multilateral financial agencies to reinstitute this project in recognition of this administration's understanding of the urgent need to have a comprehensive drainage programme in place.

While development of the drainage infrastructure is key, it is not the only intervention required to mitigate against the incidences of flooding. Government's plan can only be effective if we as citizens accept our responsibility to effectively dispose of waste material on the one hand and on the other to adhere to the development planning codes. We must desist, as a nation, from denuding the hills, from unplanned housing settlements in sensitive areas, as well as stop interfering with our natural watercourses.

Let me say that a little goes a long way. Therefore, this is the clarion call to the citizens to respect the environment, their heritage, their birthright and refrain from littering the sidewalks, the drains and the watercourses of Trinidad and Tobago.

On behalf of the hon. Prime Minister and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to extend our heartfelt sympathy to those who suffered losses and reverses as a result of the widespread flooding on November 04 and 05. I wish to assure the national community that the Government has made and will continue to make tangible and intangible assistance available through our various agencies. Please make use of the officers and the agencies designated to assist in processing the relief claims.

Further, I fervently appeal to the national community, corporate citizens, civil engineering firms, contractors, sanitation firms, furniture and appliance merchandisers, insurance companies and financial institutions and to NGOs to assist in the mop-up and relief operations presently underway.

Finally, I would like to table, for the information of the hon. Members and the country, a statement detailing the works that were to have been undertaken and the progress achieved up to this time under the comprehensive drainage programme funded by the World Bank.

I thank you.

AUDIT OF NON-ASSOCIATED NATURAL GAS RESERVES

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Eric Williams): Mr. Speaker, I would like to apprise the honourable House of the results of the audit of the non-associated natural gas reserves of Trinidad and Tobago as at January 01, 2002 conducted by Ryder Scott Company of Houston, Texas, USA.

The primary objective of the audit was to prepare a certified statement of the country's natural gas reserves in the categories, proved, probable and possible, in accordance with accepted industry standards. The project commenced on August 19, 2002 and in the first week of the project reviews and presentations were conducted with the gas producers on the data available.

The National Gas Company (NGC) provided data for the gas supply and demand outlook. Staff from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was assigned to the project for training as well as quality assurance on the audit process. The project was completed in the five weeks time frame on September 20, 2002 and the final report was submitted on September 23, 2002. The total cost of the project was US \$300,000.

The results of the audited reserves as at January 01, 2002 are as follows:

Proved category	20.348 trillion cubic feet of gas
Probable category	8.117 trillion cubic feet of gas
Possible category	5.856 trillion cubic feet of gas
Total	34.321 trillion cubic feet of gas.

The consultant was also required to determine the resource base of the identified exploratory resource, which was estimated at 29.1 trillion cubic feet.

In terms of the reserves, the total proved reserves for gas is equivalent to 3,630 million barrels of oil, that is, its equivalent in oil when compared to the actual oil reserves of 825 million barrels of oil. One can see how significant then the gas reserves are to the country. In addition, it is to be noted that probable gas reserves are equivalent to 1,446 million barrels of oil and possible gas reserves are equivalent to 1,043 million barrels of oil.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries then concludes that the independent consultant, Ryder Scott Company of Houston, Texas has successfully completed the audit of the non-associated natural gas reserves of Trinidad and Tobago as at January 01, 2002.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

BWIA LIMITED—PROPOSAL FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I have been authorised by Cabinet to make the following statement with respect the Government's position on the

proposal by BWIA (West Indies) Airways Limited for financial assistance in support of its strategies for recovery.

In the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, BWIA was thrown into a financial crisis and sought the assistance of the then government. Arising from that request in November 2001, Cabinet approved financial support to BWIA totalling US \$3.5 million of which US \$1.24 million was in the form of a short-term loan. This assistance only temporarily stabilized the company's operations.

Subsequently the demand for air travel, particularly with respect to BWIA's more lucrative North American routes, declined considerably due to the downturn of the US economy. This situation was exacerbated by a number of flight cancellations and delays during the peak summer months. The resultant loss of revenue during this period was in excess of US \$24 million.

The situation has been further compounded by the effects of increased insurance, security and fuel costs. This increase in operational expenditure has impacted adversely on BWIA's ability to meet its standing commitments to its aircraft lessors and suppliers of spares.

Given its precarious financial position, BWIA has requested a moratorium of two years on the repayment of the short-term loan of \$1.24 million. The airline has also requested a cash injection of US \$13.75 million to enable it to sustain its operations pending the recovery through its restructuring strategies. These strategies include the rationalization of its fleet management as well as staff concessions, aggressive marketing in the more lucrative markets and the commercialization of its more technical repair and overhaul centres.

BWIA anticipates that with the implementation of these strategies, it will turn around its operations from a loss position in 2002 to a profit position by 2004. BWIA has an important role to play as Government seeks to position Piarco International Airport as the gateway between South America and Miami. A reliable air transportation system is also critical if Government is to secure the establishment of the headquarters of the Free Trade Areas of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, you would know that Trinidad and Tobago is the front-runner for the headquarters of the Free Trade Area as it has the support of all Caricom countries meaning 15 in a contest in which one needs 18 votes to win. Government recognizes the importance of BWIA to these initiatives and is prepared to support the airline in its financial recovery. In this regard, Government and

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BWIA have agreed to a memorandum of understanding that outlines the terms and conditions under which the Government will provide the necessary financial assistance to BWIA. In particular, BWIA has agreed to undertake the following:

- (1) participate in a study to be conducted by consultants employed by the Government over a six-month period to determine further economies that can be derived from its operations and an appropriate structure for the airline in the context of regional air carrier integration;
- (2) provide full disclosure to the consultants on all aspects of its operations;
- (3) provide, by November 29, 2002, proposals to achieve the targeted total monthly cost savings and operations on US \$1.4 million, which is to be achieved by January 31, 2003 and of course monthly thereafter.

In consideration of the undertaking by BWIA, Government has agreed to provide the following:

- (1) an immediate cash injection of US \$2 million;
- (2) a further US \$8 million to be provided by November 29, 2002, in a manner to be determined by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago;
- (3) the remaining \$3 million to be provided over a period of six months from January 2003;
- (4) the sum of US \$750,000 to finance war risk insurance cover of BWIA in excess of the \$250 million that BWIA pays for. This will take the insurance coverage up to \$1 billion.

Members should note that any cash injected by Government under this agreement will be treated as a loan under the following terms and conditions:

A repayment period of 10 years;

Interest at the prevailing market rate payable in semi-annual installments with a moratorium of 24 months on interest payments;

Principal repayment by means of a bullet repayment at the maturity of the loan after 10 years.

BWIA to provide its landing slots at Heathrow Airport, valued at US \$10 million, as security for the loan funds advanced by Government.

Once more we are faced with the financial difficulties of BWIA. Other regional airlines are not immune to the turmoil that has wreaked havoc on the industry

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since the events of September 11, 2001. It is obvious that the time has come for us to revisit the concept of a regional air carrier. This is the only way we can ensure the sustenance of a viable regional airline industry. The Government, therefore, will be revisiting the plan for regional air carrier integration as an essential exercise in the restructuring of BWIA and the establishment of proper air transport arrangement in the Caribbean.

I thank you.

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) BILL

A bill to amend the Constitution by providing for the establishment of a Police Management Authority, and for other related matters [*The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

POLICE SERVICE BILL

A bill to make provision for the efficient management of the police service, to consolidate, amend and revise the law relating to the police service and for related matters [*The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

POLICE COMPLAINTS AUTHORITY BILL

A bill to establish an independent body to investigate criminal offences involving police officers, police corruption and serious police misconduct and for other related matters [*The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning):
Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

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 a 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

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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, 2002, 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 “The Finance Bill, 2002”:

And Whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be It Resolved that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 be confirmed.

For the benefit of hon. Members, particularly those who are new to the Parliament, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01 provides to the Government a mechanism by which it can, with effect from the date of publication of the Order in the Gazette, either impose a new tax or vary an existing tax in accordance with Government policy.

It further goes on to state, Mr. Speaker, that such an Order must be confirmed by the House of Representatives within a 21-day period of the publication of that Order. Today, Friday, November 08, is well within the 21-day period of the Order that was published in the *Gazette* on October 21, 2002.

Just for the benefit of hon. Members, again, I would like to indicate what the Order provides for. It provides for the amendment of the Registration of Clubs Acts by repealing the schedule attached to the Act at that time and replacing it with a schedule, which reads as follows:

For every regular Poker Table	\$ 8,000 per annum
For every Caribbean Stud Poker Table	\$60,000 per annum
For every Black Jack Table	\$40,000 per annum
For every Baccarat Table	\$32,000 per annum
For every Dice Table	\$20,000 per annum
For every Roulette Table	\$40,000 per annum
For every Rum 32 Table	\$60,000 per annum
For every Sip San Table	\$60,000 per annum
For every other table or device not mentioned above	\$ 2,000 per annum

Of course, the Order indicates that it came into effect on October 21, 2002.

Private members' clubs were designed for the benefit of private individuals and were never intended to be business operations and, therefore, never intended to turn a profit. The mechanism, therefore, by which certain activities would have been carried out at private members' clubs would have been the payment of a fee for a licence for the club to operate.

In 1997, hon. Members opposite, when they were residing on this side, concluded that there was a change in the approach of some organizations, whereby they began to use these tables and these activities for the purposes of raising money and, accordingly, thought it appropriate—a determination with which we entirely concurred—to impose a tax on those activities to ensure that they came within the pale of our taxation laws.

Last year hon. Members opposite, again, in their budget presentation to this honourable House increased that tax by 100 per cent and this year, Mr. Speaker, the figures I have just quoted, in effect, raises that tax again by a further 200 per cent.

The tax has two objectives. The first is to discourage activities of that nature, that is to say, to discourage the use of private members' clubs for business activity when in fact they should be non-profit organizations; and, secondly, because we propose to raise a revenue of some \$4 million in fiscal 2003 as a result of this measure.

This is a very simple Motion, with which I am sure hon. Members will concur. I draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, in presenting this Motion for the consideration of this honourable House, that I was very careful not to introduce into it any extraneous matter—an approach that I would like to commend for the consideration of hon. Members opposite.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak on the Order. I do not think that the hon. Member for San Fernando East really did justice to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

In the budget presentation of the hon. Member, he gave no justification for the imposition of a 200 per cent increase. Today, we have had two justifications. He says that the tax is raised by a further 200 per cent to discourage activities of that nature. It is my understanding that the hon. Member in a radio interview indicated that he imposed the tax because of his religious beliefs.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for Caroni East for giving way. I know he is trying his best to introduce extraneous matters into this debate, but I have had no radio interview at all; certainly none in which I made reference to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, he must review his various interviews in the post-budget debate. Having regard to the fact that the hon. Member said it is to discourage activities of that nature, I want to indicate to this honourable House that the hon. Member is not taking a global view of those activities and I will inform him how he should proceed in matters of this nature in a short while.

The second purpose the hon. Member indicated to this honourable House was that it was to raise revenue of some \$4 million. Once more, the hon. Member is receiving bad advice. I refer the hon. Member to the Estimates of Revenue 2003, page 9, under Club Gaming Tax. The actual receipt was \$1,897,654 in 2001. The estimate in 2002 was \$7.8 million and the revised estimate in 2002 was \$1,744,248. The estimate for 2003 is \$1.8 million.

First, he starts off with an untruth. Perhaps it was an error on his part. I hope that he will acknowledge that in his winding up. It is not \$4 million he intends to raise. He imposes a tax of 200 per cent and he is raising merely \$66,000 more than last year. Clearly, it is a punitive tax. It is clear to me and to all Members of this honourable House that this tax is punitive. It was meant to be punitive. It is the intention of hon. Member for San Fernando East to inflict a measure of punishment on the operators of these clubs.

The hon. Member has no idea how many people are employed in these establishments. Hundreds of people are employed in these establishments. He does not have a clue as to the link between the tourism industry and the job creation that goes on in these clubs. If he had spoken to his colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central or, for that matter, the Member for Point Fortin, he would have gotten a practical appreciation. I know these hon. Members. They have experience in these areas. They would have indicated to him the hundreds of people employed in these establishments.

When I noticed in the newspaper that the imposition of this 200 per cent increase will impact upon two persons negatively—Mr. George Laquis, chairman of National Team Unity, a virtually non-existent party and Mr. Peter George, a financier of Citizens Alliance—it brought back to me, Mr. Speaker, that the imposition of this tax—

Mr. Manning: I suggest to my hon. Friend that it may not be the best way to

proceed by referring to persons who are not Members of this House and, therefore, who are not here to defend themselves. He knows better than that.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am in no way attacking these personalities. It is a matter of public record that they went to the newspapers and indicated that this tax would impact negatively on their establishment. It is a fact that Mr. George Laquis is chairman of NTU and Mr. Peter George publicly identified with Citizens Alliance as a matter of public record. They are on the public record in the newspapers as saying that this tax will impact negatively on their establishment. Having regard to the recent general election, it was retaliation time.

I take this opportunity to warn the hon. Member for San Fernando East that in his holding of high office of Prime Minister he must curb the inclination to use the power of the State to promote his agenda of vindictiveness and malevolence. The hon. Member, as Prime Minister, should pity the poor workers of these establishments. It is clear by the imposition of the 200 per cent increase in tax, he is merely increasing the revenue stream by \$66,000 but it would also mean that workers would be on the breadline. [*Interruption*] He said Acker was his best deal and today he has come to bail them out with US \$13.4 million.

Like several measures in the presentation of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, this measure lacks a global view. It lacks an appreciation of what is happening in the leisure market in Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and the world at large. I am merely advising the hon. Member for San Fernando East to take advice from his colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central and the hon. Member for Point Fortin. They have real experience in this area.

Having regard to the impact of technology, when you enter any website, first thing you see on the sidebar is that the area with the greatest number of hits is on-line gambling. If the legal advisor to the hon. Prime Minister were doing the work required of her, instead of giving gifts to her colleagues, she would have advised the hon. Member for San Fernando East of the existence in the UK of the Sir Alan Budd's Gambling Review Report.

Let us not mince words, these membership clubs are operating as gambling casinos in Trinidad and Tobago. What is required in that situation is that the imposition of taxes he has made for every Poker Table, for every Caribbean Stud Poker Table, for every Black Jack Table, for every Baccarat Table, for every Dice Table, for every Roulette Table, for every Rum 32 Table, Sip San—these are all indications that there is de facto casino gambling in Trinidad and Tobago.

What is required of the Government is to lay the legal and regulatory framework to ensure that these things operate within the law, not a punitive imposition of a tax without the necessary regulatory mechanism. I know my colleague, the Member for San Fernando West, will want to carry this country in his vision 2020. What is required is that he take a leaf from the First World and guide his actions in that direction.

I will provide the hon. Member and the national community with a sense of appreciation of how the First World deals with a problem of this nature—not the punitive imposition of a tax to affect a few and to put workers on the breadline. It is only after widespread consultation; it is only after the receipt of memoranda; it is only after creating the environment upon which he can place the necessary regulatory framework, that he can decide to approach matters of this nature.

The hon. Member raised a moral point to discourage gambling. He said “to discourage activities of that nature”.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I was very careful to say that it was because of the use of private members’ clubs as business activity. I never raised any moral question. The question of business activity—that is the activity we are trying to discourage in clubs that were not designed for that purpose. [*Interruption*] You see, Mr. Speaker, the Member is trying to get out of a tight jacket, but of course we are outside of the Standing Orders, if that is your view.

Mr. G. Singh: You know, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East brings to mind a quotation from Sir Thomas Paine in the *Age of Reason* and I would read it into the record of this honourable House:

“It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things that he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime.”

[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, that is Sir Thomas Paine in the *Age of Reason*. By imposing a tax on poker tables—what is a poker table used for, to “pitch marble”? A stud poker table, a blackjack table, a baccarat table, a dice table, a roulette table, a rum 32 table, a sip san table and every other device, these are all gambling devices. So for the Member to say that he wanted to discourage activities of that nature—clearly he believes that he wanted to discourage activities of a gambling nature. No other interpretation can be found.

I want once more to refer to the Sir Alan Budd's Report and the terms of reference of that report which may help to guide the hon. Minister of Finance.

“The Gambling Review’s Terms of Reference were to:

- Consider the current state of the gambling industry and the ways in which it might change over the next ten years in the light of economic pressures, the growth of e-commerce, technological developments and the wider leisure industry and internal trends.
- Consider the social impact of gambling and the costs and benefits.
- Consider, and make recommendations for, the kind and extent of regulation appropriate for gambling activities...having regard to:
 - Their wider social impact;
 - The need to protect the young and vulnerable from exploitation and to protect all gamblers from unfair practices;
 - The importance of preventing gambling from being carried out in a way which allows crime, disorder or public nuisance;
 - The need to keep the industry free from infiltration by organized and other serious crime, and from money laundering risks;
 - The desirability of creating an environment in which the commercial opportunities for gambling, including its internal competitiveness, maximize the U.K.’s economic welfare; and”

Here is a Prime Minister saying that he is discouraging business and commercial activities.

- “The implications for the current system of taxation, and the scope for its further development.
- Consider the need for, and, if necessary, recommend new machinery appropriate for carrying out that regulation...”

Mr. Speaker, it is clear from the Sir Alan Budd Report that there is the desirability of creating an environment in which commercial opportunities for gambling, including its international competitiveness, maximize that country’s economic welfare. You must also maximize the current implications for taxation and the scope for its further development, but that is not the approach that the hon. Minister of Finance has taken. He is raising \$1.8 million and taking a

punitive approach to taxation and in fact he is putting people on the breadline because it will lead to a closure of several entities; but this measure will only raise, on the estimate, \$1.8 million. That is in accordance with your own documentation. [*Interruption*] No, no, no, this year 2003, based on your estimates—only \$1.8 million; and you will get your turn to respond.

Where is the other \$19.9 billion going to come from, Mr. Speaker? The hon. Minister of Finance says nothing in his contribution on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Where is the money coming from to fund the social sector programmes? It is clear that the hon. Minister of Finance has abdicated his responsibility of coming to this House and making a full disclosure as to where he is going to raise the other \$19.9 billion. Mr. Speaker, in his contribution—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

Mr. Speaker: Which point of order is it?

Mr. Valley: Thirty-five—the Member is widening the debate. Permit me—yes, Mr. Speaker. Irrelevance; because, Mr. Speaker, I make the point that on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order one is limited only to matters that deal with raising revenues. One does not have to deal with—[*Interruption*] Therefore, by going outside of that strict Order, the Member is widening the debate considerably and being irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: No, I overrule your point. [*Desk thumping*] Please continue.

Mr. G. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the hypocrisy continues. I want the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central to really read that quotation from Thomas Paine because when you were on this side, Mr. Speaker, you cried for the opportunity to speak on everything under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Now that you are on that side, for certain reasons, you want to confine the debate. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It is clear, where are you going to find the money, Mr. Speaker? Are you going to proceed on the basis of taxation and spending, as you did previously in the period when you were in control of the Treasury? Rolf Balgobin, the University of the West Indies Institute of Business Director, says, and I quote from the *Business Guardian* of November 07, 2002:

“...I do not think it is wise to spend in the expectation of earning. Many an organisation has failed this way, and there is no reason for the national dynamics to be any different.”

So the hon. Member in his presentation this afternoon did not tell us where he is going to get the \$19.9 billion. He is hoping that that revenue comes from taxes raised from the oil and gas windfall. Therefore he is spending in anticipation of revenue coming in and Rolf Balgobin, young man, brilliant economist, says that it is not wise to spend in expectation of earning.

“Many an organisation has failed this way, and there is no reason for the national dynamics to be any different.”

We have a sense of the history of what it is like, Mr. Speaker, to spend moneys in anticipation of them coming, because we have that history in the period 1973—1981 in which billions of dollars came in through taxes, through the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order—not unlike what we have here today—and they were spent in this country like a “dose of salts”. So when you look at the presentation of the hon. Member for San Fernando East in the financial year 2002/2003, it is back in times because you see, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East is caught, in a sense, in a time warp.

Mr. Speaker, this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order provides the opportunity for us to look as to how the Government intends to spend the taxes that it will collect from the oil revenue and we have a sense of history. We will recall that in 1983, after George Chambers won that landslide political victory, larger than that of Eric Williams, he put together a team of eminent economists headed by William Demas. The Demas Report, *Imperatives of Adjustment*, exposed the ad hoc patterns of spending which they said in 1983 must lead to economic crisis. That advice the then PNM did not take. The PNM mindset prevailed over that economic advice. They continued the spending on subsidies, gifts and nepotism. All the special funds were depleted. So we must have a sense that, as we collect taxes, we must be careful of how we spend them.

Mr. Speaker, all the special funds, all the savings, were depleted so that by 1986 when the NAR became the government, the populist spending of the PNM, as they are wont to engage in now, created unsustainable patterns of consumption and transfer payments. Then, when the NAR was in power, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had to enter the picture and then they called it the IMF dragon. But the IMF had to enter the picture because of the patterns of expenditure, because of the manner in which you taxed and spent over that period.

It is history that the IMF imposed adjustment programmes, which was anticipated in the recommendations of the Demas Report. Clearly, no government—and I want to warn this Government that they must not devote the

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revenues from the oil and gas to fuel populist spending. We must put our fiscal policy in the context of the history of our first oil boom, and in the context of the real need of the economy, the imperative to increase productivity, flexibility and competitiveness. Mr. Speaker, to increase the flow of wealth we must create is urgent, which is the way to reduce poverty and inequality. That must be the focus of our fiscal policy, our taxation.

We on this side, the United National Congress, are supportive of compassionate intervention to assist the aged, the infirmed, the orphans, the handicapped, citizens who need help in education and training and those who are the victims of unforeseen disasters. What we must not support is a principle of taxation, which will drive our economy to repeat the tragedy of what went on previously in the period 1973—1981. [*Desk thumping*] We must not embark on patterns of expenditure which do not modernize our workers while increasingly enlarging the internal deficit.

This country has had a consistent set of policies since the 1980s: fiscal discipline—meaning spending was not allowed to go out of line with revenue; tax reform—reducing personal and corporate taxes while increasing VAT; the liberalization of the economy; encouraging foreign direct investment and privatization of some state enterprises and deregulation. Every government since 1986, Mr. Speaker, has followed these policies and they have led first to recovery and then to economic growth.

Having regard to the manner of this administration, we are clearly abandoning this strategy which has caused our economy to grow, under the Manning administration—1991 to 1994—by a mere 1 per cent, and under the Panday administration by an average 5.4 per cent in the period 1995 to 2001. Mr. Speaker, when the hon. Member for San Fernando East speaks of a vision for the society, it is clear to me that this vision really is a mindset that goes back to the 1970s and even further back to 1956. They provided me with copies of their vision. I had begun to read it, and I have read parts of it, and it is my intention to remind this hon. Member that you have to look at your vision in the context of the time today. This is 2003. This is not 1970 or 1956.

Clearly, in this 2020 vision that the hon. Member for San Fernando East espouses, it is a populist vision of spending of taxes with no concern for the value of the output, efficiency or cost benefit analysis. That is why they plan to throw millions at the education system, totally blind to the needs of the students, to the impact of technology and to the cultural changes which impact on the curriculum, on learning and the relevance of output to the needs of a modern global economy.

To pursue a vision of populist spending, this mindset which led us into the shackles of the IMF, is dangerous. Then it was said that money is no problem. Now we can only expect the money and the PNM is spending it as if we have it, or borrowing it and spending it as if the revenues must come. Mr. Speaker, they are gambling. The hon. Member seems to be against gambling, you know, but they are gambling with the lives of the citizenry of this country. We will lose in this country if the revenues do not come or will lose when inflation, capital flight and the deficit on the current account create problems for the poor. We only have to remember 1970 and 1990.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member, I feel, is of the view that many people will leave this country and, in looking at the estimates of revenue on departure tax, in 2002 the estimate for departure tax at the airport was \$45 million. The revised estimate in 2002 is \$28,288,875. However, under the proposal of the Member for San Fernando East, the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister, he expects to collect an estimated \$78,079,500 in airport departure taxes. It is clear that this hon. Member is looking at the revenue stream from the airport taxes and expecting almost everybody to leave this country. So I just—*[Interruption]*—\$78 million when last year we only collected \$28 million. This is at page 11 of the Estimates of Revenue for 2003—your documentation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat that the UNC is concerned about the plight of the poor. Compassion is essential to good government. Tax revenues must be allocated to helping the victims of the business cycle, the victims of technological change and economic adjustment. Our record is there all over the country for everybody to see. Our focus was on culture, changing attitudes and increasing investment in people in an efficient way. We were not providing incentives to make them make claims on the Treasury—dependency some may call it. We were about creating the environment for growth and business at every level. We were not about abusing language, Mr. Speaker, calling a soup kitchen a transformation centre. We were not about creating bureaucracies to use up 90 cents of every dollar spent, allegedly to help the poor.

In this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, in the budget presentation that preceded it and from which this came, one finds that the pervasive philosophical influence of the PNM is that they are embarked on a course of creating different categories of citizenship in this democracy in Trinidad and Tobago. By the policy prescriptions, which will have to come from the provisional taxes to fund the various social sector programmes, whether it is HYPE, GAPP, the On-the-Job Training Programme (OJT), the Community Enhancement and Regeneration

Programme (CERP), YAPA, in the provision of community development scholarships or in the transformation centres or soup kitchens, this current administration, Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, is reiterating and reinforcing a culture of entitlement.

Further, on the implementation of some of these programmes, there has been blatant favouritism, discrimination and rampant inequality. For example, let us take the Community Enhancement and Regeneration Programme. I looked through the documentation. What is the quantum that is going to be spent this year in that programme? Last year we know it was \$75 million as a result of the loan obtained from the Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (RBTT). That money was given to the Solid Waste Management Company to embark upon this programme of the Community Enhancement and Regeneration Programme. Mr. Speaker, what was the criterion used to select the beneficiaries of this programme, of this state largesse of \$75 million? Taxpayers' money will have to pay back that \$75 million. What was the criterion used?

The reality is that the Community Enhancement Regeneration Programme is nothing but a blatant use of the state resources in the recent general election campaign. So too, Mr. Speaker, was the OJT Programme, confined to PNM party supporters; no question of equality of opportunity for anybody to access that. The PNM is once more carrying on their great tradition of the paramountcy of the party card, crystallized so vividly by the last Prime Minister, that you cannot live in an NHA house and not vote PNM; you cannot drive on a PNM road and not vote PNM.

When you take state resources from the taxpayers of this country and you embark on a fiscal policy of the utilization of those state resources in this manner, you not only create and reinforce that culture of entitlement, you also now begin to reinforce that culture of preference, where only supporters of the ruling party have access to jobs and other resources of the State, that culture of preference. Now, that has infected every state enterprise and state authority and it is taxpayers' money, transfers from the state Treasury, that fund those state enterprises and state authorities. So it is relevant to this debate and, if there is that culture of preference, that culture of inequality existing, then, as the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, you should redress that imbalance right away.

Mr. Speaker, the principles of individual or personal responsibility, merit, excellence, hard work, delayed gratification, individual achievement and equality of opportunity, is not currency today. It is the culture of entitlement and preference. All these things—meritocracy, equality of opportunity, individual achievement, personal responsibility, hard work and delayed gratification—have

been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency. Today, under this administration, once you are PNM you are entitled, once you are PNM you are preferred. That signals the beginning of the collapse of the plurality of this society. It signals the end of a dream to make the society competitive in the global world.

It is this culture of entitlement and preference which are the underlying assumptions in the provision of \$2.2 million to a minister of government. That is money coming from taxation. It is that principle, this culture of entitlement and a culture of preference, which are the underlying assumptions in the settlement of the matter between a sitting minister of Government and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago acting on behalf of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, that \$2.2 million will come from our taxes and I want to read into the record of this honourable House—because if that matter is settled in the manner in which they have embarked upon, it is nothing but a scandal. It points to nothing but misbehaviour in public office. It points to money drawn from taxes and being paid out to a colleague.

I will read into the record, Mr. Speaker, from the *Sunday Express* of November 03, 2002. The writer is Darren Bahaw.

“On the Friday before the 2002 general elections, Attorney General Glenda Morean instructed the Solicitor General to settle a multi-million dollar lawsuit in favour of Cabinet colleague, Foreign Affairs Minister Knowlson Gift.

The AG’s settlement was made even as the Commissioner of Valuations Kenneth Subran remained adamant that Gift had not provided sufficient evidence to justify his multi-million dollar claim.”

Mr. Speaker: I have allowed you to stray a bit but I think you are taking it a little too far. Could you come back on track, please?

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am merely making the point that this \$2.2 million is not coming from—

Mr. Speaker: I have ruled for you to move away from that.

Mr. G. Singh: Very well, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] You see, Mr. Speaker, it is clear to us on this side that truth becomes the first casualty when that

administration takes control of power. The Attorney General has not refuted anything in that newspaper report—not one thing—but, Mr. Speaker, I will abide by your ruling. Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, we will bring a Private Member's Motion on this matter so therefore we will deal with it in that way.

Mr. Speaker, what is the cost to deliver all these new programmes—the YTEPP, the HYPE, the CCC, the OJT, the YAPA—a very long list? Must we not be concerned about the effectiveness and the efficiency of delivery as distinct from popularity? We want the youth to be given opportunities, but remember, we threw money at social problems in the 1970s. We created many problems, social problems, and wrecked the economy. We neglected the primary schools system. We provided few vocational opportunities. We now suffer the consequences of the failure to learn that throwing money at social problems does not solve the problems.

We must use our tax revenues to transform our labour force to make our people globally competitive. We do this by using the transfer payments as investments, not charity. We do this by increasing the skills knowledge and the human capital of our young people, making them productive workers. We do this by reducing the numbers dependent upon URP while joining with the private sector to produce jobs that pay well and are sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance, I believe, is on a dangerous course. No nation has moved its people from poverty to sustainable wealth creation by devoting its tax revenues to transfer payments and subsidizing consumption—none whatsoever. The welfare state came after there was wealth to distribute, not from the mere monetization of commodities. Every European country, Canada and the USA, has remodeled their welfare programmes. We must learn from others. Why reinvent the wheel? Years of man-hours have been invested in designing projects to provide the right incentives and rewards, while providing relief, so that beneficiaries can become flexible, productive and valuable workers.

We are talking about taxes where you might have to consolidate a series of legal settlements to pay. Talking about legal settlements, it seems to be a trend in this Government that ministers of government will sue the Government in an effort to get the taxpayers' money. Here it is, Mr. Speaker, "Minister sues Government for aggravated and/or exemplary damages in the sum of \$25 million". This is the *Wire* of November 07, 2002. In a situation like this, you have

to find this \$25 million from the taxpayers' money to pay. However, whilst we do so, we have to deal with the issue of how we are going to move our people from poverty to sustainable wealth creation, by devoting tax revenues to the relevant areas.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about taxes, about revenues for the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Finance enlisted the services of Dr. Dhanessar Mahabir, a credible economist. Hear what Dr. Mahabir says about the Minister of Finance's revenue expectations, and I quote:

“What I think has happened is that Mr. Manning has encountered an unpleasant surprise...what he has seen on the table is certainly not squaring with his own expectation for his anticipated revenue flows...”

That is in the *Guardian* of the November 01, 2002. The hon. Minister of Finance is now threatening the energy companies to win public support. He is now, in a sense, panicking. Even if the PNM were to get a better deal, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Mahabir says, and I quote in the same *Guardian* article, that better terms and conditions do not make for an increased revenue flow. We control our supply. Revenue flows depend on price and supply, the price LNG companies get in the markets in the future. Prices fluctuate. Revenues flows will fluctuate as well.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Mahabir continues and says that the:

“...Minister of Finance...”

was being:

“...overly optimistic when he spoke about the huge windfall without really understanding the dynamics and the mechanics of the oil and gas markets.

...it is a hopeful windfall...”

Which will come from expected future prices for natural gas. Once more, Mr. Speaker, the warning of Rolf Balgobin comes to mind. You are spending money that you are hoping and expecting.

The collection of taxes must be seen in the wider context of all sources and uses of taxes. Taxes are collected for the service of Trinidad and Tobago and the difference in philosophy between the PNM and the UNC must be noted. On that side there is a culture of entitlement, a culture of preference—and the Gift settlement is an indication of that—against a culture of individual responsibility on this side. How we tax our people and the purposes for which our revenues are

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allocated is what we are debating. The PNM ideas or lack of some are cause for concern. In the 1970s before the oil boom of 1973, the PNM declared itself against liberal capitalism and I quote:

“Liberal capitalism is patently inadequate as a guide; for, whether in its 19th century form or its 20th century American form, it still leads to inequality, denial of human values; lack of effective participation of the masses and almost total alienation.”

This is taken from *Perspectives For A New Society* by Eric Williams in 1970, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Singh: I thank the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central and hon. Members of this House for extending my speaking time. Mr. Speaker, what Dr. Williams was saying in his *Perspectives For A New Society* in 1970 is that the PNM must develop its own economic philosophy, its own fiscal policy.

When the oil boom came, the PNM philosophy was to take over the economy, ignore the private sector and do exactly what the Minister of Finance plans to do, impose a pattern of spending on transfer payments which is unsustainable. They imposed a pattern that created certain types of expectations and, of course, there was much waste. This is why this debate is crucial. We must not ignore the mindset of that administration. They are determined to win popularity, as they did in the 1970s, even at the expense of our future. This they do, not because of malice, Mr. Speaker, it is because of their mindset. They have a vision for 2020 looking back to 1956 and 1970.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC began to lead this country to consider the cost of neglecting quality education. We started to review the primary school curriculum and to expand pre-schools. We were joining with adult literacy teachers to help those in need. We were expanding vocational and skills training throughout the country using the national energy skills enters. We created COSTAATT and the Trinidad and Tobago Institute for Technology and with our innovative Dollar for Dollar Programme we had embarked on a course to increase tertiary enrollment from 7 per cent to 20 per cent by 2005.

We were using tax revenues to invest in people. We recognized that the modernization of a country means the modernization of the workers. It means technical convergence and the institutional capability to deliver quality education, training and flexibility to adjust to changes in the global economy. Mr. Speaker, we cannot join the Koreans, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and now the aggressive push of China and India by promoting mediocrity under the guise of building a welfare state. Populism will win in the short run, as it did in the 1970s, and recently many people fell victim, but in the long run all of us are put in danger.

We need to remind the hon. Prime Minister that not all gifts are good. Remember the African proverb, and I quote: “When you are too happy, pinch yourself.” You see, Mr. Speaker, the underlying objective of the hon. Minister of Finance is clear. He has a clear philosophical stance where, if you engage in this syndrome and if you intervene in such a way as to provide, through entitlement and through preference to people, he will continue to stay in power. He has dropped everything at the altar of political expediency.

I want to remind the hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker, of a quotation by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and I quote:

“The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society.”

“The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself.”

“The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself.”

It is clear these two truths have merit, Mr. Speaker. The key issue today is whether in the present political landscape there exists the political leadership to bring about that intervention that can bring about the political change.

Mr. Speaker, to go to the sentiments of my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine, it is about getting the politics right. This Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is about populist politics. It is about the right of entitlement. It is about the culture of preference for only one set of people and it is clear to us that there exists a burden of responsibility on the hon. Member for San Fernando East to get the politics right. There exists a burden on all of us, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we bring about the cultural change to carry Trinidad and Tobago forward and, Mr. Speaker, it is necessary in that context to ensure that the \$2.2 million is not paid to Minister Knowlson Gift. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to join this debate to comment on a few points made by the hon. Minister of Finance. You know, when he mentioned that these measures are to raise \$4 million and my colleague showed that the actual figures will be much less than that, I would ask our hon. Prime Minister, why only look at these games? I remember him saying in 1997 that whenever he becomes Prime Minister again he was going to ban all these games. I want him to reflect and to tell us, if that was his intention, to ban these games, today has he changed and is saying that he will instead increase taxes to discourage these games?

I would tell the hon. Member that when you increase taxes and make these games or gambling seem to be out of the reach of the ordinary people, what you in fact would encourage is more Mafia-type activity to encourage people of means maybe to launder money and so on and they will come into these games that were introduced by this administration so that everybody could—they are not forced to do this but they take part in these casinos to maybe pass time and to enjoy themselves, but when you put them above the means of the average people, you now encourage a certain type of behavior, and I would warn the Member against encouraging this type of behaviour.

Also, with regard to his religious beliefs, I think sometimes when we open ourselves to these moral and spiritual values to which he is opening himself—I got a letter recently from one of my constituents and I would maybe read it in this honourable House. It is dated October 20, 2002. It is addressed to me:

“Member of Parliament for Chaguanas

The Honourable Manohar Ramsaran

Caroni Savannah Road

Chaguanas

Dear Sir,

As my Representative in the Lower House of Parliament, I wish for you to raise several questions during the Budget 2002/2003 debate. These questions should be directed to the Honourable Prime Minister and Political Leader of the PNM, Mr. Patrick Manning.

I vividly recall that the PNM was “**selected**” by His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in December 2001, to govern this country after the 18/18 outcome of the election, on the basis of having high spiritual and moral values.

Presumably, the Leader of the PNM, and the current Prime Minister would have been a role model in this regard.

However, we have witnessed first hand, or evidence have been presented to demonstrate that Mr. Patrick Manning and the PNM leave much to be desired and disqualify themselves as role models of high moral and spiritual values.

As my MP, I would like you to seek answers to the following questions:"

[*Words expunged*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Chaguanas, Member for Chaguanas; please, no. I would ask the *Hansard* reporter to strike that out. Please, please!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I would—

Mr. Speaker: No, I rule. Do not read that part of it.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I listen to you, Mr. Speaker. I continue:

- “2. Why did Mr. Manning and the PNM, referred to us women as prostitutes in light of the manifesto proposal by the UNC to give \$1500.00 to each newborn baby? While Mr. Manning and the PNM are free to knock their challengers, I am offended and feel disrespected by such comments. Can Mr. Manning really convince us that he is a role model with high moral and spiritual values?
3. Why would a leader...who professes to possess high moral and spiritual values and with all the virtues of decency, transparency and accountability saw it fit to discriminate in the allocation of State resources? Example the URP in Chaguanas.”

I will come to that later.

- “4. Where is the morality, when you Mr. Manning appoint your wife to a Cabinet position without facing the electorate?
5. Mr. Manning, you boasted of your sons’ obtaining scholarships to study in Germany, but I would like you to inform the nation of all the names of the other candidates who would have competed with your sons for the scholarships they received to study there.

As my elected Representative, I am looking to you for answers to the above questions. Hence, I trust that you would use the Parliament to obtain answers to my questions. As an ordinary citizen who struggle to survive daily, these are burning issues, which if left unanswered would undermine the credibility of our democracy.

Your constituent”

Mr. Speaker, I read that letter—[*Interruption*—I want to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: If you are reading something into the record you have to give the name of the author.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It is signed Sally Ramcharitar. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I obey your ruling but I know that you do not have to—but that is another matter.

Mr. Speaker, I am now wondering, these measures to collect revenue from our Provisional Collection of Taxes Order this afternoon, when I heard the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro reading what happened with the National Comprehensive Drainage Programme, I was trying to see how the money being raised this afternoon, as announced by the hon. Prime Minister, would assist in the National Comprehensive Drainage Programme. I point out to this honourable House that everything on this document that was laid on the table this afternoon was done by the United National Congress government. [*Desk thumping*]

This is what I call plagiarism and it happened during the budget debate when the hon. Member for San Fernando East—and if you remember, Mr. Speaker, because my constituents and the people from Central Trinidad—I heard the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro say on radio that he expects the Caroni basin to be flooded and now he is disappointed that the East-West Corridor has been flooded and he blames the PNM Government for approving plans for building on the Northern Range. Now he has widened the highway and caused flooding and he, as a matter of fact, said that it is okay for Central Trinidad to flood. Today he comes with this National Comprehensive Drainage Programme and again he is trying to mislead the public and I want the public to be very careful of what is happening.

Let me read, Mr. Speaker and I would tell you that:

“Marabella and Vistabella Rivers”

Listen to this:

“Designs completed. The construction works on the ‘Marabella River Improvement Works’ have commenced.”

When and how? I ask the hon. Member to tell me what has happened over the last nine months, because, when we initiated these programmes I know that works had started and were complete in many areas. The reason we have floods today in the East-West Corridor is because of the widening of that highway. He cannot tell

me otherwise because I visited there and I saw that the drainage that was there before has been blocked and the water now has—it must find a route. That is one thing about water, Mr. Speaker; once there is flooding water must find routes to move. That is why Chaguanas flooded over time and that is why the UNC, when we came into office, looked at the problem and we decided—and you know what the PNM did, Mr. Speaker?

I was hoping to hear the Minister of Finance tell us how he is going to fund this. He mentioned that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the World Bank signed something in 1994 but I was expecting something, especially with all the promises made by the Minister of Works and Transport. He should tell us how he is going to fix and to address the flooding problems in this country. Today, as I speak, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro must learn a bit about flooding. There was flooding in the east a couple of days ago but today I understand that areas in Central Trinidad, especially the constituency of Caroni East and parts of Chaguanas, the northern part, are under water because the water would take time to flow and all the crops in the Warrenville and Bejucal areas are now destroyed. That was not mentioned in his statement this afternoon and I am asking him to consider all these people in that area.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas, we are not debating the statement. We are debating the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I was trying to see how we could link that money that he is trying to—*[Interruption]*. I am trying to link, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]* or I am linking the fact that here we have a disaster in this country, as admitted by the Minister of Works and Transport, and we have a Minister of Finance and Prime Minister talking about the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order and I expect him to tell us for what this revenue would be used.

You know, when you look at the figure hovering about \$2.4 million, Mr. Speaker, I thought that this was to pay a gift, but, you see—*[Desk thumping]*—because, Mr. Speaker, democracy is something that we must try to preserve in this country and what we are seeing happening in this country, especially over the last nine months, we have to question; we must question.

For example, the hon. Minister of Finance spoke in this House about a surplus. Mr. Speaker, this is misleading. According to the Member for Diego Martin East, when he was on this side, he talked about “ratchiffee”. You know, Mr. Speaker, we had a budget presented by this Government for about \$17.4 billion. We had a PSIP of about \$1.4 billion. In their revised estimates, they said

that the PSIP was now \$800 million. That meant there was a shortfall of \$600 million in releasing to the PSIP. They did not tell this honourable House where that \$600 million went but they said there was a surplus of \$27 million. What they are trying to tell us is that they used the moneys to do other things and they have not yet told us what they did with that money, and when they come and say they have a surplus, you know, they cannot fool this country.

This country is not what they think it is, Mr. Speaker. There are intelligent people in this country. When you look at the newspapers daily you will see the questions being asked. I want the hon. Minister, when he is winding-up this debate this afternoon, to tell us where the \$600 million that was allocated to the PSIP went and then he could tell us about a surplus, because we are worried on this side that money that was left in the Ministry of Finance and in the country's Treasury was misused; and we have evidence. Mr. Speaker, we have evidence of moneys being spent all across the country in hiring people and getting people to do work for them to win an election, and I think that this should be frowned upon by our country.

We know that an election is about—you talk about democracy. It is supposed to be for the people, by the people and of the people. When I heard and we read in the newspapers—for example, in the *Probe* newspaper from which my colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, quoted, and we have other people calling us, Mr. Speaker—about what happened in San Fernando West—and, you know, when we do this to our country we are bound to pay the price. Mr. Speaker, in Tunapuna we heard about many illegal activities, and again this—

Mr. Speaker: Again, hon. Member, again you are straying from the topic. We are speaking about the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I am talking about gambling, Mr. Speaker. Here we are gambling with our country. We gamble with our country. We spend money; we threaten people to win an election and what happened? In my living memory I cannot remember the constituency of Tunapuna being ravaged by floods, Mr. Speaker, and I want you to understand this. When you talk about moral and spiritual values and you steal elections and you use money that should be spent elsewhere, to talk about poverty being 40 per cent of this country—Mr. Speaker, \$4 million.

According to the report laid in this Parliament today, the largest number of electors is now living in the borough of Chaguanas. In Appendix A—borough of Chaguanas—46,532 electors. San Fernando is behind with 42,000; Port of Spain

31,000; Arima 21,000 and Point Fortin 13,000. Do you know what the Member for Arouca North did? The first thing he did was to stop the URP in Chaguanas. There are 46,000 people living in that borough and there is no URP. This is why I was expecting to hear the Member for San Fernando East say the money he is going to raise from the gambling tables would put back the URP in Chaguanas to help the unemployed people in the borough and the area of Chaguanas. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, and what—

Mr. Narine: Member for Chaguanas, would you give way, please?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: When I am finished. Also, Mr. Speaker, 111,000 people live in the regional corporation of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo. Do you know what he did? He put the two together—157,000 electors—not people, you know, electors—living in those two regional corporations and, as far as I know, these two areas, now in one, receive the least amount of money for the URP in Trinidad and Tobago; and this is discrimination, Mr. Speaker. I want him to tell us how Point Fortin—and I am not against people from Point Fortin—13,000 electors, receives a higher amount of money for URP than the entire area of Chaguanas and Couva. I will give way now, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Narine: Thank you very much, Member for Chaguanas, for giving way. I was trying, through you, Mr. Speaker, to ask the Member for Chaguanas if he is aware that there was a motion moved in the borough of Chaguanas to remove the office of the URP and it was passed by the Chaguanas Borough Corporation—the municipal corporation—and I had no choice but to move the office to the quarters at Couva. I have that documented. If you need it, I will provide it for you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, this happened. The motion was to move the office from one building to another office. It had nothing to do with moving the office from Chaguanas. This is why I am so disappointed in this Member for Arouca North. That is why I gave way, you know, because I knew he would make a fool of himself, Mr. Speaker. It was to move the office from one building to another.

Mr. Narine: No, that was not—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, you know, this is discrimination and this is why I call on the hon. Prime Minister to do the honourable thing and to respect the people from Chaguanas, especially our borough corporation, because I will quote again, Mr. Speaker. This was tabled by the Minister himself. It shows that

Chaguanas now has 46,532 electors and, when you look at this, Point Fortin and Arima still cannot make up the borough of Chaguanas. San Fernando, Port of Spain and Point Fortin still cannot make up the borough of Chaguanas. I want the Prime Minister to tell us if this is not discrimination. If the hon. Prime Minister could say this afternoon he is going to reintroduce—and let me tell the hon. Prime Minister that when the UNC was in office, we gave to the 14 regional corporations their fair share of the URP and nobody could ever deny that, [*Desk thumping*] and today in Chaguanas we have the highest number of electors and they unilaterally took away the URP from Chaguanas.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas, when people come to me and ask for a little subsistence, I am aggrieved and I would tell you, it is much more than that. I ask the hon. Prime Minister, as Minister of Finance, a responsible Minister, when you look at the growing pace of Chaguanas, the people who pay taxes, there are those who have and those who have not and I want him to address the “have nots”, because look at what happened. Then when they talk about a fiscal surplus, Mr. Speaker, I am aggrieved. You know, you have a budget, whatever figure it is, and when you do not spend money they say that is a surplus.

Mr. Speaker, in Chaguanas again, the money released to Chaguanas showed a shortfall of \$3.22 million in goods and services. They did not release money to the borough of Chaguanas and here they talk about surplus.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we have to preserve the democracy of Trinidad and Tobago, and one cannot, as my colleague said, have people with entitlement.

3.30 p.m.

When I look at the social programmes in this country, I feel sorry to hear our hon. Prime Minister talk about 40 per cent poverty. One cannot talk about 40 per cent poverty on the one hand and discriminate against people on the other hand. We have figures to prove that what he said was wrong. When I got up the other day and asked him to quote the page of the UNDP report, he waved his hand. But do you know what the report said, Mr. Speaker? Over the last five years that the UNC was in office, Trinidad and Tobago amongst nine other countries in the world did more than ever before to address the issue of poverty and we brought poverty down to 7.9 per cent according to the UNDP report.

Mr. Narine: From where did he get his figures?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Forty per cent poverty is 520,000 people in this country living below the poverty line. If one looks at the income table in this country, we

have about 7.9 per cent of the people—and these figures could be checked—living on less than US \$100 per month. If one takes 40 per cent of the population, 520,000 people, the average salary is less than \$3,500 per month.

If that is the benchmark—\$3,500 is the benchmark for poverty, then 40 per cent is correct, but the Minister of Finance must tell us that. Then he will tell all the people who work in the Parliament and elsewhere that they live below the poverty line. Mr. Speaker, 40 per cent of the population earns \$3,500 and less.

That report was commissioned when I was the Minister. It came to me just before I demitted office. When they came into office they saw the report and asked the persons if they were making a mistake. Do it over. Yet they quoted and they remained with the 40 per cent poverty, and the benchmark they used is \$3,500 and that is erroneous.

The United Nations defined poverty as people who earn less than \$623 per month, per member of a household. What that consultant did is put it as \$3,500 per person, and that is wrong, Mr. Speaker. We based our poverty figures on the United Nations Development Programme reports, and the hon. Prime Minister was Prime Minister when the Copenhagen Convention to deal with poverty met in 1995 and they decided on what is poverty and what is not poverty, and these were the figures we worked with. That is why when we demitted office, Mr. Speaker, we left poverty at 7.9 per cent.

Again, I want people to understand how the hon. Prime Minister misled this country. He boasted about poverty being around 10 per cent, as if they brought it there, but that is okay. If they say so, it is so. But if poverty is 10 per cent—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is now 10?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: If unemployment is 10 per cent, how could poverty be 40 per cent, Mr. Speaker? I want them to tell us that.

Dr. Rowley: You could be employed and poor. What is wrong with you?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I always remember the Member for Diego Martin East talking about “ratchifée”, and I want the hon. Prime Minister, when he is winding up this debate, to tell us where he got the surplus from after not spending money on the PSIP. I want him to tell us how his PSIP performed over the last nine months. What did he build? What did they leave in this country, Mr. Speaker, to account for that \$800 million?

We did research in the former ministries I had the honour to lead, and nothing was done. Forty-six million dollars was left for the PSIP in my former ministry,

and nothing has been done over the last year to show that any money was spent in that ministry. I am talking about the soup kitchen. The Member pulled out a bag. Three years ago I visited that relief centre in John John and I got a similar bag as a gift—[*Interruption*] If the Prime Minister declares his, I will. If one goes to the ministry's office, one will see what I received there in the office. It did not go home by me. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is in three years we did this work, and here in nine months somebody brought a bag for the Member. Some people brought a bag for him and he came to this Parliament and claimed everything. I will be the first to congratulate the Government whenever it does anything new, but do not come with our work and try to hoodwink this nation! I have a problem with that, because in nine months all it did was to—and the Member for Diego Martin East always says, and he said it this afternoon, that all they want to do is win elections.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about the departure tax. When one looks at what is happening with the crime in this country, maybe that will be the revenue collected when everybody would leave Trinidad and Tobago. What is happening in this country is that people are losing respect for our Prime Minister and his Cabinet quickly, because they are not speaking the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to question your ruling, but when my Prime Minister was in office—when the hon. Member for Couva North was in office—Members opposite would come and say everything under the sun about our hon. Prime Minister, and people would clap, applaud and shout. But Mr. Speaker, time is longer than twine. People will have to ask questions, and we have newspaper reports in this country about certain operatives of the hon. Prime Minister. I would like to ask him again, maybe I would not read the letter, but he is the Prime Minister of this country, he is the leader of this country, there are allegations about certain extracurricular activities. He could prove that in medical tests and tell us about his—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Speaker ruled on that!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Tell us about his destiny. Let us know what is happening. Had it been another Member—but we have the Prime Minister of this country. You know, if he is really that person who our President described as moral and spiritual, he would come to us and he would be the first to say to us, “Brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, I am willing to take a paternal test and put this question to rest.” [*Laughter*]

Dr. Rowley: Not paternal. Paternity!

Mr. Speaker: Member for Chaguanas, please, you are straying. I warned you twice already. Please. This is my last warning.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I abide by your ruling. I will go on. There is much I would say, but I realize that when you look at how our hon. Prime Minister comes here this evening and attempts to raise taxes, how a budget operates, we have income and we have expenditure. I am not at all satisfied with the evidence of collecting revenues for our expenditure, and I am not a prophet of doom and gloom, but I have a problem with the handouts, for want of a better term, that have been offered to our nation's needy by the PNM.

There is something that I want to warn about. Now it is all well and good to talk about giving all these handouts and goodies, but as is happening all over the world today, if for some reason—and I am not a prophet of doom and gloom—God forbid, that our economy should come crashing down, who would be the first to suffer? Who would be the first to stop receiving old age pension? SHARE hampers will be cut. That is why we on this side looked at a sustainable development path. We were encouraging our people to fish. We were encouraging our people to go to school. We were encouraging free secondary education for all.

The Prime Minister said he would take what is good. I want him to go back on that sustainable development path. That is the only way we could go forward. We cannot go forward with handouts. Forty percent poverty, as he claimed, would remain. In the next five years when they are reviewing what has happened to poverty with handouts, that figure will remain there, because it is the culture of any people—not only Trinidadians—if they get free things they will not work for them. They will not improve their own self-confidence and self-esteem.

I want him to have another look at that whole question of how they treat our poor people. They keep them in eternal poverty, they keep them in slavery. I want them to understand that carefully. We must get our people to walk.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side encourage the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), and I know the money that was given to them was cut by \$10 million. What are they replacing it with? Hampers?

There is another area I want to raise. I visited the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) headquarters in Washington, and when I spoke to the Director of the IADB, he told me that we must be careful of politicizing the IADB funding. When I listened to what was being done with the IADB funding and they

told us that we must be very careful with that, I wonder what is the IADB's take on that today. Would they encourage that spending? Would the Ministry of Finance officials and the Ministry of Planning and Development officials encourage that spending? I think we have to be careful that when these agencies lend us money it is to do things to alleviate poverty.

The National Commission for Self-Help was one such organization, and when the Member boasted about \$1.5 million for the Rock City project, I wanted to know, did the Government abdicate its responsibility for helping Rock City. The self-help was not meant to do that. The self-help was meant to assist poor people, small sums of money allocated to them. Our policy was to give people a maximum of \$150,000 so we would help as many villages as possible. When one spends \$1.5 million out of \$4 million, a total of \$17 million with the Community Development Fund (CDF) funding, that is taking a big chunk of the National Commission for Self-help's funding to help one particular area. I have a problem with that.

I wanted to ask another question. People might frown on this, but we have self-help which was meant to eradicate poverty, to alleviate poverty, to assist poor people in this country, and when I read in a newspaper that the acting Prime Minister of this country spent \$16,000 from self-help funding which should have gone to alleviate poverty to fete her in office, I had a problem with that, Mr. Speaker. When people talk about corruption, that is corruption. Taking poor people's money and spending it lavishly on a celebration! What is this coming to? What is happening here?

There are people on the other side who would ridicule us and talk about corruption and thieving and paternal and maternal. We on this side would never remain quiet until we have our answers from the other side. When the hon. Prime Minister is attempting to raise \$4 million from gaming tables or from gambling tables, he has to tell us how this money is going to be spent.

For example, we heard about willy-nilly employment practices all over the public service, WASA not excluded. Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. Prime Minister to tell us what is the policy for hiring public servants, people on contract. Tell us their policy. We might accept it, we might even applaud it, but let us know their policy. Let us know if they have thrown meritocracy across the table.

Mr. Speaker, I have a problem with that, because I feel that if we throw that through the window, our country will only slide downhill. We need people in this country. Our government was educating people all across. In the public service

today we have many people with degrees and our government was encouraging those people to come on contract. I know for a fact that the hon. Prime Minister has sent out a circular or has spoken to his Ministers to ask everybody on contract to return to their substantive post. I have a problem with that.

There are people with as high as a PhD in the public service and should they end their lives as a Clerk III or Clerk IV and have somebody whose only claim to fame is a name on the drug report working for a big fat salary? I have a problem with that. We must understand that when we encourage our people to do well, we should give them rewards.

Mr. Speaker, I respect your position as Speaker, and I know you deserve that seat otherwise we would have spoken about it. We need to see our people propelled because of how hard they worked when they were youngsters, and when we see what is happening in the country today and people being hired all across the land and discriminating against people who need and who deserve, we have a problem with that!

So when our Prime Minister is winding up and telling us what he is going to do with this money that he is attempting to raise from gambling tables and how he is going to spend this money fairly and evenly in our country, I would knock the desk because I want to see fair play. I do not want to see discrimination.

We on this side want to call on the Prime Minister to immediately put the Equal Opportunities Act into motion, because we feel discriminated—no matter what the Member for Arouca North would tell us in this honourable House about discrimination against the 46,000 people in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. I feel offended and I will not rest until you, Mr. Prime Minister, stand here and tell us that you are going to reintroduce URP for the people of Chaguanas.

This is discrimination. The people with the highest number of votes in the country is the Chaguanas constituency—16,000 plus—and the first thing they do when they get the opportunity is to say no URP for them. Any school child would understand that it is discrimination, victimization and nepotism. We hear the Member grumbling there. We have to govern this country fairly. They want to carry this country forward and make it a First World nation by 2020, and yet they discriminate against part of the population.

I have a serious problem with that, and unless that is righted, I would get up every Friday in this Parliament to cry discrimination, and 16,000-plus people voted for the UNC in Chaguanas and if you add the Borough Corporation of the 46,000 people, about 35,000 people voted for the four candidates in the

Chaguanas Borough Corporation. And we will make sure that we give them what is their just due.

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister talks about raising his \$4 million, I want to just ask a simple question. The Attorney General, in the same story in the *Sunday Express*, said the \$2.2 million was a fair settlement. How Cabinet operates—Mr. Prime Minister, you can answer this for me. You have a senior Minister of the Government making a statement that there was a fair settlement. I am not talking about the gift. The settlement was a fair one, and then Cabinet came and ruled against that decision.

What did you do to your Attorney General? Did you say nice work? She should be reprimanded and done so in public! No member of a Cabinet should go and say something in the newspaper, that decision changed and nothing was done to that member. Something should be done and he should say that. He should clear the air with us because we were Cabinet Ministers and if that happened to us—it should not happen to any Cabinet because Cabinet is secret. Everything one does in Cabinet, there are secrets.

Mr. Manning: Ask Kamla and Ramesh!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: You talk about your cabinet. Do not ask anybody else. Tell us. Tell the country that her decision was wrong. Not one, but many decisions. But I want to tell them today, all I want to know is that when they raise this \$2.2 million, they spend the money fairly across the country.

Mr. Speaker, I have some evidence of discrimination here from the Borough Corporation over the last nine months, and the performance of the Member for Arouca North has nothing to do with fair play and equity. I am calling on our hon. Prime Minister—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. Member could just give us a link between what he is saying and the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. One expects that the Member would show some skill, even if he wants to go off on a tangent.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I know he likes to be the Junior Minister of Finance and he wants to be a junior speaker, that is no problem of mine. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, I consider this, to raise \$4 million in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I know when we come to this honourable House we talk about how we are going to right the economy; where we are going to get our money from; how are we going to fund the drainage programme; how are we going to fund the best deal the Member for Diego Martin Central made in his life.

Tell us what you are going to do. They got up and talked about five minutes on what they want to do with our country's economy but, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that in the Opposition we are going to make sure, even if we have to do it Friday after Friday, day after day, that there is social equity in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling again on our Prime Minister—he cannot govern a country like this. When we were on the other side and people—*[Interruption]* I am not bringing you into any disrepute, but when people were on this side, everything would happen and they would crucify us, so to speak. We took our blows manfully, and I am still waiting with bated breath for those on the other side to apologize to us, because what they did to this country, they tried to turn our performance into old talk.

They tried to make people think negatively of what they are now claiming to be the best airport. *[Interruption]* No. Not tabanca. We do not have tabanca. You cried for six years! *[Laughter]* Mr. Speaker, we on this side must tell them that if they want to move a country forward they cannot say on one hand that the airport was a cow shed, and on the other side—

Dr. Rowley: Is. Is a cow shed.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, they believe themselves. That is the problem. They believe themselves, but yet when the Prime Minister landed at the airport for the first time what did he say? Do you remember that? He said he was so proud, like he was in a daze when he walked out, and maybe the Member for Diego Martin West talked to him and he changed his mind. Mr. Speaker, we have to call a spade a spade in this country.

Dr. Rowley: I know a cow shed when I see one.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: And your leader does not know a cow shed when he sees one.

Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed with the way this debate is going. I thought we would have somebody on the other side answering the Member for Caroni East. Obviously they have nothing to say. I want to warn the Members on the other side that bacchanalia is for the Opposition, and they practised that for the last six years. Now they must come here with serious issues. I want them to come to this House and tell us how we must go forward. They must come to this honourable Chamber—I know the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro on two occasions tried his best, but what will haunt him? I am warning him, those two statements he made about putting this country forward and trying to put plans in motion, his words will haunt him because he will not get support from his members because they do not care about people!

With respect to the Caparo Valley flooding, the hon. Member for Diego Martin East spent millions of dollars on a feasibility study and that is all he did. I heard him say that it cost \$465,000 to do 75 per cent of the project, if I remember correctly. That other 25 per cent, we will wait for almost five years and it would not be completed and it will cost millions of dollars. He said it himself. It is in the *Hansard*, that 75 per cent was completed and it cost \$465,000 and the next 25 per cent will cost millions of dollars and will not be delivered in five years under the PNM. If it happens, I will stand and congratulate you, because this is neglect.

The neglect continues, Member for Arouca North. No URP, no releases to Chaguanas Borough Corporation, no releases to the other corporations, and yet he comes here and beats his chest and talks about a fiscal surplus. I have a problem with that. He cannot say he is giving the Chaguanas Borough Corporation a measly sum of \$20 million for all to carry out all their works in Chaguanas Borough Corporation and did not release \$3.2 million and come and talk about surplus.

Those on that side talked about “ratchiffee” and we are accusing them of the same thing now. We are not accusing them. We are telling them that they spent \$600 million short in the PSIP and talked about a small surplus of \$27 million. I have a problem with that.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the hon. Members opposite—and I am challenging them—they talk about equity and about disposing their revenue fairly across this land. That will not happen. If it happens I will be the first to apologize.

I want to warn this country about something. We had the hon. Prime Minister get up this evening and speak about raising \$2.2 million. That 2.2 is stuck in my mind. Maybe it is \$4 million. He spoke about how he is going to do this and he is going to do that. I want to warn the Members opposite and warn you and the country, Mr. Speaker, that whenever somebody takes up the responsibility to be Prime Minister, “I am the jefe, the big boy, the Prime Minister. Then I am the Minister of Finance, so I give the poor people old age pension; I give the poor people SHARE; I give this; I give that. I say walk, you walk. I take the Ministry of Tobago Affairs under my wings. I treat the two Members for Tobago with contempt. One is a Junior Minister in the Ministry of Tobago Affairs, one is not. I am in charge of Tobago, when I tell Tobago jump, how high? I have taken the Ministry of Social Development, the social deliveries section, and whenever I say I am giving you something”—this is an “I man” syndrome. He is now controlling the entire Cabinet. This is something we have to be careful about. He is in control of everything.

Mr. B. Panday: Saith! He cannot do it.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I am warning the other members of the Cabinet that a man who does that will stop nowhere in becoming—I do not want to use the word “dictator”, Mr. Speaker, but for want of a better term—we on this side will guard against that, because we must not allow a dictator in Trinidad and Tobago. It happened over the last nine months and we will not apologize to anybody for not taking our seats in Parliament, but what we will make sure is that we are going to squeeze out all the information about all the money spent over the last nine months. If that does not happen we will be going to the public and we will expose them for what they have been.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, when we look at what has— [*Interruption*] Maybe somebody will say I did not get a chance to speak in the debate of the budget, but you know, the Member for Laventille West made a scathing attack on the performance of the UNC, and I want to say that as life would have it, Mr. Speaker, I normally would not keep Government documents in my briefcase, but the last sitting was a very, as you know, historic one. I think you were a Member of this House—oh no, you were not—when we had to vacate Parliament and our Prime Minister called election.

This document remained in my briefcase and I am bringing this into the debate, Mr. Speaker, because it is to do with the question of morality and spirituality, as said by the Prime Minister. She asked me a question then—

Mr. Imbert: Who is she? Who is she?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: The Member for Laventille West. As I said before, the Member for Laventille West asked some questions.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The Member.

Mr. Speaker: You cannot say she.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Okay, okay. “She” means the Member for Laventille West.

Mr. Speaker: No! You must say the Member.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: The Member. I am not disrespecting her. She is a she, but anyway, the Member asked: “Could the hon. Minister please indicate what was the allocation for the self-help programme for the period 1999—2000 and for the period 2000—2001 for the Laventille West constituency?” And I answered the question in all honesty with figures from the Ministry and yet that Member came to Parliament and spoke about nothing being done. I could lay this back on the table. It is in *Hansard* I am sure, of what we did in that area.

Worse than that, the other question the Member asked was: “Would the hon. Member indicate whether the Ministry would be hosting the Best Village for the year 2001?” Mr. Speaker, that question: “If in the negative, could he”—they used he, but I cannot use she—”could he further indicate the reason for not hosting the programme this year?”

Mr. Speaker, I put in *Hansard* that the Best Village would never be stopped and was never stopped, yet we have this hon. Member who talked about spirituality and morality coming to this honourable House and chastising Members on this other side for not doing—and when I opened my briefcase and saw this I could not help laughing. That is why I am asking those on the other side to make the point that when they come to Parliament, do not talk about bacchanal.

I am warning them. They are now in Government. Let us get their policies, let us see how they are going to carry this country forward, and when they do that, then we could sit here and listen to the hon. Prime Minister talk to us about spirituality, morality and other issues.

The Prime Minister asked for a honeymoon. I want to say with all fairness, we sit here. When we heard the request for the honeymoon, some of us joked about it, but that is not the point. When he was delivering his budget presentation, because I went through the text after to see the part about corruption, and if this happens and if this did not happen, what will happen. That was not part of the written text, but he stood up there and lambasted the Opposition as if we were still in government and he was in opposition, yet he is the man asking for a honeymoon.

Mr. Speaker, what I am getting from the other side is a series of mixed signals to the population, and I want the hon. Prime Minister to try—it might be impossible—to lead this country with dignity. He has a couple of years to run this country, and once he could hold his Members together and remain in Government, I ask him to take this country forward. I am also asking him to be honest with our nation. When he speaks to our country and talks about crime and

politicizes crime, that is a dangerous thing. Crime should never be politicized. Crime should be treated with fairness and with honesty. Treat poverty in a way that people understand how to get out of poverty. You cannot play politics with poverty.

Social displacement of vagrancy should not be played with. All the programmes that deal with people who are in need should not be made political footballs. I am asking him to come clean with our nation, try to talk to our people to see how they could live better lives, try to give them equity—and maybe he is not to blame. Mr. Speaker, maybe the Prime Minister is not to be blamed. Maybe he is being misled as the Member for Arouca North tried to mislead this House this afternoon, that we attempted to move the office to make way for the security officers of the Borough Corporation.

Mr. Speaker: I think you are misleading me, because I see before me, Motion, Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 and you are straying very far from it. Could you please come back to the Motion before us?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I know you are not easily misled, but I was trying to finish my contribution and tell the hon. Minister to treat this country with equity. To treat this country justly. We are here for a short time. Governments are elected, governments go, governments come. We have a nation to build, and with truth, with bigheartedness, with fairness, with magnanimity. They asked us not to fear for anything, yet people are being displaced; there is no equality. The URP—there is no equality in anything, but they want to carry a country forward.

Mr. Prime Minister, I ask you to tell me that you will instruct your Minister to reintroduce the URP and let the people of the Opposition constituencies receive fair play and equity. When you could do that, we will say yes, we could be getting ready for 2020. But you cannot do that. Do not try to promise people fairness and equity when you know in your heart—

He always tries to make us feel he is a religious person, a moral person, a spiritual person—which I do not buy with your present performance. I cannot buy it. If you tell us that you have turned a new leaf, maybe we will accept that and you will learn from your past mistakes.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Harry Partap (Nariva): Mr. Speaker, I join the debate on the Motion before the House relating to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 so that I can bring my concerns about this Order to the floor of the Parliament.

This Motion really is to allow the Government to raise revenue through taxes payable on gambling tables and other devices to meet expenditure. Therefore, this Motion has a nexus to the provisions of the recently approved budget. Inherent in this Motion is a clear signal that for as long as the PNM stays in office, those people at the lowest end of the social strata will remain pegged to poverty.

Behind all the platitudes contained in the last budget is the recreation of the welfare state with little or no attempt to lead the poor into lifting themselves by the bootstraps to a brighter future. In other words, the plans enunciated by the Government in the budget statement and to which this Motion on the Provisional Collection of Taxes, 2002 refers does not offer any exit out of the quagmire of poverty. That is of great concern to us on this side.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it will be more of the same lack of vision consistently demonstrated by the PNM in its half century of existence. Nothing new comes from that side. Nothing. No new ideas, no new plans. Even the manner in which they “tief” the last election was not new. They used the 17th Century British Rotten Borough concept of buying votes in Ortoire/Mayaro, Tunapuna, and in San Fernando West. Let the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro say how many jerseys with money were distributed to the voters in Moruga, Fonrose Village, Barrackpore, Fifth Company and other depressed areas in the Ortoire/Mayaro constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I was told that the PNM had developed a scale of payments for votes in the marginal seats. The going rate was good.

Mr. Manning: How much?

Mr. H. Partap: I will tell you. Three to five votes cashed in \$500 and six and more cashed in \$1,000.

Mr. Manning: We paid out the \$7 million!

Mr. H. Partap: They stole the election and they know it. They won by thievery. They are a deceitful, wicked bunch. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they can deny it if they want, but it is a well-established fact that the PNM used the resources of various ministries and state agencies in their election campaign. I do not know if the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002, which we are currently debating, will cover that expenditure. The PNM forced the taxpayers to fund their election campaign.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM's response to poverty has historically been to throw money after it. The PNM had been throwing money after every problem, only to

find out that the money is gone, but the problem remains. That is the culture of the PNM demonstrated in the ridiculous and foolish response in the 70s and the 80s. Money is no problem. That is how they intend to deal with youth unemployment and poverty.

The programmes announced by the Government recently to deal with poverty is a hopeless invitation to dependency. They on that side have offered no real blueprint for the empowerment of our people. The PNM, in its usual arrogance, is saying "Here, take the money and do not worry". The UNC had a different approach which the hon. Member for Chaguanas has already outlined, and it differs significantly from the way in which the PNM handles poverty eradication and youth unemployment.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC's social development thrust clearly took into consideration the fact that those at the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder must be given the opportunity to break loose from the cycle of poverty. Our emphasis on education and training, as part of the social assistance package, demonstrated our commitment to this goal.

The Government has outlined a number of programmes in the recent budget presentation which, on the face of it, gave the impression that young people would be exposed to some kind of training while being employed. It is a con job. It is a con job! The PNM has again deceived the people. It is like wrapping \$100 bills in a jersey and dropping them off in every home during the election campaign. That is what they are good at. They are good at deception.

Mr. Speaker, when one really does a closer analysis of their programmes, it will be revealed to us and to you, Sir, that they are not at all geared to provide training for sustainable employment. Take for example the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture known as YAPA. This programme was allocated \$33.5 million in the run-up to the general election to provide young people with, and I quote, "firsthand knowledge and experience in agriculture". That was the basis.

I have no problem with the intent of the programme, and we on this side have no problem with the intent of the programme. What I take issue with is the fact that our young people were assigned to farmers who are not geared to provide training. Our young people ended up being a source of free labour to these farmers at taxpayer's expense. There is an example in Rio Claro where our young people were being taught to shovel sawdust and cart the bags to a particular poultry farm. That is YAPA. Shoveling sawdust and taking it to a poultry farm.

Mr. Speaker, is YAPA training our young people to shovel sawdust? Is it that YAPA is training young people to cut grass as part of the wacker gang? If so, what a major breakthrough by the PNM in encouraging young people into agriculture. What a major breakthrough.

Mr. B. Panday: And then they want to charge this tax.

Mr. H. Partap: The truth is, hon. Minister of Agriculture, you continue to fail the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I must tell you hon. Minister of Agriculture, you are fooling yourself and all those young people who will exit the YAPA programme none the better to access sustainable employment.

The YAPA programme has no relevance to training in agriculture. No relevance to training. In fact, the YAPA programme will do more damage to any agricultural thrust proposed by your government. Mr. Minister of Agriculture, you are promoting the exploitation of our young people. Get serious about YAPA. It may be a good programme. Get serious about it. If you are serious about helping our young people, you are going to review that programme.

Mr. Speaker, this is what my colleague, the hon. Member for Oropouche was alluding to in his contribution to the budget debate. My colleague quoted from a *Trinidad Guardian* editorial of October 23, 2002 which sent a clear signal that there should be no return to the days of pork barrel politics introduced and sustained by the PNM since 1956.

I want to make it clear this evening that we on this side are not against assistance to the poor and vulnerable in the society or to young people getting jobs. Indeed, the UNC has a track record of implementing policies to empower the poor. Our record is there for all to see. What we are saying is, use the programmes to train our young people for sustainable employment.

I am sure that the hon. Member for San Fernando West understands what we on this side are saying. So I was disappointed that during her contribution to the debate, she could have interpreted our demand for training for sustainable employment as being against young people getting employment. I hope the distinguished Member for San Fernando West would not compromise her known propensity for fairness, equity and clear thinking for cheap politics.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I advise the distinguished Member for San Fernando West not to put on her PNM blinkers too early or she would be condemned by history for contributing to the beginning of the decline of another generation of young people under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]. I say no more.

Unless that element of sustainable employment becomes clear to those young people outside there, all those programmes of the Government will be slapped with a ten-day stigma and we are back to square one. It is my view that the PNM is continuing its general election campaign into the local government campaign, and that there is no real plan to provide our unemployed with sustainable jobs.

Mr. Speaker, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 will not benefit people who are unemployed unless the Government has a clear policy to create employment, but the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 appears to be designed to create unemployment, as my colleague from Caroni East indicated earlier.

Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that the Government has pegged its hopes on the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development to provide 10,000 new jobs in two years through what they call the National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO). We are told that NEDCO has already disbursed 900 loans from its \$10 million capital base.

Mr. Manning: That was then.

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, I find the efficiency of this new creature quite astounding. Nine hundred applications already processed. NEDCO was launched on Emancipation Day, and in a period of fewer than 60 days was able to dispose of 900 loans. That is efficiency! This means that NEDCO was able to process some 18 loans each working day since August 01, 2002. But, Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, my good friend. Was NEDCO a free-for-all electioneering gimmick? Was it?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, could you please relate it to the Motion before us which is the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Come back to that, please.

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It will relate to where the money will come from for the revenue to finance NEDCO. [*Desk thumping*]

I say again, is NEDCO a pork barrel agency established to service PNM party supporters and party hacks? And perhaps the \$4 million from the collection of the taxes, the Order that is before us. It may be there. What was the quantum of the loans? What criteria were used for granting these loans? Was there a screening process? Was the selection of recipients transparent? How were these loans to be repaid? What monitoring mechanisms were put in place to ensure that loans were used for the purposes intended?

Mr. Speaker, these are questions that the Minister must answer with regard to NEDCO, because I find that the circumstances surrounding the establishment of NEDCO to be quite obscene, and it appears to us, it lacks transparency and accountability. Rest assured, Mr. Speaker, you have not heard the last of this matter.

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 will no doubt impact on Government's thrust to develop small and micro enterprises. On the face of it, Government is moving again to establish a Credit Union Development Bank. According to the Minister of Finance and the Member for San Fernando East, this new institution will serve as the bank to invest the resources of the credit union movement, but the Minister did not stop there. He could have fooled us if he had stopped there, but he did not stop there.

He went on to explain, and I quote from the 2002/2003 budget statement:

“These resources will be available to our small and micro enterprise development effort and other national development priorities as determined by the Government.”

That is credit union money. That is a dangerous trend and it must ring alarm bells. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this Government wants to get its hands on the rich financial resources of the credit union movement as it is conniving to get its hands on Caroni lands. [*Desk thumping*] Credit union members beware, the assets of the movement are now being eyed by the PNM Government. The credit union movement must be cautious.

I want to warn members of the credit unions that the PNM is handing out a \$10,000 tax credit for deposits in credit unions but has intentions to grab your assets through a credit union bank. Be careful about supporting another credit union bank. The experiences of the ill-fated Cooperative Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago is sufficiently fresh in our minds to send alarm signals. Those losses are too fresh to be ignored, and I believe I have a duty to draw the attention of all credit union members to what took place at the Cooperative Development Bank so that they will not plunge into this new venture proposed by the Government without careful study and analysis.

Mr. Speaker, the Cooperative Development Bank was established in 1956 and registered in January, 1957. It became known as the Cooperative Credit Union Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. It was established as part of a plan by the credit union movement for some form of central financing agency to meet the needs of the society. The objectives were laudable. Indeed, the share capital grew from

\$14,150 in 1957 to \$7 million in 1973. Its total assets increased, thereby, to \$32 million with loans exceeding \$30 million to cooperatives and their societies and their members. But the bank failed. The bank failed.

The PNM Government at that time did not lift a finger to save the institution. The PNM did not act to protect the investment of the same poor people who they are now boasting about caring for. So when the UNC came into office, the bank had gone over the brink and was a liability to its shareholders. In 1996 the bank was put into receivership. The result was that over 400 depositors lost \$2.4 million and 120 credit unions lost \$12 million in payroll accounts and deposits.

I fear that the PNM intends to lead the credit union movement down the garden path into a new credit union bank. The PNM's track record in this field is well known. Therefore, I can only conclude that the Government wants to get its hands on the credit union money and will con the movement into believing that another experience with a credit union bank will be in their interest. I caution, proceed with care or God help us all.

Mr. Speaker, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 will not affect the intention of the Government to increase the national minimum wage to \$8 an hour. This should have been done since January, 2002. Indeed, when the UNC was denied office in December, 2001, a recommendation from the Minimum Wages Board was already prepared as an order for Cabinet's approval increasing the national minimum wage to \$8 an hour. I want to point out that the Minimum Wage Board had conducted the necessary consultation with the social partners before making that recommendation.

I do not know if the Minister that came into office in December last year was taking a rest, but that order was there and it was his duty to take it to Cabinet. The delay by the PNM Government in 2002 to implement the order may have cost low-paid, low-skilled workers in the country some \$8,300 in lost income. That is how much those opposite care for the poor.

You have denied each of the lowest paid workers in the country which includes thousands of single mothers \$8,300 in wages by making a political football of the national minimum wage. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development made a public declaration—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended and will be resumed at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, we were discussing the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 before the tea break and I was saying that the Hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development made a public declaration on a radio interview advocating a fair system of national minimum wage. As I understand his argument, there should be one national minimum wage for workers employed by foreign contractors and another for workers employed by local employers. This harebrained plan exposes the fact that the hon. Minister does not have an understanding of the concept of a national minimum wage.

Permit me to conduct a crash course on the concept of a national minimum wage for the benefit of the hon. Minister. He is not here in the Chamber but I am sure that he will read it in the *Hansard*.

A national minimum wage is a basic floor of income for all workers, particularly those in the low-skilled/non-skilled category. These workers are usually low-paid. By setting a national minimum you ensure that no worker in the country, including those who would be working in these gambling places—the casinos—for which provision is being made in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002, will be protected under a national minimum wage.

Indeed, it means that no worker in the country should receive a wage that is below the national minimum wage. Market sources will continue to influence the level of pay above the national minimum. It is the responsibility, therefore, of the Labour Inspectorate of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development to enforce compliance and I sincerely hope that this is still being done at that Ministry.

I want to compliment the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development for continuing the labour policies of the UNC. I make this assumption on the fact that none of the documents we received reviewing the Ministry and making projections betrayed anything new and innovative. In fact, there were no announced plans to deepen the commitment to the protection of workers' rights in Trinidad and Tobago. As if as an afterthought, the Social and Economic Policy Framework, 2003 mentions at page 73, and I quote:

“Employment growth will be pursued within the framework of ensuring that workers' rights are respected, income is adequate, the environment is safe, and above all human dignity is respected and preserved.”

Apparently that was the end of Government's commitment, because there was no mention of the legislation to back up the high-sounding declaration in the Social and Economic Policy Framework, 2003. I want to remind the Government that there are several pieces of labour legislation left by the UNC administration at the Ministry which need parliamentary approval to advance workers' rights and protection. All these pieces of labour legislation were at an advanced stage of completion and I hope that the Minister will get busy and bring those before Parliament.

I would just mention a few that had been left there: There is the Occupational Safety and Health Bill. It would also protect the rights of workers, even workers at these casinos which the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order will be covering. There is the Industrial Injury and Benefits Bill which replaces the Workmen's Compensation Act; the revision of the Industrial Relations Act; the re-engineering of the labour administration and the completion of the National Human Resource Management Information System to provide labour market information, of which I am sure the Minister is well aware.

I am not certain what is the commitment of the Government to the passage and implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Bill. I have examined the Public Sector Investment Programme, but no funds had been allocated to implement what the Social and Economic Policy Framework commits in relation to OSHA. What does the Social and Economic Policy Framework say about OSHA? I quote at page 60:

“The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development...will establish the Occupational Safety and Health Authority to address the needs of industry and ensure the health and safety of workers in the industrial environment. The Authority will have a mandate to deal with issues related to inspections and compliance, and to provide advice to the industries on the prevention and the management of accidents.”

The PSIP does not reflect this optimistic view of the Social and Economic Policy Framework. This appears to be another con-job that the PNM intends to inflict on workers of this country. I hope not.

I have already alluded to the fact that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 provides for the revenue to meet the expenditure in the Finance Bill. What the Motion will not cater for are acts of discrimination against our citizens. It is my duty to insist that access to programmes in the social sector, regardless of how I feel about those programmes, must be available to all citizens—I mean, all citizens—regardless of race or political affiliation.

The evidence before us in our constituencies points to a dangerous level of imbalance or even discrimination in the selection of citizens for these programmes. I refer particularly to the Unemployment Relief Programme, the On-the-Job Training and the 50 other programmes financed through the Solid Waste Management Company, Petrotrin, National Petroleum, and other State agencies. The discrimination is glaring and it is not good for the good governance of our nation. All citizens should have access to the resources of this country.

The hon. Member for San Fernando East and Prime Minister, in winding up the budget debate on October 25, lectured the House on race relations and the need to act responsibly and not divide the nation. It appears to me that he was pointing fingers at us on this side. I want to remind the hon. Prime Minister of the biblical injunction contained in St. Matthew's Gospel, Chap. 7: 3. I quote:

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

But Jesus Christ did not stop there. He went on further at verse 5:

“Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

“Thou hypocrite”. It is not me who said it. I merely borrow the words of Jesus Christ. Take a look at the URP, the OJT and the other programmes and realize how shallow was the admonition of the Member for San Fernando East. He is presiding over a bunch of hypocrites, feeding the nation a menu of lies and accusing us of inciting racial division, when they are doing it every day against our citizens in the constituencies that we represent. But God will deal with them for any injustice against his people.

If the Government had been prudent in managing the economy there may not have been the need to debate this Motion for the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002. I was heartened by the public utterances of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources about his concern for the farmers of this country. I have no doubt that he means well, and I have no doubt that as a person with a business background, he would understand the special plight of farmers who themselves would want to operate their holdings as a business.

Making nice speeches under the bright lights of the media is one thing, but taking the action to assist the farmers is quite another. The Minister can start by instructing his Ministry to pay the compensation to farmers in Cascadoo, Kernahan and Plum Mitán for flood damage to crops in December 2001 and

March 2002. These farmers have followed the established procedures of the Ministry. That crop damage was assessed by officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and submitted for payment. It is now November, 2002. A third claim is underway following the flooding this week and I notice that the hon. Minister of Works and Transport did not include Plum Mitan, Charuma and Navet which had been flooded also recently. But I am sure that he would include it.

As I said, it is now November 2002 and the third claim is on its way following the flood, but farmers did not receive payments for their losses in December 2001 and March 2002. I hope that the \$4 million that is being collected in the Provisional Collection and Taxes Order, 2002 can be used to offset this debt to the farmers.

I am aware that the PNM's shadow Member of Parliament for Nariva, the gracious lady who lost the election to me, is being encouraged by the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to take up the matter on behalf of the farmers. I have no problem with that; absolutely no problem. I am not in the business of getting political mileage from the distress of people. I do no such thing. That is not my style. I am just sounding a warning to the Minister: For heaven's sake, in the matter of compensation, do not use farmers who suffered losses on two occasions as political pawns. I know he would not do that, but I am just telling him not to do it.

These farmers are in serious financial problems, having lost their seed capital to the floods. They need the compensation money to re-finance planting. Stop the political game and pay the farmers. In fact, the Minister can border on the obscene if he likes, by allowing his shadow Member for Nariva to hand out the cheques to the affected farmers. He could do as he pleases, but get the money to the farmers urgently.

The Motion on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 will pave the way for Government to continue to provide for the services to the people. In this context, I make an appeal to the hon. Minister of Works and Transport to continue the rehabilitation and paving of the Cunapo Main Road from Rio Claro to Sangre Grande. You would no doubt recall that under the UNC administration we had commenced the rehabilitation and paving exercise in November 2001 following the construction of six concrete bridges and the repairs to three major landslips along that road.

However, as you are also aware, the 2001 general election intervened and the

project was suspended. Indeed, it was stopped, because to date no work has restarted. This is a main thoroughfare that connects Rio Claro to Sangre Grande. It has deteriorated to the extent that storm water has created small drains across the roadway at several points. The road is a living nightmare to motorists and pedestrians alike and I travel that road seven days a week.

I wrote the former Minister of Works and Transport on the matter earlier this year making a similar request. In a chance encounter with the former Minister at the opening of Parliament, he advised that funds have been sourced for the project and the rehabilitation and paving exercise should be restarted. I make this information available on the floor of the Parliament not to embarrass anyone but to emphasize the urgent need to treat the people of Nariva equally and give them their road.

I say again, I have no problem if the PNM shadow Member for Nariva, the defeated candidate, sits on the mechanical paver to start the project, but please start the exercise as early as possible and put an end to the perception that the PNM is inflicting political punishment on the travelling population of Nariva and its environs.

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

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, clause 2 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 is the only revenue-earning clause in this Order. I stand here and I wonder how they are going to raise the revenue to conduct the affairs of the country. They have scrapped one of the major drivers of the economy.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give way, because, honestly, I think that is fundamental. It is the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, and the only purpose of the Order is to raise new taxes. In other words, if you do not know that, I say it simply to guide you so that you would be informed— [*Interruption*]

Dr. A. Nanan: I want to draw the Member's attention to Friday, October 23, 1998, *Hansard*, on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order where a point of order was raised on Standing Order 36(3), and the ruling given by the Deputy Speaker, if you would recall, is:

“The Bill which is before us today is an extension of that debate...”

That is the previous debate.

“...and a Member has all right to do it, although without tedious repetitions and irrelevance.” [*Desk thumping*]

The relevance of what I am going to say—and I want the hon. Prime Minister to listen very carefully because he was misled by his Member for Diego Martin West. He came in this House during the budget debate and he spoke about the International Conference Complex and that the project was a failure, and he went to 2015 in terms of a projection of expenditure. But I will show here today in this House that we could still go back to the project because the project is a viable project. It will bring revenue into this country so there will be no need for these punitive measures in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order here. [*Desk thumping*]

In the budget debate—I will not be tedious; I will not be irrelevant, but it is very important to understand that the International Conference Complex was a tourism project. It is not a UNC project; it is not a PNM project; it is a project for Trinidad and Tobago. I want to bring you back in terms of what the hon. Member said about the project that it would have been a direct revenue stream. He said, which is true, that:

“Cabinet approved in 1998 the adoption and implementation of phase one of the Port of Spain International Complex project which would include two office blocks, four conference facilities and accommodation for the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) at an estimated cost of \$265 million.”

But the project of 2001—and he made reference to it in his contribution and said by the time the building was finished it was \$1.6 billion and by the time the debt is paid it would be \$3.6 billion. I will show here that the project of 2001 was part of the Government's thrust to improve the tourism sector.

“The plan for a waterfront development in Port of Spain ICC Tourism Project, with hotel and National Centre for the Performing Arts, is one that will raise the awareness of Trinidad as a destination and increase its overall vibrancy within the overall southern Caribbean region.

The RGM report, published in July 1997, began a careful discussion about the idea of developing a complex that would provide the requirements for the Caribbean Trade Association and meet the needs of a growing trend in business travel, meetings and conferences within the Caribbean basin.”

The site that is most suitable to the project is King's Wharf.

Mr. Valley: What does that have to do with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order?

Dr. A. Nanan: I told you that I will show in my contribution that the revenue generated from this project, which is a feasible project—there was no need for this punitive measure in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. [*Desk thumping*] I will show the Member for Diego Martin Central the profile this evening, in terms of VAT collection, corporation tax and all the other taxes, that this project was a viable project.

Getting back to the site:

“This site currently serves as a trade port and port-of-call for a steadily growing cruise industry.”

I am sure the Minister of Tourism would be very happy to hear about this project that was scrapped by the Member for Diego Martin West, and how he could continue with this same project. I want the Member for San Fernando East to reconsider.

The tourism master plan it is not something that just came out of the sky. This project is part of the Government's thrust in terms of tourism. It comes on the heel of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Master Plan. It was not something that just came out of the sky. It is part of the advances of the tourism master plan and it is also part of the airport upgrade.

“Based on a feasibility study carried out by Synterra International who were commissioned by RGM to develop a facility program for all the components of the proposed Port-of-Spain ICC Tourism Project, they concluded that a National Centre for the Performing Arts...”

was also a part of the centre.

I am just giving you a history in terms of this particular project and how this project came about. It was not something the UNC pulled out of the sky. It came about based on a feasibility study. Synterra International came here—and there is another interesting aspect here that I want to point out this evening.

“Synterra International has led the collaborative effort with RGM and UDeCOTT...”

And mention was made here of UDeCOTT.

“...to develop the implementation plan for the Port of Spain International Conference Complex (ICC) Tourism Project. The development team reviewed previous 1997 plans created for the Kings Wharf site...”

Listen to this, Mr. Speaker:

“As the Synterra International team analysed ways to invigorate and 'jump-start' the development of the ICC Tourism Project, they discovered that there were a very limited number of business class hotel rooms in Port of Spain. A determination was initially made that an internationally branded hotel would be an essential element of a successful conference complex. Synterra International presented preliminary findings to Crestline Capital, a major U.S. based operator for Marriott Hotels...”

This is what they are turning down:

“...Crestline representatives visited Port of Spain and agreed that the Kings Wharf site would be an appropriate site for a Marriott Hotel.”

The Member for Diego Martin West came and spewed his mouth in this House and fooled the entire population [*Desk thumping*] I do not know if he was misled by the technocrats in his Ministry, but he must take a look at the report again. [*Crosstalk*]

“The previous design for the ICC Tourism Project proposed twin 20-story office towers as the chief commercial elements of the overall development. The current proposed development program retains the objective of developing a substantial office concentration on the waterfront, but the current program also accommodates the new objective of hotel development.”

This is why the project went to a larger figure.

“This will be accomplished by adjusting the prior office development approach to stage office development in two phases. The first phase will be incorporated in a mixed-use hotel/office tower with a total of eight floors of office space; the second phase will be an office tower constructed over the Waterfront Place retail facility. Dedicated lobbies and elevator banks will service each office complex.”

It is interesting to note that this is the kind of project that was in the budget for \$1.2 billion that he is talking about in his contribution as “airport two”. But I want to show the Member for Diego Martin West that he should have read the profile in terms of the revenue-generation from this project and he would see that you would not have to bring in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order today with its punitive measures.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West, when he gave his contribution—I would not say he pulled figures out of the sky because the figures

were correct, but he just did not give the full picture in terms of this project. That is why I am so happy for the opportunity this evening to let him know, if he did not read the report of the Synterra Partners and he just read a report of technocrats, what is the actual status.

“Project Financing

The estimated total development cost of all buildings and infrastructure for the ICC Tourism Project is TT \$1,176,000,000. While selected commercial components of the project (office and retail) generate net revenues sufficient to facilitate development with private sector financing alone, private sector financing for other elements, such as the hotel, will need to be supplemented with government investment.”

I will show that in terms of a projection of revenue, you will see that even with the debt servicing there would be a projected revenue stream coming into the country with this particular project:

“The conference center and parking garage both generate revenues but not at a level that covers development costs and will require Build Own Operate Transfer (BOOT) financing. Common areas such as site infrastructure and pedestrian walkways will require government financing through Build Own Lease Transfer (BOLT). It is anticipated that The National Center for the Performing Arts would be financed with government and corporate contributions, including use of BOOT.

The ICC Tourism Project will provide a catalyst for development in the surrounding area and generate spin-off revenues...”

This is very important, this spin-off revenue stream:

“...to the government in the form of taxes...”

That is the link, Mr. Speaker, to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order—

“...new employment (both construction and permanent jobs) and significantly increased visitor arrivals that generate new spending. These financial benefits provide the rationale for and return on project investments by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Conference Centre: The estimated cost of the Conference Centre is TT \$277,000,000. Conference centers of this type are typically publicly financed requiring development and operating subsidies. The proposed financing for the conference center would use the Build Own Operate Transfer mechanism

that has been used for other facilities in Trinidad. RGM and Royal Bank, in concert with the government, would arrange financing.

Commercial Block & Retail/Office: This block is proposed as a two-part development with the Waterfront Mall constructed in Part I and offices developed in a later phase as the market demand warrants. The estimated cost of the Waterfront Mall is TT \$82,000,000 and estimated cost of the office is TT \$138,000,000. Potential revenue support, financing, and private sector financing for the commercial block would be provided by RGM and Royal Bank.

Hotel/Office Tower: The central and largest building of the ICC Tourism Project complex will contain both offices and hotel rooms.

Tower offices: Potential revenues for the 88,000 s.f. tower offices will support private sector financing of TT \$132,000,000. RGM and Royal Bank will provide financing for the tower offices.

Hotel: The estimated development cost for the 400 room hotel is \$325,000,000 TT. The financing of hotel properties (or in this case the hotel component of a mixed-use building) bears little resemblance to the financing of other commercial properties such as office and retail. Hotel properties rely on the success of a business and are thus underwritten for financing as business...”

I agree with the Member for Diego Martin West in terms of the hotel component:

“...rather than real estate, investments.”

But I would show him that the tax from that hotel could be a revenue stream:

“Private sector sources view hotel financing as high-risk investments...”

That is the main issue here:

“...dependent upon local and international economic conditions, management quality, and unpredictable travel patterns.”

As he spoke about the 9/11 situation. This is the part, Mr. Speaker:

“The Marriott Hotel planned for the ICC Tourism Project incurs the development costs of a high-rise structure on an environmentally sensitive site. While potential market support appears strong, the absence of similar new properties of this scale in Trinidad results in rather conservative underwriting by private sector financing sources. The projected stabilized

income averaging US \$5.5 million annually is not sufficient to attract a private sector partners only.

The specific debt/equity and private/public investment ratios needed to support the hotel is a 50% minimum equity position by the government of Trinidad and Tobago.”

Hon. Member: What does that mean?

Dr. A. Nanan: You probably do not know that, but ask the Member for Diego Martin Central and he will tell you:

“It is anticipated that hotel financing will be arranged jointly...”

This is what it means:

“...by Synterra Partners, RGM and the Trinidad & Tobago government.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I heard what you said originally but, please, I am asking you to relate it to the Motion before us. Every now and again come back to it.

Dr. A. Nanan: Sure, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I will just go on to the National Centre for the Performing Arts and then I will come back to the corporation tax and all the other tax measures. I just want you to see the whole tourism complex, in case you did not see it, and the Member for Diego Martin West did not tell you about it. I just want to give you an idea of what he turned down and the kind of revenue stream.

Hon. Member: I do not see where that comes in.

Dr. A. Nanan: The national community will decide.

“The performing arts center has an estimated development cost of TT \$72,000,000. “

Mr. Speaker, here is the Economic Impact Analysis which will show the relevance of the tax measures:

“The economic impacts of the Port-of-Spain ICC Tourism Project will occur in three areas:

- A. new employment generated at the complex;
- B. direct tax benefits accruing from economic activity at the complex; and,
- C. additional economic benefits resulting from the expenditures in other portions of Trinidad by the new visitors attracted to conference activity at the complex.”

When I speak about new permanent employment, you would realize that the more people that are employed, there would be more tax by the income earned and that would be part of the revenue-generating stream, and that is how it relates to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order:

“Nearly 1200 new permanent jobs will be created...”

I go now to:

“Direct Tax Benefits:

The government of Trinidad and Tobago will receive dramatically increased annual taxes and direct income as a result of the development of the Port-of-Spain International Conference Complex. The total annual tax and income benefits from the complex will be more than TT \$93 million at 2001 wage and price levels. These tax benefits include:

- an estimated \$11.3 million in increased income taxes paid by the nearly 1200 new employees at the complex;
- \$11.7 million in increased corporation taxes;
- \$48.3 million in increased VAT payments;
- \$8 million in hotel room taxes;
- \$8.4 million in real estate taxes;
- \$2.6 million in increased airport passenger taxes from the 26,000 new visitors attracted to the conference complex;
- \$.3 million in new insurance premium taxes;
- \$1.2 million in annual land lease payments; and
- \$1.2 million in annual utility income.

While the 26,000 new visitors to Trinidad will make most of their lodging expenditures at the International Conference Centre, as well as eat some of their meals there, they will also make significant purchases from other Trinidad restaurants, retailers, transportation companies, and attractions. These off-site expenditures are estimated to be over TT \$106 million per year, yielding an additional \$15.9 million in VAT for the government of Trinidad and Tobago.”

That is why this direct revenue source would have made this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order today obsolete:

“The total tax benefits accruing to the government each year directly from this complex and from the new visitors attracted to Trinidad and Tobago by the complex will be TT \$109 million.”

The Projected Revenue:

The debt servicing of the conference centre, car park and the art centre, which is 50 per cent, is \$67.5 million. The hotel/debt service is \$10.3 million. Conference/car park revenue from this centre would have been \$14.6 million, and the hotel revenue, \$17.1 million.

I spoke about the VAT on additional spending. That would be the 26,000 visitors that would be spending money within the economy—\$15.9 million; direct tax revenue, \$90.6 million; and the lease/utility, \$2.7 million.

Mr. Valley: I wonder whether the hon. Member would allow me to ask just two questions please—

Dr. A. Nanan: Hold on. I just want to continue this trend of thought here.

Mr. Valley: Okay.

Dr. A. Nanan: The net revenue for this project is \$63.1 million, as against \$1.8 million from this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Mr. Valley: Would the Member give way now?

Dr. A. Nanan: No. I want to go to job creation.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important project that was not carefully thought out, in terms of being turned down by the Member for Diego Martin West. The Net Revenue, \$63.1 million, is the kind of stream that we are seeing.

The Member made reference to the airport.

“The development of the new Piarco International Airport terminal...offers 445,000 sq. ft of state-of-the-art enclosed facilities for in and out bound travellers—14 loading bridges (gates), six automated baggage carousels and 82 ticket counters.”

Listen to this—and he talks about cow shed:

“This project has been a major capital investment, which clearly signals that Trinidad is open for visitor travel. The older terminal is a classic picture of an open-air Caribbean facility with limited shopping...”

And, Mr. Speaker, I could link that to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order because you would collect departure taxes and other taxes from the sales here:

“...and eating options, locals milling around the baggage and seating areas and gates that provide steps to a back access for visitors to walk a distance and board planes. The new airport indicates an understanding of what international visitors expect...”

And when you have a tourism thrust you must have that kind of standard. The new airport meets those standards of the discriminating traveller:

“The challenge is now to develop the additional relationships...”

And that is why this linkage with the whole tourism conference centre, and all the other areas in terms of lifting standards in the country was geared towards this tourism thrust.

“The Retail Development of the complex: The previous design for the ICC Tourism Project included only limited retail development, mostly along the waterfront walkway, and a free-standing multiple restaurant complex...”

May I take a break to drink some water, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the Member would allow me to ask the question now. [*Crosstalk*] I am enjoying the Member's contribution, but I wanted to ask him whether the investors would guarantee those returns that he is speaking about, to the Government; whether they are prepared to guarantee those returns.

Hon. Member: Do not be distracted.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, as the former Tourism Minister, I was part of the Synterra group. I went to Washington with the Ambassador to Washington—I do not want to call names, but—Mr. Arneaud. We met Synterra Partners and that is how this whole project—[*Interruption*] He could shout corruption from the rooftop but it is part of the tourism thrust, and that is why it was so important. I do not know if the hon. Member was listening, but I spoke about Marriott being interested.

The direct tax benefits—and I will detail it in terms of the facilities.

The Marriott Hotel:

Income Tax	\$3,810 million annually;
Corporation tax	\$2,750 million. All linked to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.
VAT	\$6,800 million from the Marriott Hotel.

Provisional Collection of Taxes Order
[DR. NANAN]

Friday, November 08, 2002

Hotel Room Tax \$8,030 million

Airport Passenger Tax \$2,600 million

That is from the tourists coming into the Marriott.

Total \$23,990 million.

Conference Centre:

Income Tax \$540,000

VAT \$1,500 million.

That alone, and this collection here is a measly \$1.8 million.

Total \$2.04 million.

Theatre Complex:

Income Tax \$540,000

VAT \$1.5 million

Total \$2.04 million.

Office Tower:

Tenants:

Income Tax \$3.52 million

Tower Maintenance/Security/Management:

Income Tax: \$610,000

Corporation Tax \$950,000

VAT \$4.08 million

Total \$5.64 million.

And we come here to talk about \$1.8 million from this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. I continue:

Waterfront Mall:

Tenants: \$1.24 million

Corporation Tax \$5.9 million.

I see the Member for Diego Martin West taking notes. I continue:

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VAT	\$25.31 million
Total	\$32.46 million.

Mall Maintenance/Security/Management:

Income Tax	\$270,000
Corporation Tax	\$500,000
VAT	\$2.14 million
Total	\$2.9 million.

Promenade Shopping Tenants:

Income Tax	\$290,000
Corporation Tax	\$1.34 million
VAT	\$5.72 million
Total	\$7.35 million.

Parking Complex:

Income Tax	\$230,000
Corporation Tax	\$290,000
VAT	\$1.22 million
Total	\$1.74 million.

Exterior/Public Space Maintenance/Security/Management:

Income Tax	\$270,000
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Total:

Income Tax	\$11.32 million annually
Corporation Tax	\$11.74 million
VAT	\$48.27 million
Hotel Room Tax	\$8.03million
Real Estate Tax	\$8.4 million
Airport Passenger Tax	\$290,000

Annual Land Lease Income \$1.2 million

Provisional Collection of Taxes Order
[DR. NANAN]

Friday, November 08, 2002

Annual Utility Income	\$1.2 million
Total	\$93.05 million.

A direct revenue stream coming into the country. When you take out all the other debt servicing, you have a figure of \$63.1 million above the red line. That is profit.

The Member for Diego Martin West needs to go back to his technocrats and look at this particular project. I do not have shares in the complex.

Mr. Speaker, I gave you and the country an insight in terms of project financing, and I also want to talk before I wind up my contribution, about the situation with financing, because this is very important. There are specific mechanisms for financing.

“The construction cost of Performing Arts centres...”

He spoke about that. He said the Government has to put 100 per cent for the performing arts:

“...is generally underwritten by broad-based partnerships of government and business.”

As the Member said:

“Performing Arts centres typically generate up to 50% of their operating costs...”

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is related to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order because it is all part of the revenue-generation stream:

“...through box office revenues with the budget balances furnished, again, by partnerships of government, business and private sponsors. It is essential for the National Centre for the Performing Arts to be viewed as part of the infrastructure to support the growth of cultural and events tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Much of the construction and operating costs re-circulates through the local economy...”

That is the key. You have it in employment-generation:

“...business purchases, services contracts and the taxes that each of these generates. The distinct identity within the Caribbean region that a first class performing arts center/conference facility will confer on Trinidad and Tobago (will) enhance marketability of each commercial element proposed for the

Kings Wharf waterfront development. It would also elevate the nation's cultural tourism..."

They say they are putting a lot of money into the tourism thrust over the next few years:

"...to a level that is unsurpassed elsewhere in the Caribbean.

On the government side, methods of financing..."

Of course, the Minister of Finance is aware of these. This is how they operate in other countries:

"Municipal bonds underwrote a significant portion of the development cost of Seattle, Washington's 2,500-seat concert hall in 1998 and the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre's 720-seat Powerhouse Theatre."

I am showing the link between this conference centre, the link between the Government and business partnership arrangements, so you have more revenue coming into the country through the tourism thrust. Then as you have more revenue coming into the country and you have this positive revenue base through this complex, you would have no need for this punitive measure of \$1.8 million in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

There are also other options:

"A local options tax provided financing..."

This is how it was done in Athens, Georgia for that particular classic art centre:

"The Sydney Opera House was financed through lottery..."

So there are other means from which revenue can be generated.

Before I wind up I just want to give you an idea of this particular performing arts centre in Iowa. It was opened in 2000 at a cost of US \$23 million.

"This center features a 1,620-seat multi-purpose Great Hall for concerts"—
[*Interruption*]

You see, that is the mentality of those on that side. We are speaking about building the country and he is telling me to put it in Tabaquite. If you were listening, I told you the importance was on the wharf. I prefer to speak to the Member for Diego Martin Central:

"This center features a 1,620-seat multi-purpose Great Hall for concerts..."

This is what this project was doing, improving the cultural thrust, and you would not have to tax gambling tables:

“Funding included the state legislature, two individual contributions of \$1 million each...”

This is what we are opening up. The business sector would have been contributing. People would have actually given money to help with the Performing Arts:

“...forty contributions of \$50,000 each...”

That is the kind of generous donations that were coming in:

“...and 1,360 smaller contributions...”

All of that, Mr. Speaker:

“A local university foundation also made a substantial contribution.”

The youth were getting involved in all of this. This was not a government initiative only, this was the whole country coming together on this conference complex. This is the 2020 vision that they should have seen. When I spoke about his budget being myopic, that is what I meant, in terms of a sustainable development growth plan. As one of our Members on this side said, the tourism thrust.

I ask that this project be revisited in terms of the revenue-generation possibilities. I have shown quite clearly that you would have substantial revenue coming in from this particular project. This was a three-year project. The construction would have taken three years and after the three years the revenue stream would have continued to flow.

I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate and I hope that the Member for San Fernando East would have further discussion with the Member for Diego Martin West in terms of the revenue-generation of this particular project, and they would not come with this \$1.8 million punitive measure for the poor citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning):
Mr. Speaker, it is an old adage that says: “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” Whether the hon. Members opposite this evening were operating on that premise is something that I am unable to determine. What we did notice is that the battle was joined by the Member for Caroni East, the Member for Chaguanas, the

Member for Nariva and the Member for Tabaquite, on a finance matter where the two principal financial experts on that side, the very distinguished Member for St. Augustine and the Member for St. Joseph, chose to remain silent. The silence of the Member for St. Augustine still continues to elude me; the reason for that silence. However, the reason for the silence of the Member for St. Joseph is very clear.

I want to draw the attention of hon. Members to a debate which took place in this Parliament on Thursday, September 27, 2001, when a Provisional Collection of Taxes Order was being confirmed by the Parliament, and that the issue involved was an increase of 100 per cent on the very same tables that we are seeking to increase the taxes on this evening by way of the Order that is before this honourable House.

I quote—and it is the hon. Gerard Yetming speaking, the Minister of Finance at the time:

“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 and 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...”

Very elegant language:

“...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.”

If it is that the very distinguished Member for St. Joseph chose not to intervene in the debate this afternoon, it is merely because he was in full agreement with the position adopted by the Government on this matter and certainly the justification given this evening as we presented this Order for the confirmation of this honourable House, a position which was very eloquently articulated by him one year ago when Members of this Parliament met to confirm a similar Order and a similar measure. I thank him very much for his support.

Parliaments, whether they be here in Trinidad and Tobago or elsewhere in the world, normally have very strict rules about what is said in the Parliament, and in particular, the accuracy of the information that is given. When I became a Member of Parliament early in 1971, one of the things I learned from those who had preceded me was that whatever else you do in the Parliament, you try to be as accurate as you can, and truth is not something that you use sparingly. One must not be economical with the truth when one speaks in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, or any Parliament for that matter. [*Interruption*] I am sorry?

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Ramnath: It sounds as if you are on a pulpit.

Hon. P. Manning: Well, I am trying my best.

Mr. Speaker, regrettably the hon. Member for Caroni East appeared not to be as familiar with that principle as those of us on this side as he, time and time again in his contribution, made statements that were not accurate, and which served to discredit his entire contribution. For example, the hon. Member began by saying some \$66,000 is what we are going to raise as revenue this year. Then he continued by saying that last year, when the tax was increased by 100 per cent, the net yield of that tax was \$1.83 million and therefore questioned the \$4 million. Mr. Speaker, if last year the 100 per cent increase yielded \$1.83 million, why does the hon. Member for Caroni East find it so difficult to believe that a 200 per cent increase this year is unable to yield \$4 million? The hon. Member was economical with the truth.

Mr. Speaker, he took it one step further and he made a statement—which I was very surprised to hear, a statement which could have been very easily checked. That is why I thought he would have been a little more careful in making the statement, especially as he knows that there are those of us on this side who operated in the Parliament at that time and therefore would be in a better position to know where the truth laid in the context of which he spoke. He said, for example, that Mr. George Chambers, the country's second Prime Minister, won a victory in 1981 that was bigger than any victory that Dr. Eric Williams had won previously.

I would like to remind my colleague from Caroni East that I became a Member of Parliament in 1971 when the PNM, under Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, won 36 seats in a 36-seat Parliament. Therefore, I could not understand how, in the face of that—which was well known by the Member for Caroni East—he could come and say to this honourable House that what happened in 1981

represented a victory by Mr. Chambers that was much larger than any other victory that was ever experienced by Dr. Eric Eustace Williams.

Mr. Speaker, it would have been bad enough if he had stopped there but he took it one step further. In treating with an issue that is current—an allegation that a Minister of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was paid some \$2.02 million by the State on the eve of a general election—he ignored the fact that just 24 hours prior, in a press conference that was held following the regular weekly meeting of the Cabinet, the national community was informed that the Cabinet was advised the very morning—yesterday morning in fact—that the report was not accurate; that indeed a negotiated arrangement had been arrived at between the two parties, one being a minister of the Government, but that no money was paid.

Furthermore, the lawyers for the Minister involved had now communicated with the Attorney General indicating that it was their preference—in the face of the public reaction to inaccurate disclosures made on this matter—that it should now be returned to the courts for final determination. *[Interruption]* But we said it yesterday! In other words, the lawyers rejected—and incidentally it was a view shared by the Attorney General on behalf of the Government—the approach of a negotiated settlement, choosing instead to refer the matter back to the courts, which suggested a negotiated settlement in the first instance, the preference now being to have the court arrive at a final adjudication on the matter, so that we can ensure that the transparency and integrity of the process was in no way impaired. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Caroni East—in the face of all of this—makes these allegations and includes these inaccuracies in his contribution before this honourable House, it is very difficult for those of us listening to him to accept anything else that he says because he has served—by the approach he has taken—to discredit his entire contribution. It therefore becomes necessary for me to clarify a few things he said and to set the record straight in this Parliament because it was an approach that was signaled not just by the Leader, it was taken up by the Member for Chaguanas and also the Member for Nariva.

When the Member for Chaguanas says that the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) was stopped, he gave an impression that was entirely incorrect. Mr. Speaker, he was correct in saying that the URP in Chaguanas stopped—the

statement was correct as far as it goes—what he did not say was that the programme was stopped in the entire country. That is what he did not say! [Interruption] You had your chance. The programme has been stopped in the entire country and it is about to be restarted. Yesterday the Cabinet adjudicated on this matter and the Minister of Local Government, in the regular weekly press conference gave a statement to that effect and drew the attention of the national community to the fact that the programme is about to be restarted.

Mr. Ramsaran: Are you telling this honourable House that URP will be resumed in Chaguanas?

Hon. P. Manning: Yes. And therefore I take this opportunity to assure the Member for Chaguanas as, indeed, I assure the 36 Members of this House that the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) is designed to provide unemployment relief to persons in Trinidad and Tobago who are unemployed and who otherwise have no gainful method of employment. It is an interim measure providing relief, at a particular period of time, until the individuals are able to find gainful employment elsewhere. It is not the PNM's intention to discriminate at all. [Interruption] The programme is going to be implemented in the 36 constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] And it is open to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding considerations of race, colour, creed, class, or political persuasion; most important. In that regard the PNM is taking a very different approach from the approach taken by my honourable friends opposite when they found themselves on this side of the House.

In 1995, in the constituency of San Fernando East [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. P. Manning: In 1995, we started in Cocoyea Village—the village from which I come, where I was born and where I grew up—a community centre and the development of community facilities. Before we left office, however, the project had not gotten very far—it was started in 1995—and we had assured the people of Cocoyea Village that even if the Government changed in 1995, we saw no problem in the context of that facility, because we expected that the government coming in—the UNC—would have been as even-handed as we were in the development of these facilities all over the country and they would have continued the development of the community centre and the complex.

In the year 2000 they hurriedly recommenced the construction of the community centre to facilitate the then Minister of Local Government, coming on the eve of a general election, and putting up the plaque on a reconstructed centre

indicating that as Minister of Local Government he was commissioning, for the first time, a community centre in Cocoyea Village. I had to tell him, Mr. Speaker, that a community centre in Cocoyea Village was commissioned on November 07, 1966 when he was still in short pants.

For five years in Cocoyea Village the people had to tolerate a situation where the construction of the centre was not continued because it was felt by my friends opposite that Cocoyea Village belongs to the constituency of San Fernando East, of the Leader of the Opposition, as he was at that time, and that by withholding that particular facility they would be in a position to say to the residents of Cocoyea Village that your parliamentary representative has done nothing for you in the last five years but we would do something for you.

It went one step further than that, Mr. Speaker. It has taken a PNM Government, on our return to office, to now take a decision to continue the complex and, indeed, a contract has been awarded to Nipdec for completion of the complex. The people, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago resident in Cocoyea Village, are now able to say thank you to the PNM Government, which after a six-year hiatus, has now been able to recommence, what they consider to be an essential project in the social development of the people of Cocoyea Village. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, if you think that Cocoyea Village was an isolated incident, it was done in Mon Repos also.

Hon. Member: You are mixing up yourself.

Hon. P. Manning: I am not mixing up myself; it was done twice in San Fernando, not once. And it is necessary for the Parliament to know, because they insist on coming here and giving the impression that they are holier than thou and when it comes to integrity and non-discrimination, they are the first and last word. Mr. Speaker, it is a straight case of if they tell you "A", it is in fact "B"; if they tell you "C", it is "D"; if they tell you good morning, go home and put on your night clothes. That is what it is!

In Mon Repos it is the same thing, the centre should have been started. We were unable to get it going because of a land problem in 1995 and it is only this year that we are able to restart the community centre. Mr. Speaker, they partially succeeded in their strategy because when I was campaigning in Mon Repos in the last general election a lady told me: "Patrick, if you don't build the centre don't come back." They partially succeeded in the strategy they had put out.

They are talking about discrimination—I am going to come back to the Member for Caroni East in a while—and the person who did it earlier this afternoon is the Member for Chaguanas. Now I have had to warn some of them about this before; when the Member for Chaguanas was Minister of Social Development and they were clandestinely making adjustments to the social security package that they were making available to the national community—and I put “available” in quotes—in particular, the disability grant which was upgraded, and which they kept to themselves—they never made any announcements on it. They alone knew, Mr. Speaker, that a disability grant was payable at an enhanced level—[*Interruption*] You had your chance—the Minister responsible was authorizing persons with high blood pressure to qualify for disability grants.

Mr. Ramnath: No, no, no.

Hon. P. Manning: Yes! Ask the Minister he will tell you if he did it. That is what they were doing. He was doing it all over Chaguanas and in all other constituencies controlled by the UNC. I found out about it only because the PNM has party members who work in that Ministry. I am sure my colleagues on this side did not know—

Dr. Rowley: It is the first time I am hearing about that.

Hon. P. Manning:—and therefore were not able to benefit from it; as opposed to the PNM which comes here in the budget debate for this year and makes it clear that we are going to increase the disability grant from \$600 to \$650 next year; that we are going to reduce the qualifying age from 40 years to 18 years; and there was a third consideration in the matter. We said we would do it with effect from next year because the \$70 million it would cost this year was something that the Government could not afford at this time. How different, Mr. Speaker? And then we must sit here and hear about transparency, openness, accountability and discrimination from hon. Members opposite. Mr. Speaker, I am yet to come back to the Member for Caroni East. The Member for Chaguanas—and you know something, Mr. Speaker [*Interruption*] I will attack the messenger, if necessary, through you, Mr. Speaker.

What I do not like about it also is that they have developed this habit of coming into this House, believing that they could use the cover of parliamentary privilege to say what they want about whom they want. On most occasions that they do that they would not go outside in the corridor and say it; they would not go on the pavement and say some of the things they would come in the Parliament

and say; not only that, Mr. Speaker, they would say things that they know to be inaccurate.

When the Member for Chaguanas gets up and says that I have boasted in the past that my son has won a scholarship to go to Germany—[*Interruption*] He read it in the newspapers. Which newspapers?

Hon. Member: The *Probe*.

Hon. P. Manning: You understand, Mr. Speaker. Member for Chaguanas, you may get away with it at this time; you may feel that you have been smart by a half; you may feel that you pull a stroke on us but at the end of the day all you have done is that you have abused the parliamentary privilege that is accorded to hon. Members and you have forgotten that Members of this House carry the title of “honourable” because they are expected to be honourable men and women. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, just for the record, I have no son who won any scholarship to study in Germany or anywhere else.

Mr. Imbert: Liars.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I want to warn the Member for Chaguanas that he is going to be the subject of very close scrutiny by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] Yes, because he comes to this Parliament and pretends that he is holier than thou and he goes outside and conducts his business in a manner that is sure to bring the profession of politics into disrepute.

He was invited to a Divali celebration by a bank. A bank in Chaguanas invites him to a celebration and he goes and instead of extolling the virtues of the significance of the festival of Divali to the Hindu community and by extension to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the role that Divali could play in the integration of the society, he uses the opportunity to attack his hostess—it was a lady—for about 20 minutes in the people's function; throwing cold water on the function and he was doing it only because, as he said, the lady, or the lady's husband who he says was a strong UNC supporter is now supporting the PNM. That is what he said! He chose to discredit the lady as “traitor” and other words that are not properly mentioned and admissible in this Parliament, merely because the election result came up in a way different from what he expected. I must remind him that this country has a Constitution and it guarantees freedom of association. People in this country are free to support the political party of their choice, whatever he or his colleagues may think. [*Interruption*] Let him get up and refute it.

Mr. Speaker, when he is not doing that he is accusing the Government of — what they call it—a dependency syndrome mentality, that is what they say. Is that what they are accusing the Government of? Because the Government makes a social intervention in the lives of citizens who need that intervention, they call it a dependency syndrome and a culture of profligate spending. That is what they say. What seems to have particularly upset the Member for Chaguanas—[*Interruption*] What letter? What seems to upset the Member for Chaguanas is the fact that we have intervened in the lives of our citizens with a view to making those lives more comfortable and palatable [*Desk thumping*] with the handouts, as he called it, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw your attention and the attention of hon. Members to an article appearing in today's *Newsday*, November 08 2002—

Hon. Member: The *Probe*.

Hon. P. Manning: Not the *Probe*, a proper newspaper. Page 6, headlined: “Cabinet approved \$3 million handouts to contractors”, written by Charleen Thomas. This is how the article goes.

“A decision by UNC minister, John Humphrey, not to impose penalties on contractors for slow work on the Piarco airport project, but to institute an accelerated work programme with a bonus offer, resulted in \$3 million literally given as ‘handouts’ to the contractors.”

Handouts not to individuals, Mr. Speaker, but to the contractors.

“The decision was approved by Cabinet.”

So the Cabinet was pressed into giving service also.

“The accelerated programme made no impact on speeding up the completion of the airport and instead saw all contractors coming out as winners suffering no losses.

Further, arguments whether to go ahead with the ‘Jack and Bore’ method to have fuel pipelines buried under the runway, stalled the project for one year, the delay costing taxpayers over \$10 million with the Jack and Bore method being replaced by running the pipelines around the runway.

The request to run the pipelines around the runway was made by Airports Authority (AA) General Manager, Tyrone Gopee.”

They are objecting, Mr. Speaker, to small quantities of moneys being made available to persons who are in social and economic circumstances that are

substandard and unacceptable to a PNM Government, preferring instead to espouse an approach that would make the handouts available, not to the many but to the few; the contractors, friends and associates of—at that time—the ruling party of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I could spend my whole evening on the Member for Chaguanas. [*Interruption*] I am not going to do it. I would like to address a matter raised by the Member for Caroni East because that Member espoused an economic policy that is popularly known as the trickle-down theory. He was chastising the PNM of 1981 to 1986 for putting the country in a position that forced the NAR government to go to the International Monetary Fund. For the benefit of hon. Members, I would briefly recap the history of the revenues of this country; what happened in the decades of the 70s, 80s and 90s. I was here and I sat in this very Parliament in those years.

It began in 1973 with a war in the Middle East, the middle eastern countries cutting off oil supplies to the western countries; oil prices at the time going from \$2.50 a barrel to \$9 and \$10 a barrel; it was a significant jump, and Trinidad and Tobago, as a small oil-producing country being the beneficiary of those enhanced revenues. And as the revenues built something was happening; oil production in the country was also on the rise. Oil production peaked in 1978 at 240,000 barrels per day—

Mr. Ramnath: It was 228,000

Hon. P. Manning: Both are correct, you see the 228,000 was, in fact, the annual production, 240,000 was the peak; it peaked at 240,000.

Mr. Ramnath: I bow to your wisdom.

Hon. P. Manning: Thank you very much, Sir. One year later when oil production was still high, another war broke out, the Iran/Iraq war broke out in the Middle East and the oil prices, which had settled around \$9/\$10 a barrel suddenly jumped again and they went to as high as \$40 a barrel, settling eventually at \$34 a barrel by 1981. Is that correct? So what was the position with revenues? The oil prices jumped at a time when the production was going up and therefore we were the beneficiaries of significantly enhanced revenues.

In 1982, the developed countries made an attempt to gain control of oil prices again; they did not succeed but succeeded one year later in 1983 and oil prices began to fall. It fell from \$34 a barrel to \$28 in 1983, and by 1986 oil prices collapsed to a low of \$9 per barrel. That happened at a time when our oil

production was falling, so the combination of falling oil prices and falling oil production meant a significant reduction in the revenue of Trinidad and Tobago and structural adjustments were called for. The Government of Mr. Chambers, to his eternal credit, Mr. Speaker—I was a proud member of that Government—Mr. George Michael Chambers, vilified in a lot of quarters, must be credited with initiating the actions that have led to sustainable economic growth in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

May I also say, that in the context of the Special Funds to which the Member for Caroni East made reference, amassing over \$7 billion at one stage, when we left office in 1986 there was over \$1 billion of the Special Fund left and that was the inheritance of the government that succeeded us. Therefore, if in the face of that Trinidad and Tobago ended up at the doorstep of the International Monetary Fund, it cannot be a proper liability and charge on the backs of the PNM. It was not a PNM liability at all! It has to be squarely placed on the shoulders of the government that was in office at the time, of which the very distinguished Members for Couva North, St. Augustine and Couva South were proud parts; they were an integral part of it. That is the reality of it. [*Interruption*] I am not ascribing any blame; it is the historical record; that is what happened.

Mr. Speaker, what was even worse, we were in opposition at that time and we made it clear that the government of which those honourable gentlemen were a part, were conducting their business in such a way, especially incurring debts at a rate that we considered laying a bed of thorns for the government that was to succeed them, which they knew would not have been them. So said, so done. Our debt service in 1992 was US \$600 million; our debt service in 1993 was about US \$610 million and in 1994 was about US \$650 million; this was the early 90s, different circumstances. We, therefore, came into government and met a tight situation but that structural adjustment had already started under Mr. Chambers. While the NAR has to be credited for taking it a step further, the evidence suggests that they were quite timid; they were not quite sure about what they were doing. So the acceleration of the process really took place between 1991 and 1995. [*Desk thumping*]

That is when the Member for Couva South was plotting against the Member for Couva North. [*Desk thumping*] I think it was the year 1988. [*Interruption*] It is the historical record and we are just trying to clean it up, that is all. I think that the efforts were very successful; they resulted in the formation of the group called Club 88, is that right?

Mr. Valley: Yes.

Hon. P. Manning:—which eventually led to the formation of the UNC which sits very proudly on the Opposition Benches in this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*]

What happened after that is very significant and I would like to put it into the record. The year 1996 was the year in which hon. Members opposite thought that government and UNC was synonymous, and that there was an element of permanence in the relationship between the UNC and governance. That was the year, Mr. Speaker, they did me every imaginable thing in this Parliament; and I took it. I will never forget my good friend from Couva South—this was in an earlier incarnation and this one is worthy of repetition.

In a debate at one time I made a comment about the then Prime Minister, Mr. Robinson and they put eight speakers to deal with me and the last one was Mr. Ramnath, the Member for Couva South. When he was finished beating me, Mr. Speaker, he said: “I will grind you into the dust.”

Hon. Member: Who said that?

Hon. P. Manning: The Member for Couva South. [*Laughter*] [*Interruption*] Well, we could send for *Hansard* if you wish. That approach was repeated in 1996 when—I was vilified all over the country but while they were doing it, I was walking. I walked 36 constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago, listening to what people had to say. Do you know what they were saying? They said to me: “As well as the PNM thought it had done between 1991 and 1995, we believe you did not spend enough time on us.” A hell of a thing, if that is admissible in the parliamentary record.

Mr. Speaker, it has led to a significant shift in PNM policy. More than that, the so-called trickle-down theory does not work, in the face of the boast that there is a 10 per cent unemployment—the very point that was being made by one hon. Member opposite—but 40 per cent of the people are living below the poverty line. The economic theory that suggests that if you spread the wealth at the top it is going to trickle down to those at the base of the society is a theory that does not work. The PNM, therefore, has opted instead for a different social approach, preferring to intervene more directly in the lives of our citizens to alleviate poverty and to ensure that there is a more equitable distribution of wealth and that a larger percentage of our citizens enjoy a standard of living that is consistent with their own aspiration and with the national aspirations of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is the big difference.

When, therefore, you talk about dependency syndrome—there was a time we would listen to that but we would hear you now and laugh. All we would say is

that you have not yet realized that this is 2002 and not 1995 or 1996. They have not yet realized that, Mr. Speaker, nor have they yet fully understood how the PNM was able to get 50,000 additional votes in the last general election. [*Desk thumping*] Think about that!

Mr. Speaker, for our part we would wish to reconfirm our approach of a significant social sector intervention. We wish to confirm that approach of the PNM Government and to assure citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, especially those who may be less fortunate than others, that they have a government in power that is sensitive to these issues; a government which understands their plight and is prepared to take whatever steps are reasonable and necessary to ensure that they, too, have something to eat when they sit around the table as a family.

The other thing of which heavy weather was made in this debate was the question of equity and equitable distribution of the country's resources. They have come back with the same foolishness, accusing everybody of discrimination and we have to sit here and be lectured by the Member for Nariva, whose new-found evangelism caused us this evening to be the beneficiary of a quotation from the Gospel according to St. Matthew, is it, about a beam in the eye and a mote in the next? Well, may I assure you that while the text is not unfamiliar to us, we believe that the text is as applicable to hon. Members opposite, as you believe it might be applicable to us, and we would like to commend the reference, not just to your good self, Member for Nariva, but to your colleagues.

This Government is going out of its way to ensure that there is equity in the conduct of our public affairs. [*Desk thumping*] We have a major social sector intervention going; programmes of all kinds, and we have taken special steps to ensure that the programmes are available to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know if hon. Members are aware but the Cabinet has taken a decision to employ 39 cultural officers, 39 youth officers—or youth assistant aides, a post that is not a public service position, because it is on contract; 39 sports officers, 39 community development officers, 39 social services officers and 39 environmental officers. All of them, in the six disciplines that we have called, would be distributed all over Trinidad and Tobago on a geographical basis and their responsibility would be to ensure the implementation of projects on the ground.

Since the spread is going to be an equitable spread all over the country, the consequence of it is going to be an equitable distribution of the resources as the Government pursues its social agenda. Deliberately set up! Right now the advertisements are out and those of you who know people who might be

interested in that kind of work are free to ask them to apply. The advertisements are out and we are going to be interviewing applicants not too long from now. We hope that by January 01, not only would everybody be selected but also they would be trained and they would be in place. May I also alert hon. Members that that is the beginning of a new approach that the Government would announce, in due course, of dispensation of social services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: You start the campaign early?

Hon. P. Manning: It never stops.

Mr. Ramnath: Local elections soon.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I also want to say this to hon. Members. They have a way of telling their supporters that they are being discriminated against by the PNM. There is a big difference between urban and rural; let me tell you what is the difference. I went to Mamoral some time ago and I met some PNM members who live there. On that day the particular group, all women, said they lived on the same street and they said that unemployment there is very high but we do not starve because we all plant a garden. We have the land on which we can do that. What I do not plant my neighbour plants. What my neighbour does not plant and I do not plant somebody else plants. We exchange produce among ourselves and that way we ensure that even though unemployment is high and we are not working, we are not starving.

Mr. Speaker, take that in stark contrast to what takes place in Laventille where there is no land to plant. Therefore if a man is unemployed in Laventille what faces him is starvation for himself and his family. That is the reality of the situation and therefore it is quite unfair—and hon. Members opposite know it!—to say that if the people of Laventille in those circumstances, perhaps, are given a slight handicap over the people of other parts of the country that the PNM is discriminating in favour of Laventille. You know what such an argument leads to—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Ramnath: Would you return to the subject before the House?

Hon. P. Manning: I am merely responding. I presented a motion, Mr. Speaker and I am merely responding to what has been said by Members opposite. If hon. Members opposite chose to stray from the point, then so be it. My responsibility is to correct the records and I will do it to the best of my ability. Mr. Speaker, what they are really trying to do is break my trend of thought.

The argument, therefore, that they tend to push is that you are discriminating in favour of Laventille against persons who live in rural Trinidad and Tobago. The intention being to force a reallocation of resources in such a way that persons who live in rural Trinidad and Tobago end up with an advantage, only because—not that I have any objection to it—only because, of course, those persons live in their constituencies. What that then sets is a true imbalance in the distribution of the wealth of the country. *[Interruption]* That is what it sets up. All I am saying is that is an argument they have traditionally used and we have noted that argument. We now propose to do a new survey of living conditions in Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* We do not trust anything that you do, okay, it lacks integrity. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, they did the 2000 census in this country on the eve of a general election when they were also doing a registration exercise and therefore the people of Trinidad and Tobago put a question mark on the census and did not respond properly to it. Up to now you still cannot get results from that census and whenever you get results the census is fundamentally flawed and therefore it has to be redone—I imagine you did the living condition survey at the same time. It has to be done over and when you do it over, we are going to end up with a poverty map of Trinidad and Tobago and then the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would be able to target its social intervention based on the areas of greatest need—whether they be urban, rural, semi-urban; whether it is in Trinidad or Tobago or whether the people have this religious background or what have you. That is how we propose to go. It is equity in the conduct of public affairs.

Dr. Khan: I want to thank the hon. Member for San Fernando East for giving way. What you have just described was a sort of a regional type handicap discrimination, which you want to equalize. What policy is going to be taken into consideration where you have a sort of a local type of discriminatory pattern where—let us say Barataria/San Juan you have URP, what tends to happen is that certain members of the PNM in a local area tend to favour their party supporters, which is natural, but also discriminates against people of, supposedly, the other parties or non-party people. That is the kind of information I would like you to speak about.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that what the Member for San Juan/Barataria has alluded to, indeed, happens in parts of this country. I want to assure him as, indeed, the national community, that that does not form a part of the official PNM policy. *[Interruption]* Or unofficial for that matter and wherever we find it—*[Interruption]* You do not have to listen to us you know—it is our intention to take steps to try to redress. I live in the world of practical politics and it may not always be easy to bring about the redress about which we speak but the Government is committed to redressing situations like those and we proceed on that basis.

We have been talking about social interventions and one of the programmes of which we are particularly proud—it was unfortunate that the Member for Nariva would have attacked the programme today—is the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA). I listened carefully to what the Member for Nariva had to say and I have to reject, categorically and out of hand, the allegation by the Member for Nariva that the programme was not achieving anything and, in fact, it constituted a waste of time and resources. I have a letter here—

Hon. Member: Ramesh write that one too?

Hon. P. Manning: No, I will call the names. It is written by two people, and because I am quoting the letter into the record I will call the names of the individuals. Well, perhaps, I should not, Mr. Speaker. The letter is written to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Hon. John Rahael by one of the persons who lives on Guaracara-Tabaquite Road and I suspect that might very well be close to the constituency of Nariva; if not in the constituency itself. It goes as follows:

“Mr. John Rahael

Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources

Dear Sir,

Our names are...”

And the two names are called respectively.

“We are two graduates from the first batch of the YAPA. We would like to compliment you on your interest in agriculture and in our nation’s youth. The YAPA programme is to our knowledge the first of its kind introduced by your Government and is a very highly educational programme. Our experiences were good ones and the same has motivated us to go forward with our all into agricultural business.

Mr. Minister, we have formulated a small group to start our business, the people involved are...”

And the names have been called.

“...who are also interested in agriculture. We, Sir, would like you to help us to put our knowledge to use by helping us to acquire some land to start our agricultural business. We are from the Guaracara-Tabaquite area and in our area there are some 22 or so farms and, Sir, only two or three of these farms are in operation.

Some of the farmers have passed on while the others are not functioning. These lands are abandoned and are going to waste and we would appreciate your help in leasing some of these lands to us for starting our agricultural business.

We do hope that some light would be shed to us concerning our plight. Hoping you continue the good work you have started and that the knowledge that you have allowed us to gain would be given to others also.”

A hell of a statement from two young people.

“We can be contacted at the above number and address. Thanking you in advance for your help.

Respectfully yours in Agriculture.”

And the two persons signed the letter. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, if ever this Government feels vindicated on a policy that it has pursued, this letter constitutes a letter of great encouragement to the Government, confirming—[*Desk thumping*] that, indeed, the YAPA programme has made a very important intervention in a critical area of national development. We, in the Government, are of the view that for the first time we might be on to something that has the potential for significant growth, as a consequence of which we are watching the YAPA programme very closely and we are going to adjust that programme as we consider appropriate; fine-tuning it so that it could more closely approximate the achievement of the objectives that we have set for ourselves by the programme.

I want to make one final comment on the point that was raised by the Member for Caroni East because I think—The Member was talking about Dr. Dhanessar Mahabir who talked about a surprise that we got in government. I just want to remind him, as indeed, other Members, that the Dhanessar Mahabir Committee, at

the end of January this year, identified a budget deficit of TT \$1,769 million. That was the deficit! If anybody got a surprise it was not us, it was Dr. Mahabir and several of you all opposite, who were expecting at the end of the financial year that the funding—

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Consistent with your previous ruling, I think the hon. Member for San Fernando East should read the authors of that letter into the record of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: I did rule previously with the Member for Chaguanas, so perhaps you need to put the names on record.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I bow to your ruling. I was trying to avoid a particular situation but so be it. The writers are Nicole Joefield and Marsha Johnson. I hope that is not now used by them to victimize those two individuals. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, if anyone got a surprise it was the Chairman of the Committee, I am sure, and it was hon. Members opposite who thought, on the basis of their public utterances all year, that the Government would not have been able to balance the budget, as it were; the finances of the country were in disarray. They got the surprise when in the budget presentation for fiscal 2003, we announced that we had turned a surplus of \$68.9 million for fiscal 2002. That was the surprise! [*Desk thumping*] It confirms the view that even with what they thought was profligate spending, we were able to turn a surplus; even with that! Mr. Speaker, it underscores the point that we had been making all the time, that to be able to do that, all you had to do was cut out the corruption for which the administration that proceeded us in office had become—[*Desk thumping*]

I think that I have addressed all the issues of relevance that have arisen in this debate. I hope that I have not given a wrong impression to hon. Members. I really welcome the fact that the Members for Caroni East, Chaguanas, Nariva and Tabaquite had participated in the debate. In a position—not that I am in a position to give anybody any advice—we used our position as an opportunity to hone our skills and to understand governance a little better. I have no doubt that hon. Members would utilize the next five years for that purpose—perhaps 10 years. So that we hope that at the end of the time as and when they return to government—if at all—they would be much better schooled in the techniques of governance and they would be in a much better position to provide for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2002 be confirmed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House be adjourned to Friday, November 15, 2002 at 1.30 p.m.

I want to inform Members on that day we would be starting the debate on the package of bills relating to the police service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before I move the adjournment, I wish to inform Members that I have given leave to Members to raise matters on the adjournment. The three Members are in the following order: Member for Chaguanas, Member for Fyzabad and Member for Tabaquite. Members, you will have 15 minutes to make your presentation and the appropriate Minister has 15 minutes to respond.

Kidnappings (Severe crises)

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to say, I do not know if it is with regret or a feeling of sadness that I have to raise a Motion on the Adjournment on the severe crisis facing the population, especially businessmen who are being kidnapped with impunity. I use strong words “with impunity” because these kidnappers seem to do their crime—which I consider to be a serious crime—with impunity and with the knowledge that nobody would touch them. This is why I feel that this crime is so dangerous in Trinidad and Tobago. I could not put it better myself than to quote the “*Probe*” on page one dated November 10, 2002. It says:

“The demons of fear and paranoia have struck Chaguanas once again with the kidnappers’ abrupt resumption of illegal duty shortly after October 07 general election.

There is new talk in the business arena of a well-organized kidnapping syndicate with links to financial institutions, which seems to be more bold and brutal in its modus operandi this time around.

For more than a year, the central Trinidad business sector has been under a siege by a mysterious and malevolent spate of kidnapping.”

Mr. Speaker, you would remember that just before the last general election there was the truce signed somewhere in Laventille with community builders, I understand, and Mr. Yasin Abu Bakr. What we read in the newspaper is that after that the kidnapping stopped. My question to this honourable House is: Did the Minister of National Security know about this truce and what did he do? If the intelligence is working in this country and you could have somebody in that area signing a truce with community builders, does this not mean that somebody in authority should know about this truce? I am on this question because now as I read from the *Probe*, the kidnapping has resumed.

7.00 p.m.

I want to just share with this House an experience that was shared with me by the first kidnap victim, Mr. Kenneth Medford. When Mr. Medford spoke to me—and I am sorry I have to call his name here, but I have to do that—and told me of what happened to him during his ordeal—and listen to how it happened, Mr. Speaker. He was driving his car. He went to close his business place at about 1.00 a.m. or thereabouts and he was driving back to his home in Valsayn.

As he passed the Munroe flyover, a vehicle with a flashing blue light and a siren signalled him to stop. When he did stop he was pulled aside and the “policemen” came to him and said, “Let us see your driver’s permit.” He pulled out his driver’s permit and his insurance and they said, “You have a gun. Let us see your gun.” So he said, “Well, my gun is licensed.” So then they said, “Well, okay, open your trunk because we think you have cocaine.” Mr. Medford said, “Well sure. I do not have any.” As he came out of his car, they snatched him, threw him into the vehicle and drove away with him. They immediately blindfolded him and—[*Interruption*] I said “policemen”—but what is instructive, Mr. Speaker, is that—[*Interruption*] I am not saying it was a police vehicle. Do not get me wrong at all. The driver of the car, Mr. Medford, because of the blue light flashing and the authoritative manner in which he was spoken to, he believed that.

So he cooperated with the kidnappers. Then they hid him for three or four days and what he told me is inhumane, Mr. Speaker. He was blindfolded and put to face the elements—rain, sun, mosquitoes—and do you know what he told me? He said the best part of the ordeal was that he was blindfolded so the mosquitoes did not eat up his face, because they were attacking him all over; and this is what happened to our people in Central Trinidad.

The kidnappings continued. We called it a spate of kidnappings. The Commissioner of Police took umbrage at that fact and we had other people being

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kidnapped. During this whole series of kidnappings, there was a couple from San Fernando, Mr. and Mrs. Rampersad, who were kidnapped from their homes and murdered, Mr. Speaker. I think that when you compare criminal activities in Trinidad and Tobago from whenever, you would see that, over the last year, brutal crimes have been committed and the crime of kidnapping has been committed against people from Central Trinidad and businessmen especially. It does not end there.

The crime is brutal. I could go on describing—the last kidnappee, a lady, Kaloutie Godeck, I have spoken to her family. She is also a constituent of Chaguanas and she was treated in the same way. She was put to face the elements—rain, she was dried, she got wet—and I mean it is beneath human dignity. I ask this honourable House, and I want the Minister and the Prime Minister to tell me—and when Mr. Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East—I am glad now that he says he is going to have an eye on me. Maybe I may not be kidnapped. However, the fact is he went on record saying—let him deny this—that the kidnappings are political and if he knows that then he should have arrested somebody. He is the Prime Minister of the country and the head of the National Security Council. If he knows that the kidnappings are political, then he was supposed to have somebody arrested.

Mr. Speaker, this is what I consider to be, you know—I mean, when the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East and the Prime Minister of this country could make these pronouncements and not pass the information to his Minister of National Security, or the Minister of National Security will know about a truce signed by his known political supporters—and let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker, just to put it quickly in. I was told that on election day this same person who signed that truce was campaigning and working for the PNM. So I want to know the connection because I am telling you my constituents are now leaving this country in droves. On my way to Parliament, I called a businessman and he told me—

Mr. Manning: How many have left so far?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: If you file a question I will answer it.

Mr. Manning: Name me six who have left so far.

Mr. B. Panday: Assuming it is six, then that is all right? That is okay, then?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: If you ask for the parents of the Minister of National Security, you might find that they are not in the country at this time. Mr. Speaker,

not to be disturbed, they told me this morning that businessmen are packing up. I could call the names but I do not want to do that because I fear for their safety, because, if people know they are leaving the country, they will be given a farewell kidnapping, so I do not want to call their names. The people are packing up. At this minute I know two businessmen who bought houses in Miami in preparation to leave this country within the next two or three weeks, but if I call their names here, Mr. Speaker—unlike what was the accusations thrown at us for two small people signing a letter—these people's lives will be in danger and if the Member for San Fernando East expects me to fall for that and put my constituents at risk, he is not going to get that.

Mr. Speaker, I am disturbed about the spate of kidnappings in Central Trinidad and in Trinidad in particular. What is happening is that the Member for Diego Martin East, in crosstalk, told me, "If that happens dey go win election because our supporters leaving the country." When people talk about our supporters, and the *Newsday* from which the Member for San Fernando East quoted a while ago, in a headline a couple of days ago, said that the UNC supporters were at the Prime Minister's residence, I do not know if UNC supporters walk with their forehead marked "UNC" you know, so I am confused.

I do not know the people, whether or not they voted for the UNC. They complained to me that their lives are in danger and I am here this evening to talk about that. I ask the Prime Minister, as the head of the National Security Council, and the Minister of National Security, to do something about this and if they cannot do it, resign. Let somebody else do the job. After nine months there, nothing has happened.

He came to Chaguanas and met with the businessmen, and do you know what happened? He told the businessmen, "Do not invite the Member for Chaguanas to that meeting" and I was not invited. I know that my friend, the MP for Laventille East/Morvant, had he been the Minister of National Security, with his background of being a police officer and a learned attorney-at-law, we would have got some action but, Mr. Speaker, I am not attacking the person here. I am talking now about the restlessness in the Chaguanas area, and more so in Central and South Trinidad, and I would like to get some answers that could satisfy not only me as the messenger but the people of this country. When you hear words or statements made by the hon. Prime Minister that, "We have to make laws to deal with kidnapping" and so on, I am a bit worried.

A couple of days ago, somebody from about a half a mile from me was kidnapped in Barrackpore, brought into the Caroni cemetery and murdered. She

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was murdered in the Caroni cemetery, and this woman was making a livelihood doing her house-to-house sales. She is from Chin Chin Road in Cunupia and she was brought from Barrackpore and murdered in the Caroni cemetery, and up to today we have heard nothing about what is happening.

I make another appeal to the hon. Prime Minister. Do not treat with these complaints as if they are only political, because he has a way of making everything sound political and throwing it in one basket. Here we have people's lives at risk, we have the country at risk. You know too, the Member for Diego Martin East heckled across the floor, this could affect this country's democracy because, once people are threatened, for example, from being free and frightened away from going to vote because they are scared of the criminal element in this country, this could affect our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious issue and I want it to be treated seriously. I call on the Minister to do all that he could within his power, if he is allowed to do anything by his Prime Minister, about crime in this country, especially kidnapping, because I receive complaints daily. People are hurting. They want to leave this country. I know my leader told a few of them recently, "Leave and go where?" However, Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that these people's children's lives are at risk, these people's properties are at risk and I call on the Minister of National Security to not only make a good speech in Parliament—I see he walked with a prepared speech—but I want him to deal with the matter as urgently as possible, set up police posts in the central area; get some action. I quoted earlier today that Chaguanas is the most densely populated of our corporations and he must treat with it as a matter of urgent importance. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee): Mr. Speaker, please allow me to respond to the Member for Chaguanas as he emphasized the severe crisis facing the population, especially businessmen who are being kidnapped with impunity. I would also respond to something he said, that I did not invite him to a function held in Chaguanas. That function was held by the President of the Chamber of Commerce in Chaguanas and he did not invite you, so it had nothing to do with me.

Mr. Speaker, this honourable House is advised that the act of kidnapping is not peculiar to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] It is a global criminal occurrence. In fact, we have seen an increase worldwide in the last five years and, in fact, I just bring to your attention today's *Express* about a banking expert after a kidnap ordeal, and I read:

“The British banking expert who was kidnapped in June was freed Wednesday...Shaw spent the night at the British Embassy. He left for London early yesterday.”

So, Mr. Speaker, this trend is taking place globally.

The prevalence of increased kidnapping for ransom in Trinidad and Tobago is now affecting the psyche of our national community; and I am agreeing with the Member for Chaguanas. This new type of crime gained momentum in the last decade. A review of statistics revealed that from 1991 to 1995 there were 35 kidnappings. This figure climbed to 114 during the period 1996 to 2001. What is perhaps interesting is that in the former period, 1991 to 1995, the average per year varied from a low of 16 to a high of 35 when compared to the period 1996 to 2001, where there was a low of 80, to a high of 156. So you see, Mr. Speaker, the trend has been spiralling upwards in the last decade from 1991 to 2001. We inherited this situation from the UNC.

Mr. Speaker, I give you these statistics to simply show that crime bears no allegiance whatsoever to political parties, [*Desk thumping*] neither does it influence political partisanship. What is required at this point in time is to recognize that legislative intervention is necessary to comprehensively deal with the crime of kidnapping. In the interim, however, the Government has already instituted certain executive measures to make the profession of kidnapping unprofitable. You see, Mr. Speaker, the motive for this crime is profit and profit only. Given the motivation behind the execution of this crime, families of the businessmen and businesswomen are at risk. Unfortunately, kidnapping has now joined the list of serious crimes committed in our beloved country. Notwithstanding the justification for intense concern, we must also demonstrate a level of determination to effectively confront this specific type of criminal activity. This is the time when we must stand together as a nation.

My task here today is to give an overview of the present scenario as it relates to the spate of kidnappings. As most of you are aware, I am a product of the business sector. Many of my friends and associates are businessmen and businesswomen. This places me in a position to further understand the apprehension being felt by all businessmen in Trinidad and Tobago. My personal experience is that I have learned a great deal about the emotions, such as with Mr. Ken Medford, who is a personal friend of mine, and I have shared with the families their pain and anguish. I have directly visited many of the homes of kidnapped victims during their ordeals. I have shared their sorrow and I have

shared their anguish as loved ones waited and prayed for a successful outlook. I also shared in their joy as victims returned home safely.

Mr. Speaker, we are all at risk. Already for this year there have been 24 kidnappings for ransom. The allocation of blame is not the solution. The exclusive concern should be, how do we deal with this menace in our society? The Anti Kidnapping Squad (AKS) of the police service, Mr. Speaker, is relentlessly pursuing the implementation of measures to curb the increase in kidnapping. This unit has been increased threefold in the last year and has access to the most sophisticated technology in the area of surveillance in this country. They are fully organized around specific major objectives which include safety and security of victims and the identification, location and prosecution of those involved.

These objectives were instituted, recognizing that among the various types of kidnapping, kidnap for ransom is the one we are dealing with here today. Simply put, it is a criminal act in which a person is seized with the objective of obtaining a ransom for his or her release. Mr. Speaker, the Anti Kidnapping Squad is a professional unit, developed in the police service, which this Government re-established in September of 2002 as an independent unit. This unit is going through a combination of in-depth skill upliftment and training coupled with other areas of empowerment. These include manpower expansion, technological advancement, intelligence coordination and strategic positioning.

Post September 2002 in the area of training, a comprehensive needs assessment was conducted which resulted in the arrival of Clayton Consultancy Agency into the country. These experts, Mr. Speaker, comprise of former members of the FBI, CIA, the national state agencies and the departments of defence. They conducted a 10-day intense course over the period August 30, 2002 to the period September 09, 2002 covering the following areas:

- they taught our AKS in evidence gathering during investigation;
- they also taught the AKS case management;
- areas such as reduction of risk of being a kidnap victim;
- surveillance intelligence gathering and analysis;
- counselling on the trauma of kidnapping;
- case preparation of indictment;
- extortion demands and other related areas.

This is what we have done in the last three months with members of our Anti Kidnapping Squad.

Mr. Speaker, the act of kidnapping for ransom has therefore been occupying the attention of this Government over the past 11 months and we propose to introduce legislation aimed at minimizing if not eliminating this crime. A Kidnapping Prevention Bill with stiff penalties will be piloted in Parliament within the next three months. This piece of legislation will declare as a criminal act the following:

detaining of someone against his or her will for the purpose of receiving a ransom;

the payment of any ransom demand by anyone representing the person who is kidnapped.

This bill will also designate the crime of kidnapping as a non-bailable offence. Financial institutions will also be mandated by law to provide confidential financial information to the police in kidnapping cases. We expect full support in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, already the population is witnessing positive results from the hard work of the Anti Kidnapping Squad. [*Desk thumping*] The AKS, over the last year, was successful in arresting 47 suspects, [*Desk thumping*] out of which 31 charges were laid for kidnapping and false imprisonment. [*Desk thumping*] The officers of this squad, like their colleagues, are truly worthy of national applause, and that is the police and the Anti Kidnapping Squad. [*Desk thumping*] Just recently they charged three persons. I think it is appropriate to mention here that the international rate of success around the world is as little as over 2 per cent. That is the solve rate for kidnapping. As of September 12, 2002, Trinidad and Tobago has a success rate of 52 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

On August 30, 2002, Mr. Speaker, together with the international experts on kidnapping, I met the business sector, through the various chambers of commerce, and thoroughly briefed them on all aspects of preemptive and responsive measures with regard to kidnapping. Another key mechanism, which has been utilized by the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, is the Crime Stoppers Hotline. The business community has been instrumental in setting up this crucial anti-crime information device. The national community must make maximum use of this. Remember, Mr. Speaker, I have been consistent in my appeal to citizens to dial 800-STOP or 800-TIPS in the event any suspicious criminal activities are observed. I am pleased to report that this avenue of information has been

successful in bringing to a close the arrest of many of these kidnapping suspects. It is to be noted here that such community participation contributed to the arrest of the alleged perpetrators in the recent sniper case in the United States of America—information from the public.

The expansion of community police, the re-introduction of Crime Stoppers Hotline and the neighbourhood watch, the ongoing intense training programmes for law enforcement officers and the accelerated expansion and training of the Anti Kidnapping Squad of the police service are measures instituted by this Government to deal with the crime situation. The business community has been playing its responsible role as a corporate citizen in this process. We must continue to work together. The media as well has a crucial role to play, and a responsible one I must add. There must be a collective partnership in this national crime reduction exercise.

In view of all of this, Mr. Speaker, I wish therefore to assure the hon. Member for Chaguanas that we on this side are also mindful of the kidnapping situation and, as outlined, we will continue not only to intensify and update the training programmes for the members of the AKS but to also secure the safety and well-being of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Losses Suffered
(Government Assistance Available)**

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, permission was obtained from your good self to raise today, on the Motion for the Adjournment, the failure of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and its agencies and/or agents to make assistance available to persons suffering loss and injury from house fires, floods, accidents and disasters.

I want to deal with the first matter which is house fires. For this year alone, more than 25 homes, with which I am familiar, have been affected by fire and close to 75 people have lost their belongings, in addition to all their household possessions. Now what I have found, and what has come to my attention—and this is across Trinidad and Tobago not only in the constituency of Fyzabad—is that there seems not to be a proper process by which affected persons can obtain assistance. For instance, the regional corporations in the areas where these homes are affected, seem not to have a policy or do not have a fixed policy on how to assist people.

Sometime ago, through the National Commission for Self-Help, it was agreed that there would be a \$10,000 grant available for persons who may lose their

homes by fires or any disasters and again that has not seemed to materialize up to this point in time. Also, in the area of SHARE, it was felt that persons who lost their homes by fires or disasters, or who are victims of accidents, should be able to obtain some meaningful assistance from the SHARE programme. That again does not obtain in any meaningful way. Again it was felt that at some time family counselling services would be made available. Again there is no fixed approach to obtain any of these services.

Now, earlier today, if I may be permitted to refer to it for a minute, the Hon. Prime Minister indicated help available from rural communities versus urban communities and the same thing seems to apply in the case of house fires and disasters in the rural communities. It seems as if persons living in the rural communities have a greater difficulty in accessing help, for one reason or the other. I hope it is not the policy of the Government to say a fire victim in Cedros would be treated differently from a fire victim in Laventille. I am sure that is not Government's intention, but it will translate if it applies in one sector of government services, and the same thing could apply for accidents as well.

Let us look at the case of motor vehicle accidents. Too many people have died on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago. Every time there is an accident there is a death. That is one too many, but the families are always left alone. There is no government policy in place to lend assistance in the case of funerals for maintenance of the family breadwinners immediately. After some time one can go through a process six or seven months down the road. There is also some small degree of discrimination in, for instance, the funeral grants, the moneys for burial, which I think is about \$1,150. The cheapest cremation in Trinidad is about \$2,500 so that a family wanting to cremate would have to choose burial if they want to enjoy this grant and the same thing applies to disasters.

There have been many cases across Trinidad and Tobago, in fact we saw only two or three days ago some instances of it where roofs were removed from homes because of high winds. Again there is no policy. There is no system available for nationals of Trinidad and Tobago to obtain it. So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Government could indicate in a meaningful way and something that could be put to the test as well that persons affected—and there is a process.

When there is a house fire the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services respond, and the police also get involved, so there is documentation of the fire, there is also evidence of the loss suffered and injury. The same thing would apply to accidents and disasters of any kind, so that there is a process available in terms of measuring whether such loss took place, and, more than that, the immediate

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assistance that must be made available to nationals. We have seen in too many instances persons who have suffered loss, death by accidents or death from fires or the total loss of a house; they are just left to the mercy of the community in some areas.

I also want to suggest that the offices of the Members of Parliament on both sides can be utilized in an intelligent way. What happens sometimes is that, especially it may affect Members on this side, persons who come to the office of the Member of Parliament, there is no system there so that the Member of Parliament or the staff at the MP's office can access any one of the government agencies. There is also the feeling by some government agencies, the request is coming from the office of an Opposition Member and must be treated with contempt, but we have seen a lot of evidence of that for one reason or another, so that the Government, in their response, may want to indicate what happens when a Member of Parliament—and it might be for both sides in some instances—makes a request or draws to the attention of the relevant authorities loss by fire or accidents or disasters and what can be expected. Thank you very much.

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the assertion made by the hon. Member for Fyzabad that there is or has been a failure by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, its agencies and/or agents to make assistance available to persons suffering loss and injury from home fires, floods, accidents and disasters.

This assertion, Mr. Speaker, is more than a request for clarification or information by the hon. Member. It is an accusation. More than that, Mr. Speaker, it is a groundless accusation. [*Desk thumping*] It represents an unprovoked and unjustified attack on those conscientious and hard working public officers of the Social Services Delivery Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister, [*Desk thumping*] officers, Mr. Speaker, who toil tirelessly to respond on this country's collective behalf to those in need in our society. It is in defence of those persons, among others, that I respond this evening.

Contrary to the assertion of the hon. Member, assistance, and meaningful assistance, has invariably and continues to be provided by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to persons suffering loss and injury from home fires, floods, accidents and disasters through the Social Services Delivery Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister and also through partnerships between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, NGOs and other civic organizations. Furthermore, the

assistance that is provided in such cases is of a holistic nature, focusing on the material, emotional, social and psychological needs of those affected.

These services target clearly identified needs. They involve collaboration between and among various divisions in the Social Services Delivery Unit and they are provided, Mr. Speaker, without favour to any individual or group. Moreover, because the officers of the Social Services Delivery Unit adhere to professional standards of practice, what is done or who receives assistance are not matters which are shouted from the rooftops in order to bolster false claims of performance. These officers seek, at all times, to ensure that the dignity of survivors is respected. It is also in defence of these survivors' rights of dignity and privacy that I speak this evening.

Mr. Speaker, first permit me to address in broad terms the question of assistance provided by the Social Services Delivery Unit. The divisions of the Social Services Delivery Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister respond to crises and emergency situations from Toco to Cedros, from Morvant to Nariva, from Chaguanas to Moruga and points in between. [*Desk thumping*] In every incident of the nature identified in the question before this House that has held the attention of the national community over the last two years, and others of which the national community has never heard, there has been an effective and immediate response by officers of this unit, the concomitant provision of assistance to clearly identified needs.

The National Family Services Division, for example, Mr. Speaker, has been at the forefront in providing assistance to members of the national community in times of crisis. Between 2000 and 2002, that division has intervened in the following cases among others: fires, over 12 cases, including Morvant, Duke Street, which was a fire that affected some 20 families, Chaguanas, Laventille, the Salvation Army hostel; freak storms, including those at Cocoyea Village; Salazar Trace, Point Fortin; Claxton Bay; electrocution; floods, including those of December 2001 when officers were at work after 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve; burn victims, murders in Point Fortin, Paria, Caroni, Claxton Bay, Chaguanas, Ste. Madeleine; accidents, Point Fortin, Arima, Claxton Bay; drownings, including the three recent cases from Williamsville; suicides in Cedros, Chaguanas, La Romain; well blowouts in Point Fortin.

To those, Mr. Speaker, like the hon. Member for Fyzabad who seem to feel that the units in the family services division do little or nothing, may I point out that in some of the instances of which I have guardedly spoken, officers of this division responded on weekends and public holidays. Recently, one officer had to

respond to three crisis cases in one weekend. All the work of which I have spoken was undertaken in addition to these officers' normal duties for which they ought to be commended, not vilified, as some are wont to do. I am sure if the hon. Member had consulted any of his colleagues, take the Member for Chaguanas, for example, [*Desk thumping*] he would have readily and fully been apprised of the sterling work of the officers in the Social Services Division [*Desk thumping*] and he would not have found it necessary to filibuster with this question as he has this evening; but, Mr. Speaker, we know that they are suffering from selective amnesia.

Having evidently elected not to take that path, I wish to outline to this honourable House how this unit works to address the very issues raised in the Member's question and the response mechanisms which are in place to deal with the issues. Typically, on learning of a crisis situation, the officer in the relevant division of the Social Services Delivery Unit, assigned to the geographical area, immediately makes a site visit and undertakes an assessment as to those affected, both directly and indirectly, specifically on the nature of the needs arising and of what is required to address the situation both immediately and in the short time.

Mr. Speaker, the officer, in most instances, is a member of the National Family Services Division. He then informs the director of the relevant unit who in turn contacts the other critical divisions, for example, the ministry's Social Welfare Division or SHARE, to institute immediate material aid alongside attending to the emotional and psychological needs primarily through formal counselling of both primary and secondary victims.

For the benefit of the hon. Member, Mr. Speaker, let me bring all of this home in more direct terms. On staff at the ministry is a member of NEMA's task force. This officer maintains frequent contact with that agency and communicates with this ministry as well as non-governmental, social and voluntary agencies to collaborate and supply relevant services as necessary. As recently as in relation to the floods of Tuesday of this week, the officer immediately contacted relevant officers to conduct site visits and to ascertain and report on those and the quantum of resources required from the ministry to address this problem.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, there has been constant communication with NEMA and the regional corporations which have the major responsibility in assessing damage in their respective areas. At this time, damage assessment needs analysis reports from the corporation teams are waiting to inform on further responses by this ministry. May I also point out that the National Family Services Division has provided counselling to families in Nariva/Mayaro and has referred

some of the families to social welfare and to the SHARE division, has visited Bamboo No. 2 and Kelly Village and are returning today, Friday, to counsel the families in Kelly Village. There has also been the referral of families in Bamboo No. 2 to SHARE and social welfare. Based on the assessment reports, the officer for St. George East of the National Family Services Division has been visiting with residents of Anthuria Avenue, Macoya Gardens for counselling, and there has been communication with regional corporations re counselling needs, referrals to SHARE, social welfare and self-help.

Mr. Speaker, apart from the National Family Services Division, the SHARE secretariat has also responded to over 160 disasters in the forms of fires, floods, oil spills, explosions, storms, tornado damage and other forms of emergencies. In almost all instances, response was effected through collaboration with and referrals by other departments of this ministry, in particular the family services division and the social welfare division. Referrals have also been made to the National Self-Help Commission for the renovation and rebuilding of residences.

The following, Mr. Speaker, is a breakdown of the number of households that were assisted by the SHARE secretariat.

- Fires—51; number of households assisted—36;
- Floods—90; number of households assisted—55;
- Storms—10; number of households assisted—3.

The responses with respect to floods include those in relation to households to whom assistance was given during the floods of December 2001 and who continue to receive assistance thereafter in the form of food hampers in the months of January and February 2002 and beyond. Since Tuesday's unfortunate flooding, personnel of the secretariat have been out in the field, and, as I see, are still in the field, assessing the damage done with the aim of determining eligible recipients. Special care is being taken to ensure that duplication of benefits is minimized and that beneficiaries do not misuse the ministry's efforts.

That is not all, Mr. Speaker. As I speak this evening, staff of the social welfare division are also standing by to provide assistance to victims of the recent floods. Indeed, over the years, this division has been providing financial relief to many of our citizens who suffer loss or injury as a result of fires, floods, accidents or other disasters.

Mr. Speaker, the social welfare division, under its Urgent Temporary Assistance Programmes, provides further assistance to victims of disasters by way

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of various grants. These grants are provided to assist victims in replacing essential items—books, uniforms, clothing, housing articles and utensils and building materials. Let me remind Members of this honourable House, and the Member for Fyzabad, that revised rates for these grants were announced in the 2003 budget statement and they will come into effect shortly. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Point of clarification. Can you tell me how much it will be, please?

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Mr. Speaker, during the period 2002, to September 2002, the division assisted victims of fire, landslide and violent crime in terms of those grants. While I am generally pleased with the prompt response of the officers of my ministry in most instances, let me state categorically that we also accept that much more needs to be done to bring speedier relief to citizens in crisis. It is an area engaging priority attention as my ministry continues to review and explore avenues to improve on our service delivery to the public. Additional human and material resources and improved networking are the keys to satisfying requests in an equitable manner.

Mr. Speaker, it is now, I hope, quite clear that there has been and is no failure on the part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, its agencies or its agents to make assistance available to persons suffering loss and injury from home fires, floods, accidents and disasters. Suggestions to the contrary are both mischievous and misleading. [*Desk thumping*] It is our hope that now that the facts have been laid bare before the national community, those on the other side will devote their energies more towards collaborating with the Government with a view to improving the delivery of social services to persons in crisis rather than to hurling irresponsible allegations at those who provide yeoman service in that regard. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

PROCEDURAL MOTION

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is fast approaching 7.50 p.m. Is it the wish of the House that we continue to sit until the disposal of the last Motion before us?

Assent indicated.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House continue to sit to allow for the other Motion to be heard.

Question put and agreed to.

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Mr. Speaker: We will now hear the Motion of the hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Cedar Hill Road
(Illegal Dumping)**

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am deeply grateful for your permission to raise this matter on the Motion on the Adjournment of the House, the need for the immediate removal of garbage along the Cedar Hill Road, Claxton Bay in the vicinity of the south-east boundary of the Forres Park landfill due to a recent upsurge of indiscriminate and illegal dumping of garbage in that area.

Mr. Speaker, as you travel east along the Cedar Hill Road, having exited the southbound lane of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway at the Forres Park flyover, you encounter, after driving about one and a half kilometres, a large garbage pile-up about 20 feet from the road side. This is a serious health hazard. Since the new access has been made to the Forres Park landfill off the Cedar Hill Road, the heavy trucks that use this road have left the road in a deplorable state. This is causing undue hardship to hundreds of motorists who use this route to enter or leave the villages of Tortuga and Mayo. The schoolchildren have to trek through mud when it rains.

Mr. Speaker, this road was resurfaced in 2001. All along the roadside leading to this entrance off the Cedar Hill Road there is garbage. There is indiscriminate and illegal dumping taking place. This Cedar Hill Road has become the main access to the villages of Tortuga and Mayo. There are several feeder roads to these villages but they are either impassable or in a deplorable state. Under the 2001/2002 National Road Enhancement Programme (NREP), the Indian Trail Road was to be upgraded since there is a severe landslide that has made this road virtually impassable. No works were carried out. The Gran Couva main road is also in a deplorable state following the laying of a pipeline in 2001. This has also been programmed under the NREP for resurfacing—no work carried out.

Along the Mayo/Tortuga Road there was a pipe laying project in 2000 and this road was to be resurfaced in 2001/2002 under NREP. There are several severe landslips along the roadway that had to be repaired. These were never started. Mr. Speaker, the road leading to the main entrance of the Forres Park landfill is in a terrible state and, as a result, truck drivers either use the roadside or the new entrance off the Cedar Hill Road. What in essence has emerged is satellite or peripheral dumping.

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Mr. Speaker, the extension of the landfill on the south-eastern side is very close to the Cedar Hill Road and it is a serious health hazard. Recently there was a report of an outbreak of the bubonic plague, or black death as it was known, in the United States. This disease is carried by rats or, to be more specific, the fleas on the rats. When we thought the world was rid of this plague, it has resurfaced. Mr. Speaker, the rat population has been increasing under the PNM [*Laughter*] and this is fueled by the garbage that we have seen accumulating on the roadside [*Laughter*] both [*Interruption*] in the rural and urban areas. The Minister of Health must stop trying to fool the population and admit that there is a dengue epidemic. Scores of people are dying and thousands incapacitated by the dengue fever.

The former administration had a holistic approach to solid waste management, not this kind of piecemeal approach by the PNM Government. There was a plan for a national solid waste management system. All the research was completed and even the tender documents were prepared by the ministry. All the PNM had to do was go out for tenders. It is the same plan that is now in their social policy framework document. Instead of this approach, the PNM preferred to spend \$75 million of taxpayers' money under the scam of an environmental programme to buy votes. The money was budgeted for 2001/2002.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon the Government to implement our plan as quickly as possible and also for the resurfacing of the roads I mentioned. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Jarrette Narine): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Motion on the adjournment from the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, former Minister, and never to be again, reads as follows: the need for immediate removal of garbage along the Cedar Hill Road, Claxton Bay, in the vicinity of the south-east boundary of the Forres Park landfill due to the recent upsurge of indiscriminate dumping of garbage in that area. I doubt that this has anything to do with laying of waterlines.

Mr. Speaker, subsection (j), part of section 12 of the Municipal Corporations Act No. 21 of 1990, gives corporations the responsibility for the disposal of garbage from public and private property. The Cedar Hill Road falls within the purview of the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite Regional Corporation and does indeed fall within the vicinity of the Forres Park landfill.

At this time I wish to state that there is no need to address the removal of garbage along the Cedar Hill Road as there is no garbage to be removed. Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest to the Member for Tabaquite that he should get

better acquainted with the constituency that he purports to represent and not only rely on hearsay. I believe that my misinformed colleague wanted perhaps to refer to the Kanga Wood Road which leads to the access to the landfill site. This roadway, Mr. Speaker, is in a state of disrepair. There is no evidence of the paved surface; it has long since been eroded. There are large potholes, trenches, and pools of water which make it very difficult and dangerous accessing to and from the landfill sites. That is Kanga Wood Road, not Cedar Hill Road.

On the Kanga Wood Road, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that there has been indiscriminate and illegal dumping for sometime now due to the presence of waste pickers who salvage garbage from the garbage collecting units along the roadway. In addition, Mr. Speaker, there also exists illegal dumping on the part of scavenging contractors owing to the state of disrepair of the Kanga Wood Road. However, the Ministry of Local Government has obtained an assurance from the Solid Waste Management Company Limited that the garbage on the Kanga Wood Road will be removed. Additionally, the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite Regional Corporation will be standing by to supplement the efforts of the Solid Waste Management Company Limited.

Mr. Speaker, I am however somewhat surprised that it is the Member for Tabaquite who has raised this matter. After all, he was once the minister with responsibility for the environment. He was the minister who never allocated funds to the Solid Waste Management Company Limited to repair the access road to the landfill. In fact, that was the minister's responsibility for the occurrence of the very same matter that he is raising today. However, I would like to alleviate any concerns of the Member for Tabaquite in the short term.

A meeting has been planned for Thursday, November 14, 2002 with the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Solid Waste Management Company Limited, Caroni (1975) Limited and the Ministry of Local Government to come up with a plan of action to repair the Kanga Wood roadway. As a matter of fact, these agencies, Mr. Speaker, are responsible for different areas within that Kanga Wood area. Further, the Solid Waste Management Company Limited has already provided alternative access to the landfill in the interim and will be monitoring the area to prevent or minimize the incidents of illegal dumping.

Mr. Speaker, for the long term, my Government is working towards finalizing the National Solid Waste Management Plan which will involve the setting up of transfer stations. This plan is expected to be implemented before the end of this

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Government's term in office and will serve to eliminate any future problems like these. Even though there have been many, many have been created by my colleagues on the other side.

The information I have has come from the officers of the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite Regional Corporation, which is a corporation under the control of the United National Congress. We have no councilors involved in that corporation and, as a matter of fact, the Member of Parliament has never visited that corporation in his tenure. He does not know his councillors nor does he know the people who run the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite Regional Corporation. We, however, will be meeting this week. We are going to correct that area and we are looking at the greater problem in the future to correct all landfill sites in Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.57 p.m.