

Leave of Absence

Friday, November 29, 2002

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 29, 2002

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received correspondence requesting leave of absence from the sitting of the House from the Member for Arouca South for the period November 27 to December 02, 2002 and from the hon. Member for Princes Town from today's sitting. The leave of absence which Members requested is granted.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(RULING)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to make a ruling for the benefit of this honourable House.

On Friday, November 15, 2002, the hon. Member for Caroni East sought to move an adjournment of this House pursuant to Standing Order 12 to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance namely; the flooding that was occurring in various parts of the country.

Without doubt, the matter which the hon. Member sought to discuss as an emergency debate was indeed a serious matter which affected numerous citizens, not only on this occasion, but virtually year after year without fail whenever heavy rains occurred.

On this occasion, the rains began on or around November 04 and on November 08, 2002, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport made a statement in this House on the manner in which the Government proposed to deal with the issue of the flooding. As all hon. Members are aware, Standing Order 12 is a vehicle by which the House sets aside its pre-arranged business to debate a matter that is so pressing that the nation's interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention. An adjournment motion is therefore quite an exceptional thing and the rule is that nothing new should be introduced for discussion for the day unless the occasion is of such a character that something so very grave has suddenly occurred significantly affecting the country, its safety, and its interest that the House must pay attention to this matter immediately to ascertain its resolve.

Definite Urgent Matter (Ruling)
[MR. SPEAKER]

Friday, November 29, 2002

May's Parliamentary Practice explains that this Standing Order is really intended to give the discussion of some recently occurring emergency precedence over the business already arranged. Consequently, it is unlikely that the Speaker would be satisfied that the matter qualifies to be raised under this Standing Order unless the nature of the matter is imminent and the consequences thereof are such that it must be resolved urgently by the Government.

If however, the Speaker is so satisfied, he must thereafter seek the permission of the House for the matter to be heard, and if the House refuses to grant leave, at least nine Members must rise to indicate their support for the request. Only then can the matter be debated. It is to be noted that the Speaker does not have to give reasons to the House for his decision to accept or decline the request.

In interpreting whether a matter is urgent or not, the Chair is guided, not by the ordinary meaning of the term, but by the technical use of the term, meaning the rule. For a matter to be urgent, it must have arisen suddenly in the nature of an emergency. Therefore, a matter is urgent only if it is of virtually immediate occurrence and it must be raised at the first available opportunity. Thus, procedural authorities are clear that on-going problems would be rejected as being unsuitable to be raised under this procedure.

A matter even of very recent occurrence is not urgent if an opportunity for its discussion would arise in the ordinary course of business within a reasonably short time, or moreover if the matter was addressed in the House at an earlier sitting—in this particular case, the sitting of the week prior.

On technical grounds therefore, and for the substantive reasons outlined above, I found that the matter raised by the hon. Member could not succeed.

Speakers often advise Members to utilize Standing Order 11 in order to have important matters dealt with. The Standing Order is clear on matters to be raised on the motion on the adjournment of the House. It allows Members, other than Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, to raise any matter for which the Cabinet is responsible on the motion for the adjournment giving only three clear days' notice. This was the recommendation of the Speaker at the sitting of November 15, 2002. Moreover, Members can also use the provisions of Standing Order 17.

Hon. Members, I am not surprised that my ruling and the rules relating to Standing Order 12 have been the subject of widespread discussion and debate in the print and electronic media. Indeed, there have been commentaries by the general public, a former Speaker, former Members, current Members of this House and an experienced Member of the other place.

Many of these commentaries highlight a pressing need for Parliament, through its support department, to explain its various procedures and rules to an obviously intelligent and interested public. However, what I consider inexcusable and reprehensible are the attacks on the Speaker by Members of this House and by a Member of the Senate.

In fact, the written comments to the media made by the Senator in question so misconstrued this House's procedure, and in particular, Standing Order 12(2) and (3) that it has added even more confusion to the mind of an uninformed public. And for a Member of Parliament to infer that the Speaker's ruling is frivolous or partisan is to cast a serious reflection on the Chair, and only serves to bring disrepute to this House and its proceedings. Indeed, it borders on contempt of this House.

Hon. Members, as with intimidation of a member or a witness before a committee, the intimidation or attempted intimidation of a Speaker is something to be viewed very seriously by the House. Uninformed comment by anyone on the impartiality of the Chair is not only an attack on the integrity or an attack on the office, but also an attack on this honourable House.

In my opinion, comments like: "The Speaker knows which side his bread is buttered. And, if both sides understood the Standing Orders, it is possible that in time needed, the power to refuse, or the right to insist would be exercised in a frivolous or partisan manner," can be seen as an attempt to intimidate the Speaker and ultimately influence rulings by the Chair.

Each Member of this House enjoys the right and privilege to freely discharge his duties in this House. The Speaker also enjoys these rights and privileges. Without them, we would be unable to perform our various functions without fear. It is not only the duty of the Chair to protect these rights and privileges; such a duty is also binding on all hon. Members of this House, since I feel confident that all of you have respect for this institution and its authority and dignity.

Rules and regulations as framed by this House, and traditions established by my great predecessors of this and other Parliaments would be my guide in conducting the business of this House. While applying these, I intend to continue to be impartial and judicious in the conduct of my work. I also intend to earnestly endeavour to live up to the exacting requirement to uphold the dignity, decorum, and privileges of this House, which I am sure you will agree will redound not only to the benefit of this honourable House in particular, but also to the greater appreciation of a discerning public in general.

PAPER LAID

Annual Report inclusive of audited financial statements of the National Insurance Board for the financial year ended June 30, 2002. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas):

Best Village Division**(Employment of Persons)**

1. (i) Could the hon. Minister of Community Development and Gender Affairs tell this House the number of persons employed in the Best Village Division over the last year? Could the Minister submit a list of these persons, their positions, their qualifications and the salaries paid to each?
- (ii) Could the Minister explain the procedure for recruitment to these positions?

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the question on the Order Paper be deferred for one week. I understand the Minister has spoken with the Member for Chaguanas.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)****Acts of Violence
(Port of Spain General Hospital)**

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (Caroni Central): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12, I wish to seek leave of this honourable House to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance namely, the recent acts of violence at the Port of Spain General Hospital.

This matter is definite as it relates to specific instances of violence at the Port of Spain General Hospital.

Definite Urgent Matter (Leave)

Friday, November 29, 2002

Mr. Speaker, the matter is urgent because these acts of violence at the Port of Spain General Hospital have seriously affected the ability of the medical staff to give proper care to patients and have put the lives and safety of patients and staff at risk.

The matter is of public importance since more than 90 per cent of the population of Trinidad and Tobago seek attention at the public health care institution and acts of violence cause serious disruptions in the services as evident by the closure of the Accident and Emergency Department of the Port of Spain General Hospital on several occasions, and one of the clinics on another occasion due to incidents of violence.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the leave which the Member for Caroni Central seeks is denied.

REDUCTION OF AIR FARE

(Domestic Air Bridge)

The Minister of Culture and Tourism (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Mr. Speaker, I have been authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement with respect to the Government's position on the reduction of the airfare on the Domestic Air bridge between Trinidad and Tobago.

In the budget presentation for fiscal 2003, the Minister of Finance stated his intention to strengthen the union between our twin islands and to ease the burden of travellers between the islands by reducing the cost of an airline ticket from \$300 to \$200 during the fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform this honourable House that in pursuit of this objective, Cabinet at its weekly meeting on Thursday, November 21, 2002 agreed to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with British West Indies Airways Limited (BWIA) and Tobago Express to ensure seats are provided at the reduced fare of \$200. BWIA and Tobago Express have committed to make seats available at a \$200 airfare year-round.

The fare of \$200 will be available on tickets purchased seven days in advance of the intended date of travel, however, the \$300 will apply in the event of cancellation or change of date. There is a significant element of Government subsidy in this arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, BWIA and Tobago Express have committed to providing sufficient capacity on the air bridge to service the existing and future market demand. This new arrangement would take effect from January 01, 2003.

Thank you.

STAMP DUTY (VALIDATION) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to validate the cancellation of certain postage stamps be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is to validate documents and instruments in respect of which stamp duty and fees were paid by way of postage stamp instead of money after the coming into force of the Stamp Duty (Special Provisions) Act, of November 06, 2001.

Last week in this House, we were informed that all the bills on the Order Paper were those of the last government and some of them were found to be not necessary. In this case, this is a Bill of the last government and it is extremely necessary and, more than that, I think it points to the inefficiency of the UNC government.

Mr. Speaker, in November 2001, the Government came with legislation to request, or to deem adhesive stamps no longer valid for documents like deeds and other instruments. From that point on, payment had to be in money and that was the whole purpose of the legislation. The background to that, which we did not get when the Minister presented the Bill, is that since the coming into force of the postal corporation, all revenues from adhesive stamps went to the postal corporation rather than the Treasury.

The postal corporation established by statute a separate legal entity, and I think it was an excellent move, but they did not do everything that was required. You will remember that the legislation with respect to the postal corporation was in early 1999, and this legislation was in November 2001 which means that for some 18 months, the postal corporation still continued to receive the income of these adhesive stamps because the purpose of the validation Bill was to validate documents on which adhesive stamps continued to be used even after the passage of the Bill in 2001.

So that rather than at the time of legislating the postal corporation and bringing legislation at the same time to say: "Fine, we are going to stop the use of adhesive stamps, one would now have to pay by cash for these documents," this legislation came sometime later on.

Now that was in 2001 and even after that legislation, adhesive stamps continued to be used, hence the purpose of this validating legislation. Simple, but

it points to inefficiency at two levels because, in the first case, given that the legislation was not passed at the time of the postal corporation there were post offices continuing to receive the income.

Secondly, even when the Act was passed in 2001, there was a lack of communication so that various organizations and governmental institutions continued to accept the adhesive stamps. As a matter of fact, although when this legislation was proposed, the break suggested that the organizations and institutions were told to stop using the adhesive stamps, one is not even sure that was in fact so. I have asked my people to ensure that it is so.

We are now faced with having to bring legislation to validate the use of the stamps after the passage of the legislation on November 06, 2001 to the current time. It is important legislation because without it, instruments such as those that may have used adhesive stamps, may not in fact be valid.

Mr. Speaker, this is the simple purpose of this legislation. I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for permitting me this time to enter this debate. Just a few points I wish to make on the Bill.

Mr. Ramnath: She is the Chief Whip in the absence of the Chief Whip.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Chief Whip is here.

Mr. Speaker, before I do that, I am very happy that the hon. Speaker spent some time this afternoon clarifying the difference between Standing Orders 11 and 12 because I remember on that particular day when Mr. Speaker advised us that it could now be done under Standing Order 11, I asked whether ours was out of time. What the hon. Speaker has done today is clarify that there are two measures that it can be brought under: Standing Order 11 and Standing Order 12. I am very happy for the clarification. That was not for us in the House because we understood that, but certainly for those outside who seem to have confused the issue of notice with respect to bringing motions or matters to this honourable Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new Prime Minister if I am not mistaken, because I see here Bill No. 1: "An Act to validate the cancellation of certain postage stamps (By the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance)". So I do not know if there is any change on the other side or if, for some reason, the Prime

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Minister has chosen today to give way to the Member for Diego Martin Central to pilot this Bill. Maybe he has been very wise in so doing.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, just to correct the Member.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I am not giving way because the last time when I kindly gave way, I was insulted. The Member will have his chance to wind up.

So congratulations to the Member for piloting this Bill, because like the one last week, as he has clearly indicated, it is another UNC bill. There is not a comma or a full stop, and not a word has been changed. So the substance of the Bill remains clearly a UNC measure and by piloting this Bill, speaking in favour of it today the Member is asking for the support of hon. Members of this House.

The Member, on behalf of his team, is clearly making an open admission to the nation that, despite all their rantings that the UNC did nothing, here is something that the UNC did, and it is a good Bill, a UNC bill.

Mr. Speaker, I still must comment on the point I made last week. Whilst we have no difficulty in supporting this Bill because it is a necessary measure, I again raise the issue of the legislative agenda. Each week I look forward to seeing what is on the Order Paper. In spite of all the protestations last week by the hon. Member for San Fernando East to regale this House with the vision from 1956 right up to the present, there is still nothing on the Order Paper that is a measure coming from the Government, and I have a serious difficulty with that. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I will not go home until you give me permission to leave. I will not leave because the Member asks me to. I will not go home. I have been elected by the people, and if the Member does not like what I am saying then he may leave because I have no intention of leaving my place as an elected Member of the Parliament. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I am saying once again, looking at the Order Paper and looking at the Bill, I am very disappointed that despite the protestations that it was only in October this huge document of vision—and I repeat that they have been in Government for well nigh one year and yet nothing on this Order Paper. Today is November 29, 2002, almost a year and there is nothing new; no new plan, no new programme and so we come to the Bill, an Act to validate the cancellation of certain postage stamps.

Last week when I mentioned this particular Bill, some of the Members on the other side reminded us of the historic significance of it. This Bill will go down in the annals of our political history as a Bill that came before this Chamber and I would talk on that in a moment.

What does it do? The Member gave us a very garbled explanation as to what this Bill is about and I remembered Ramesh standing in this Chamber when we were on the other side and piloting this very Bill. What it really seeks to do, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, is deal with all the mortgage deeds, all the documents, all the instruments in the Registrar General's Department, in several Government departments, but why it comes out of the Ministry of Finance is because it is dealing with revenue. So that revenue was collected by way of postage stamps. But when, as the Member indicated, TTPost came into effect moneys were no longer going into the Consolidated Fund, it was going into TTPost and so we came to the Sixth Parliament, the one before the last and we brought the Stamp Duty (Special Provisions) Act and we were doing two things with that Act. It was to say that revenue collection by way of stamps was no longer necessary, you can now use money and pay that revenue directly to Government, but it was also clearing up a problem which I know, hon. Speaker, you faced in your own practice and which lawyers faced when they came to the Red House here.

You would send your clerks to register documents and they would have to look for somewhere selling stamps because it was only when you arrived you would get an idea of how many stamps you needed to put on that document. So we got rid of that archaic system of sticking the stamps on. And so it is that the Stamp Duty (Special Provisions) Act came into effect and said no more stamps.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I said the hon. Member garbled, he does not seem to understand—with due respect to him—what is going on with this because I heard him repeatedly mention the date of November 06, 2001 and there is nothing whatsoever that this Bill now, or in its previous incarnation, had to do with November 06, 2001. You see, I had reason last week to mention that the Explanatory Note of the last Bill we debated was misleading, and today the Explanatory Note in this Bill is totally wrong. It is inaccurate because it gives the date of coming into force of the Stamp Duty (Special Provisions) Act, 2000 as November 06, 2001 and that is incorrect. The Act in fact came into force in 2000, not 2001.

If what the Member is saying is true, then problems only arose from November 06, 2001 to the present time, that is just a couple weeks ago from last

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, November 29, 2002

year just before they came into office to the present time, and that is not the case. That is what he would be saying. You are validating from November 06, 2001 to this time and this is not the case at all. So again I ask those responsible for the drafting of these Bills to please spend a little more time.

I have to ask, what is the Attorney General doing? I raised that issue last week. Please be more careful with respect to the drafting of the bills. This is what comes before us to debate. Here we are seeking to validate documents and instruments in respect of which stamp duties and fees were paid by way of postage stamps when they should have been paid by way of money after the coming into force of the Stamp Duty (Special Provisions) Act, 2000. We are validating those documents and it is not because the issue is clear, but it is because out of an abundance of caution there have been some concerns as to the legal validity of the documents where stamps continue to be affixed unto them as the revenue collecting measure. When those stamps were cancelled, what was the effect of these documents for evidentiary purposes? What was the effect of these documents where stamps were affixed and so on? Are they legally valid and can they be used as evidence of particular transactions? Are those documents in fact legal documents? Those were the concerns which really is the genesis of this Bill and which led to this Bill coming into effect.

Again, I say the Member for Diego Martin Central has indicated clearly that he understands that this is a Bill that would benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In piloting this Bill, he is openly admitting that he knew, as he knows today, this was a Bill that was necessary. It needed parliamentary approval and was a good Bill that deserved the support of Members, and even though they knew that, and they still know it, on that fateful day—and that is why I say it is historical—October 05, 2001, not many moons ago, just some months ago, those on the other side, together with three foolish men, all elected representatives of the people and here by the trust of the people, to act for the benefit of the people, conspired and made a deal to betray the trust and the welfare of the very people who elected them to Parliament when they voted against the identical Bill on October 05, 2001. [*Interruption*]

The Member is asking me where are they. Where are their fellow conspirators now? Where are those three men with whom they conspired? They are certainly not in this Parliament as elected representatives, instead we can see them wandering from pillar to post across the country fighting to recapture the very thing that they had and threw away. I want to warn the Members on the other side that they have become political outcasts wandering in the wilderness from whence

they came and to where they shall soon return, because they have no vision and I repeat because that is a word that gets the Member for San Fernando East very upset.

Hon. Member: Win alone, lose alone.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: So they conspired and voted against this Bill. I would like to remind you of some words when we look at this Bill, an Act to validate the cancellation of certain postage stamps.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat some words that would be familiar to you. What is not usual is that an item of legislation comes before Parliament which was moved by a group of people when they were in Government and who today are sitting in Opposition who passionately argued in favour of that and now they sit on the other side of the fence, we get a total about face. I quote:

“When people elect people to Parliament, they expect a certain amount of honesty in the way they conduct their political affairs. I talk about intellectual honesty. They cannot lay a Bill in Parliament when they were on this side and come a couple months later, merely because they are on another side of the House, and find that everything is wrong with the Bill and it should not be before the House. When politicians behave in this way, they bring the profession of politics in disrepute. If the profession of politics today does not have the position in the minds of the public that we would like it to have, then politicians have nobody to blame, but themselves.”

Intellectual honesty. A total about face, and these are the words you would recall of the hon. Member for San Fernando East last week in this Parliament.

This is the *Hansard* record, so when they pilot this Bill today, I ask, where is the intellectual honesty about which their leader spoke? If there ever was a case of satan correcting sin, in my respectful view, this is it. This is a clear case, because last Friday the Member, with those words, was piously regaling us with this sort of studio philosophy accusing us of making an about face about bringing the profession of politics into disrepute because he was alleging we were changing our minds about the way we were approaching that particular bill last week.

Today they are doing exactly the same thing that they were accusing us of last week and this is why I say this is a clear case of satan correcting sin. Because months ago, the Members on that side voted against this Bill, and today they come and argue passionately and ask for support in favour of it.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, November 29, 2002

So:

“When people elect people to Parliament they expect a certain amount of honesty in the way they conduct their political affairs. I talk about intellectual honesty. They cannot lay a Bill in Parliament when they were on this side and come a couple months later, merely because they are on another side of the House, and find that everything is wrong. When politicians behave in this way, they bring the profession of politics into disrepute.”

The words of the hon. Member for San Fernando East just last week.

Here it is another Friday, and I ask, how would Members on the other side now vote? Will they have the intellectual honesty that the Member spoke about to maintain consistency in voting for the Bill? So I ask the Member for Diego Martin Central; will you vote today as you voted on October 05, 2001? No. The Member for San Fernando East, will you have the intellectual honesty to vote consistently with how you voted on October 05, 2001? No. The Member for Diego Martin West, will you vote consistent with the way you voted on October 05, 2001? No. The Member for Diego Martin East, the Member for Arouca North, the Member for Port of Spain South, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, the Member for Point Fortin, the Member for Arima, the Member for La Brea, Port of Spain North, will you vote with intellectual honesty, and will you carry through and be consistent? Or is it now that you are on the other side of the House that we now see a total about face? Where is the intellectual honesty?

When the vote is taken at the end of this debate on this Bill, I would respectfully ask for a division because I want the *Hansard* to record for all to see whether there was any intellectual honesty on the other side, and whether there was an about face on this Bill by Members on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, whilst I say this, I would like to set the record straight because when the Member said those words last week with respect to that Bill, this is what is happening in today's debate. When those words were uttered by the hon. Member he was accusing us on this side—with respect to the Registrar General (Amdt.) Bill—that we had argued passionately for it in the past and that we came last week to say we were against it. Nothing is further from the truth and the *Hansard* record would show clearly that at no time did any one of us on this side ever argue passionately in this Parliament because there was no debate, there was no argument whatsoever, no debate ever on that bill. This Bill today we did argue for it, we asked for their support on this Bill and as I say, they voted totally against it.

Just a few more points I would like to raise. This is a revenue matter, that is why it came out of the Ministry of Finance. I would like to respectfully ask: having been in Government for the past eight to nine months, almost a year, I would have liked the Minister to tell us what has happened to the revenue that should have accrued to the Government as a result of these stamps being affixed? How much is the revenue?

Mr. Speaker, they are validating as up to the date of this Bill that the Member is piloting. Do not escape responsibility by saying: “You did it.” That is not the issue. You all are in office—and I will repeat it—for over a year. What have you done, and what are you doing about it? We need to know because those on the other side have a problem with revenue measures.

There is accounting for revenue. You will recall that we are dealing with revenue measures and we had raised the issue and it is still not answered. We had raised the issue that for the eight months that you remained in office without accounting to the Parliament, up to today you have not said how you had spent \$18 billion of the budget last year. Where is your Supplemental Appropriation Bill? If you did not spend it, tell us. Where is your Bill? Where is the closing of the accounts? It was a \$16 billion budget, not \$18 billion.

Mr. Speaker, this is a revenue matter. Where is the revenue? What has become of it? How much is it? Has it gone into the Consolidated Fund? It should have gone. It did not go. What measures have you taken? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Diego Martin West wishes to respond he will have his chance. Any Member of this House can speak. It does not make sense to sit on the sideline and yap at people’s heels. If he wishes to respond, feel free, he will have his turn. I am asking what has happened with respect to the moneys that should have come into the public purse, into the Consolidated Fund. How much is it, and what steps have been taken to recover it?

Mr. Speaker, what steps have been taken, if any, to ensure that such a position does not continue? Have any steps been taken at all? The Minister said: “I am not sure but I have asked my people to ensure that this does not happen”, I recall his words properly. What measures and what steps? There are numerous Government departments which this has applied to, which took revenue by way of stamps. What measures has the Member put in place with respect to making sure that this does not continue?

Mr. Speaker, I am not in Government, they are, and it is their duty to explain to the people what they are doing and why they are doing it. Here we are today

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, November 29, 2002

and Government has put on top of their agenda the validating of something making lawful what was unlawful; validating. It is a revenue measure, but it also has to do with making lawful that which in law was unlawful.

I have a serious concern with respect to the agenda of the Members on the other side when it is at the very top we see a Government that is breaking the law, refusing to obey the law, because right now the Government is in total violation of the law and I want to know when will they seek to validate that.

According to the Municipal Corporations Act, all local government bodies terminated. We are faced, just as we are in the Parliament, with representative democracy. At the local government it is representative democracy at that level as well, and those bodies came to an end. According to the law it terminated and the Minister went ahead and illegally set up advisory committees. There is nowhere in the law—I am on the Bill, Mr. Speaker—because the Minister is speaking about making lawful that which is not lawful and that is something that has to be done with due respect to you, Mr. Speaker.

If we are to just read these provisions, with due respect, Mr. Speaker, and if you read the *Hansard* you can see that if you are dealing with revenue, on top of revenue is making lawful that which is unlawful. I am saying there is a much more urgent matter. Here it is at local government level all ceased and the Minister went ahead and set up advisory committees for which there was no provision in the law whatsoever.

In the past, a measure had been brought to the Parliament to set up advisory committees, but if you look at the law, it was only for a fixed period. The advisory committee was not anytime you decided that you were not calling the local government election. So if you have to validate, as of October 12, all local government representative democracy ceased in this country, and you cannot tell me you are going to name the date on Sunday at that rally you are having because no date that you name would be legal until you come to this Parliament with an act to validate. You must come and validate the life of those councils, the local government bodies. You can get as angry as you like, but it is the truth, it is the law. You must return here to validate it before any date can be legal. This House must approve an extension of time for the calling of the local government election.

Mr. Speaker, I speak about validating that which is unlawful under the law to make it lawful. Therefore, it ties in with the parliamentary agenda that if you are serious about governance and accountability to the people, then that should be at the top, or very close to the top of your agenda, not just these UNC measures.

You are in office, it is your plan and your programme this Parliament should be paying attention to and I am saying from the very top that you are breaking the law, because it is the Government that must set the date for that election. So the Government from the very top is lawless and, therefore, there is no excuse whatsoever, and I am not surprised when I see lawlessness pervading all over this country. [*Interruption*]

In the schools, now it has gone to public institutions. Right in this Parliament, our colleague, the Member for Naparima's family is now living in fear as they have been threatened with kidnapping. There is lawlessness throughout. Look at the hospitals, lawlessness! And that is coming from the very top because they are breaking the law from the top.

Mr. Speaker: Are you finished, hon. Member?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I ask you to come back to the Bill before us.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, this Bill is dealing with revenue, validating unlawful activity, making it now lawful and so I ask that Members on the other side deal with issues to validate those matters that are necessary.

You cannot, as the elected Government of the day, break the law from the top. The Member for Diego Martin Central broke the law. I do not know if it is true. I read it in the newspaper that his EBC returns are outside the law and above the limit. That is what I read in the newspaper. Are you also breaking the law? I do not know if that is true.

In terms of the lawlessness, I read the *Probe* today and I see "Terrorist attack December 22". Is this where we are going? Is this happening? Is this true?

Mr. Imbert: That is a UNC paper, you wrote the article.

Mr. Ramnath: We are going to have a television station just now.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Any time I hold up this newspaper in Parliament, it is like a red flag to a pole. They all become so upset and angry. I thought they were such friends with the media that they would be reading every newspaper. What is wrong with the *Probe*? What is wrong with it? This is like a red flag every time I hold it up, a newspaper of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as I said there were just a few points I wish to raise with respect to this Bill. I again ask and wait to see whether Members on the other side who were in this House on October 05, 2001 and conspired with others to ensure that

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, November 29, 2002

this piece of legislation was not made law—I wait to see today, whether they would listen to the gratuitous advice of their leader last week, and whether they would have the intellectual honesty today to vote in a manner that is consistent with the way they voted on October 05, 2001.

I know my colleagues would find some other words to find out whether they have the fortitude to vote consistent with the manner they voted on October 05, 2001. Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the Member for Diego Martin East does not go and look after the Accident and Emergency Department. People are in danger in Casualty where they are supposed to get help and he is asking if I am still speaking.

So I wait to see how Members on the other side would vote. Those words—intellectual honesty—did not come from me or anyone on this side, but from none other than the hon. Prime Minister last week.

Thank you.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill, 2002.

Before I get into this matter, I take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for Caroni East on his assumption to the position of leader of those of us on this side of the House. I begin by complimenting the Member for Caroni East because this Bill before us is also linked to the very good work of the Member. It was not too long ago when he presided over the remarkable transformation of the postal services in Trinidad and Tobago, and if today Trinidad and Tobago can boast of having an effective and efficient first-world postal service, that boast must be made by the Member for Caroni East. It is his work and the work of the United National Congress.

This Bill that emanates from that type of work and transformation deals with matters relating to validating what has been done before to ensure that there is law and order, and those persons who would have paid moneys and used adhesive stamps on their public government documents, that those transactions are valid and lawful for other purposes.

Mr. Speaker, another critical element of this Bill is that it is a revenue collecting measure. We take notice that between \$9 million to \$12 million can be collected in stamps and funnelled into the Consolidated Fund. Part of this measure is to ensure that the Government collects that money and the money is not left aside, or left in the coffers of TTPost. So it is a measure that deals with collecting revenue—\$12 million—so I will focus on that.

One would also relate this Bill to the Act which deals with this matter, which is the Stamp Duty (Special Provisions) Act, which was enacted by Parliament and proclaimed by the President on November 06, 2000. The Member for Siparia had already spoken on this matter and indicated to the junior Minister of Finance that he may have had his dates all mixed up in that this deals with matters after November 2002 and not 2001, as stated in the Bill.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I felt fortunate just to come to the Parliament and receive a bill with writing in it, because it is not the custom to receive a bill with writing. It is not coincidental that some time ago we came to the Parliament and had before us a blank document. That is how they intend to conduct the business of the Government—by keeping the population in the dark, whether in the Parliament or outside.

Many members of the public would have conducted their transactions at post offices and government departments and would have used these stamps. I recall, not long ago, in hustling to have a matter done, one had to go to the post office, line up, have exact change, buy one's stamps, affix it to one's document and then run again to the government department. For those of us—and I am sure you would empathize with me in this matter—who live outside of Port of Spain, in San Fernando and deep South, it would have been quite a hassle to buy stamps in one place and run around all over the capital city, Port of Spain, or other city centres, to go to government departments.

With the vision of the Member for Caroni East and the UNC administration, we solved that problem for the ordinary citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. When we talked about collecting revenue, that was vision.

Collecting revenue must also be linked to governance. This House, according to the Constitution of this country, is here to make laws for peace, order and good governance. They talk a lot about good governance, integrity, transparency and so on, but those of us in the UNC view good governance as the transparent and accountable management of all the resources of our country for a sustainable economy and social development. Good governance is what we are about. The Constitution outlines that. So all our laws and amendment bills must reflect that—order, peace and good governance.

I am happy to see the Member for Laventille East/Morvant here this afternoon. He usually joins us later. With good governance, how we spend that \$12 million is critical. How we spend public money is critical. This week, in the

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

press, we read some startling developments. They have now been presiding over the affairs of this country for almost 11 months and this week we learn about rampant corruption in the refurbishment programme of the NHA. I am speaking of money collected and money spent.

We heard this week of ghost gangs, people with names like Jennifer Lopez and Serena Williams. We are told, in San Fernando, that there are other names—Janet Reno. We are also told—but I do not believe this one—that there was a name on a ghost gang in San Fernando, Patrick Manning. I do not believe that. There must be somebody else with that name. We do not believe that one at all, but the others we need to investigate because this involves collecting and spending revenue.

We on this side call upon the Prime Minister to conduct a public enquiry into the allegations of corruption at the NHA. I say “public” for a particular reason. It is one thing to stand up as the Member for Arouca North did a few months ago and say he is enquiring into allegations of corruption and then hear nothing about any report done. The Prime Minister is on record as stating that there will be an enquiry. We are saying it must be a public enquiry and we must get the findings. If we do not do that, then measures such as this Bill are null and void, useless and pointless.

We come to the Parliament and deal with the Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill, which deals with collecting revenues. We come here as responsible lawmakers and pass legislation dealing with collecting revenue, only to wake up the next morning and read in the newspapers—I will not go far out of the ambit of this Bill—of issues of rampant corruption involving the expenditure of over \$75 million in that programme.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, just for the information of the hon. Member, this Bill has nothing to do with collecting revenues. It has to do with the validation of the inefficient action of the UNC government. It is a validation bill.

Dr. R. Moonilal: May I advise the Member for Diego Martin Central that in his winding up he will have ample time to correct me if I am wrong. Between then and now, I prefer to be uninterrupted.

On this matter of revenue collection and spending, it is critical that the Government take all possible action to ensure that it makes valid what may have been unlawful before. This is what the Bill is about. Just as they come here with this Bill to make valid what is unlawful, just so they must also deal with the other unlawful acts taking place in this country. That is my link. This is about good

governance; this is about order; this is about making valid what is unlawful. When I make reference to the scandal in the NHA, that is what I am talking about. It also involves spending some of the revenue you will be getting from this measure.

My understanding is that at this moment it could well be that moneys have been collected by TTPost and not passed on to the Central Government—I am not here casting aspersions on the management and executive of TTPost—so this is a critical measure. When the money is passed on, how they manage that money is probably far more critical to us as responsible lawmakers. My first point, which I do not want to dwell on, is that NHA business. They know who the ghost gangs are. They paid Jennifer Lopez for six fortnights before the election and then came after the election and said they did not know whom she was. They do not need UN inspectors to find the ghost gangs. They know them. Now they are posing as ghost busters. They know the people. They campaigned for them during the last election and then betrayed them after. You will hear much more about that, Mr. Speaker.

On the issue of revenue collection and spending of public money, this week some of us—and I, myself, experienced it in my neighbourhood—experienced the very brutal murder of a businessman in Palmyra, Mr. Kenneth Boxie, who was shot dead during a robbery on Wednesday last. It was a daylight robbery. I make the following points, not to attack the police, but to register that when that incident took place it took one and a half hours for the police to go to the crime scene. The ambulance took one hour to arrive. If ever we needed a litmus test to know which party is in power, that is the litmus test.

Today the Commissioner of Police expressed apologies to the family and stated that there is a lack of manpower and vehicles in the police service. So when moneys are collected from validating these measures, it can be used to increase the complement of police officers and cars on our streets and to purchase other types of equipment. Those moneys are disappearing in NHA ghost gangs, URP and so forth. That was a tragic incident that occurred in Palmyra. That very young, 37-year-old businessman will be buried on Sunday, the same time they are celebrating their—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have been giving you a little latitude, but you are straying too much. Please try to come back to the Bill!

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to run the risk of incurring your wrath.

Many members of the public conduct transactions at post offices and government departments. It has been the experience of citizens, when they go to

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

government offices, to encounter inefficiencies and bureaucratic measures, which lead to further discomfort—whether it is the Registrar General’s Office or any other office. There is inconvenience and time wasting for ordinary citizens when they line up to pay cash on legal documents that need to be registered. This measure was introduced by the former administration and, as the Member for Siparia said, on that fateful day this measure did not enjoy the support of those on that side. Instead, they focused on the wider issue involving other Members of the House. This issue was not critical at the time, but it is critical today. As a responsible Opposition, this is a measure that is critical to us whether we are in Government or in Opposition.

Mr. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, is the Member for Oropouche saying that those Members voted against this same Bill on the last occasion? I was not here. I am just trying to clarify this matter.

Dr. R. Moonilal: For the benefit of the Member for Couva South and other Members who were not here at that time, it is my information that Members on that side voted against the measure. Members like the Member for San Fernando West, in whose constituency they are now rioting over the non-payment of the NHA, and other Members who were not here at the time, it is correct that those on this side and those three Members on the other side voted against this measure. They did not think the measure important and in the public interest. They did not see this measure as catering for the peace, order and good governance of this country. I will now move on with my contribution after being interrupted by the Member for Couva South on a very important point of clarification.

Unless this Bill is passed and there is validation of what has happened before with the payments, it will create much more discomfort, inconvenience and even embarrassment for members of the public who have already registered deeds and have done so using stamps. They are now caught in a serious problem as to whether those documents are legal given the Act that was passed in 2000. This is a time when members of the public are discomforted and inconvenienced, not only at the Registrar General’s office, by putting stamps and finding out it might not be legal, but at the Port of Spain General Hospital as well, where there is a complete breakdown, a war taking place between the doctors and the Minister of Health, just as in the Registrar General’s office where citizens are faced with a major problem, having their deeds registered with stamps and finding it unlawful. Those very citizens face problems at the hospital and while they play bad and give all sorts of strong man talk to the doctors, the people of this country suffer. Violence in the health sector is a critical national problem but I will come back to the Bill.

As I was saying before, those of us on this side will have little difficulty in giving support to this measure since it was birthed under the UNC administration. We are also aware of very good work done by the former UNC administration in transforming the postal services that were in dire need of upgrading to increase the efficiency level, the human resource complement and so forth. The UNC administration, the Member for Caroni East, in particular, took action to sort out the postal service. If today we benefit from effective postal services, it is because of the work of the UNC administration. Today I noticed that even the mail from the Parliament now comes through TTPost—efficiency of the highest order—and this measure will continue that good work that we started in the last administration.

It will not be too long from now, when the population comes to the realization that they were seduced with money and really fooled by those on the other side, prior to October 07, 2002. As the Member for Siparia said, when you look at the Order Paper, there is no originality, there is no vision, there is no fresh new piece of legislation to take this country forward. It is really bringing forward a series of measures that have been tabled by the UNC administration. That is why we will have no great difficulty on this side to give support to this measure. We believe it is critical that those moneys, which by this time might be much more than \$12 million, are delivered to the coffers of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Our only concern is that those moneys are well spent and are used to provide security in the hospital; that they are not used to pay the jobless Embcadere youths who block roads in San Fernando protesting that as ghost gangs they were not paid.

I plead here that our concern is the spending of the moneys collected from a measure such as this. On two occasions, Mr. Speaker, when they were caught, they made it appear that they were caught by a no-ball. I refer only in passing, not to get into it, but so that the measure to reward the Minister of Foreign Affairs with some moneys—I will not get into that—and the second matter dealt with—we do not know what it was—a land transfer to the Jamaat al Muslimeen. At the time they were caught, they made it appear that it was a no-ball, but this time when they were caught with ghost gangs, they could not appear. They were bowled with a good ball. We will continue to hold them to account. When they were on this side, they spoke on transparency, integrity and probity in public affairs. Now that they are there, we read in the newspapers of these matters. I want to know if they will blame the people in the North West Regional Health Authority, who were there before they came in office. Will they continue to blame them?

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Today the hospital does not have an administrator. The fellow was relieved of his responsibilities, so that it involves the spending of taxpayers' dollars, the collection of revenues and good governance.

There are several other matters pertaining to the postal service and the efficiency that we would like to bring to that service, but that will not happen without good legislation, without foresight and without vision. I do not want to talk too much about the lack of vision of the other side in fear that the Member for San Fernando East would rise to give us a tutorial on the People's Charter, 1956. They do not like to hear that they do not have vision and that they discriminate. We will not get too much into that to trigger the Prime Minister into that vision tutorial.

With those very few words, I would like to indicate that we are very consistent with our approach, whether we are on the Government Benches or on the Opposition Bench. This is a measure that is needed and that was proposed in its entirety by the UNC administration and rejected by those on that side when they were on this side and today they stand before us pious, self-righteous, noble, virtuous as the entire country comes into chaos and trauma. Every time we raise that matter they threaten terrorism. Every time we stand here to talk about integrity, throwing away the taxpayers' money, they threaten to jail people. That is the only thing we get from them—that the police is looking for us.

When this measure came the first time, they did not support it. That is an historic moment in this country. That put in train a process that led to the removal of a government by proclamation. It was part of a conspiracy. They conspired with former Members of this House who are running up and down.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you would concentrate on the Bill, your contribution would be very interesting. I was enjoying those parts of your contribution which concentrated on the Bill. I am urging you to please concentrate on the Bill.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I would really appreciate if you enjoy my contribution. I would like to get back to the matter of efficiency in the government service as it relates to the Registrar General's office and validating acts that have been conducted that may be unlawful.

The Bill states at clause 3:

“Notwithstanding section 3(1) of the Act, in relation to the payment of stamp duty or fees in accordance with any other written law, the cancellation,

between the date of proclamation of the Act, that is to say, November 06, 2000 and the commencement of this Act, of postage stamps affixed to any instrument, is hereby validated.”

It is very significant that the cancellation of postage or adhesive stamps cannot go without notice. The adhesive stamp by this measure will be cancelled by an authorized person who would write on or across the stamp his name or initials together with the date on which the cancellation was done. The cancelled stamp cannot be used on any other document thereby ensuring that revenue was not lost to the Consolidated Fund.

Ensuring that a written document is duly stamped is important when we come to dealing with providing evidence for all purposes where evidence is required. Any instrument executed in Trinidad and Tobago, which relates to property situated in Trinidad and Tobago is not admissible in evidence unless it is duly stamped.

So, you see the importance of this measure which the UNC brought to this House. It deals with matters as they relate to the courts of Trinidad and Tobago to providing evidence on all matters. In other words, the cancellation of adhesive stamps on written documents will no longer render those documents as being duly stamped.

The predominance of the Act over the provisions of the Stamp Duty Act is expressly stated so that section 18 of the Stamp Duty Act has effectively been nullified. I would not have to go into this if the presenter, the Member for Diego Martin Central, had gotten into this type of analysis rather than just reading the Bill. I am not surprised by him at all. He does not do his homework.

Consequentially, written documents relating to any property in Trinidad and Tobago denoted by adhesive stamps after November 06, 2000 could not, except for this validation before this honourable House, be given as evidence in any court of law. *[Interruption]*

I should reiterate it for the benefit of the Member for Diego Martin Central. That is a major problem. We are getting back to this progressive measure that was first tabled by the UNC administration. It should be clear to all, on either side of the House, how important this measure is and how tragic it was on the last occasion that they chose not to support this measure for personal and political gain. This is an example of how the Members on the other side will put their private, political interests first, beyond the public interest. When it came the last time, they voted against it and find themselves now coming to Parliament to

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

propose and trying to encourage us to support the measure. We will not put private and political agenda first at all. This is in the interest of all the people, including the people from Penal Rock Road, who are looking for the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. I saw the protest on television. They said they have not seen him since the election. I am not surprised because he is here. There is protest action throughout this country and that action is being led by people who have been feeling dissatisfied, dispossessed and betrayed by those on the other side. We, on this side, would like to assist them by supporting measures such as these. It is in the interest of this House and the country that we pass progressive legislation for the benefit of the country, whether the people are quarrelling in Penal Rock Road because the road fell off in a landslide and they cannot see their representative; whether for those other citizens who are brutalized in the hospital, this measure is for all the citizens.

There is the issue as to whether those documents can be enforced in the court of law. Apart from that being a problem, with evidence, whether you can enforce such documents, it may well be that there are citizens out there who have certain proceedings before the courts and it is now stalled because this measure took so long to reach the House. When it came to the House they did not support it. There are citizens in this society, whether UNC or PNM is irrelevant, whose business has now been sabotaged because this measure was not passed the first time around; because those on the other side played politics and teamed up with certain people to remove the UNC government. We are here today debating this measure because it was not passed the last time. There is a reason for that and it is important that we put that on record. It will come up again with the other measures.

Another critical matter relating to this Bill is whether or not we can enforce it if someone else has to claim that it is not dealing definitively with your property but it really belongs to someone else. It may well be that there are court actions where matters arise that would need lawful government documents, related to persons who are not central to those matters before the court. By extension, it could be an enormous number of citizens who are inconvenienced and who today suffer because we did not get this measure out of the way earlier because they played politics the last time around. [*Interruption*] They were involved in that act of treachery and conspiracy. Those words are not words we use lightly.

I take this opportunity to remind the Government of its role to bring legislation to deal with the peace, order and good governance of this society. I will not be as brutal as other Members on this side when I deal with the lack of vision of Members on the other side. I do not want to run the risk of triggering the

Member for San Fernando East. [*Interruption*] He may be listening, you do not know. That fellow has his eyes and ears all around. Ask the Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

On the matter of the vision, I support elements of that vision. I support that we should promote Spanish as a second language. I told the Member for Diego Martin Central that on another occasion, but the problem is that they cannot speak English. They have a problem dealing with the English and want to introduce Spanish.

I saw an ad in the newspapers, Trinidad and Tobago Society of Planners, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Development, led by the distinguished Member for Diego Martin West at which the Member for Diego Martin West is speaking and the target group includes “development” professionals, not “development”. [*Protest*] That is a simple matter. That is a typographical error. That is not as bad as in their political ads misspelling words, but there is a bigger issue here. The bigger issue is that when we have in our country professionals from abroad reading our daily newspapers and see this, what will they think of this country?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is about the third occasion I am appealing to you to be relevant.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With the passage of this Bill, the wrongs will be put right and it will lead to the collection of revenues. This simple measure will lead to the collection of a certain amount of revenues for this country. When this original legislation was brought, which is related to this measure, it was felt that we needed to act in the public interest to take processes of government out of the dinosaur age and that the days of licking stamps would have to come to an end. It was felt also that as part of the process of upgrading all government functions, this was one critical measure to bring us into the modern age. Although at the time they did not support anything that was progressive to the country, we felt that reform of the postal service, of reaching a stage where people can go to the Registrar General’s OFFICE and swipe a credit card, bank card or use a cheque book—[*Words Expunged*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, please!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay, I withdraw that.

Mr. Speaker: Withdraw it and have it expunged from the records, please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I speedily withdraw that, Mr. Speaker. I regret telling the Member that. That just slipped.

This measure was meant to bring relief to citizens. It was related to the Parent Act dealing with the reform of the postal service. It was an outmoded system. It was not only in the area of reform of the postal service and bringing greater efficiency to bear on the Registrar General's office, but it was in all matters that we brought reform and transformation related to the postal service and the operations of the Office of the Registrar General.

When we brought these matters to this House, we outlined in great detail the benefits of these measures. Today, as we stand here to talk about the benefit of validating those transactions undertaken before, there are also other benefits that have arisen from this Parent Act, the postal services that we have achieved as a nation, for ordinary citizens.

The fact that this measure will bring relief to citizens when they go to the office of the Registrar General reflects our thinking on matters of this kind. When we were in government duly elected and not appointed, we sought to bring transformation to all aspects of national life whether it be water service, electricity generation, public transport or postal service. Those involved several pieces of pioneering legislation and by definition, because all things are not correct all the time, measures such as these to validate what is happening.

We saw it as our sacred duty to transform. We also saw it as our sacred duty to ensure that the moneys were collected and well spent. I appeal to the Government to show some heart and to show that they care in dealing with the citizens of this country. If today we are talking about collecting \$12 million through this measure and we are talking about revenue collection and, by definition, spending monies, we must also talk about the misappropriation of funds; about critical national problems as they relate to this Bill.

It will be unwise, unfair and really not in the public interest for us to come every Friday to speak and not reflect on the critical problems facing citizens. That is why we are here. If we cannot reflect on the critical problems facing the ordinary citizen on Friday when we come here; and if we cannot reflect on matters involving spending and raising money, as this Bill seeks to do—

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, to come back to the Bill, I am talking about raising revenue and then spending that money in the interest of the public. As I said, it will be of no use that we pass measures such as this and then do not discuss how we spend it. It will be of no use, so that the connection is very clear. Collecting revenue and spending money has to do with improving the quality of life of our citizens. Those who follow world news were shocked a few hours ago when we saw on television and read of the bombing of a hotel in Mombassa, Kenya; of terrorist activity a few months ago in Bali.

Mr. Speaker: I am at a loss to ascertain what that has to do with the Bill before us.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I began by talking about raising \$12 million through this measure and using the money. I said that in the use of funds raised as a result of this Bill, protecting our citizens is a fundamental objective. That is my connection. I see that connection clearly.

Mr. Speaker: I have ruled it irrelevant.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I will continue directly and maybe very directly with the measures outlined and the benefit of the Bill.

When we seek to bring modernity and transformation to government's activities and bureaucratic functions, it requires pioneering legislation with foresight and policy with foresight. When you talk about a developed country, it is foresight and vision and pioneering legislation such as these related to that pioneering piece of legislation that transformed the postal service. In effecting measures like these we think of the citizens and their hardships. The purpose of our being here is to alleviate the hardship of our citizens and this is one measure that will do that.

As we relieve the hardship dealing with the matter concerning stamps placed on government documents, we must also seek to relieve the hardship in other areas related to this. Today there is still further need for greater efficiencies in our postal service in the way we conduct the public business as it relates to the timely delivery of our post and to the issue of the human resource management of the postal service.

Now I have reached to that substantial issue—that of the human resource management of the postal service. It did not go unnoticed that employees in the postal service are now agitated, to say the least, by the management of the postal service and by the Minister with responsibility for that postal service. I have been

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

having discussions with all trade unions in this country, including the workers in the postal service, and I am informed by the leadership of the postal union, Mr. Speaker, that they are having severe problems relating to this Government because it is either Ministers are too busy—they conduct themselves like aristocrats in office; you have to wait three months before you see any one of them and they do not even see their constituents who are complaining. The people in the postal service are complaining. It has to do with their terms of condition of work. It has to do with matters concerning collective bargaining; with matters concerning benefits due to workers.

The hon. Member, who is also the Minister with responsibility for the postal service, sits in another place. I am hoping that I could communicate with Members on the other side to have a gentle word with that new Minister with responsibility for the postal services and indicate to him that it is critical, in the management of our affairs, for good governance that we meet and treat with the representatives of the workers in the postal service. It is critical that he meets and treats with workers and is not rude and arrogant and saying, every time workers protest, that it is politics—as the Member for Diego Martin East is saying now in relation to the crisis in the health sector.

It is critical that he meets and treats with the workers' representatives and if today the union is complaining that they cannot even get an appointment to see the Minister, that is a serious matter relating to the management of our postal services. We do not want the outcome to be that we pass this measure validating all that has been done before, collect our \$12 million and then the postal service collapses on us because of an industrial relations conflict and there is a serious matter in the postal service as it relates to outstanding benefits to those workers. All that workers need is for the Minister to meet and discuss their problem and not play “macho” management, this neo-colonial type aristocratic management where you see yourself as master and workers as servants.

I do not want to dwell on Caroni either because I do not want to trigger the Member for Post of Spain North/St. Ann's West into his relationship with the union. I get back to the Bill before me and speak about matters concerning the postal service and the lack of consultation between those in the management of the postal service and those who temporarily occupy the Benches on the other side. If managers are not meeting and treating with workers, then the Minister with responsibility for the statutory body should intervene and not tell workers that they cannot see him for the next three months. They need to meet. I am putting the Government on notice that there is only so much that the postal

workers can take and when they reach the breaking point, as the doctors undoubtedly have, then there will be another crisis and measures such as these to collect that \$12 million will mean nothing and “macho” management will get us nowhere.

I do not want to give the Member for Diego Martin East a lecture on industrial relations, but just to warn that they really should not treat workers in that way—every time they raise legitimate protest, they say it is political.

The matters involving the postal service came to the attention of the former Minister of Public Utilities. In the last few months of the year 2001, prior to October 05, when they voted against the measure, I met quickly with the leadership of the union and the management of that corporation to put in place measures to address the concerns of the workers and they were being implemented when suddenly there was a U-turn which occurred at the same time this Government came into being by proclamation. The way they conduct their business in relation to the workers in the postal service is a critical matter.

If today it takes an hour and a half for the police jeep to reach and today doctors are being threatened with death, tomorrow it could be the postal service. This service is critical. I do not want to talk about Bali and Mombasa for the Speaker to rule me irrelevant, but it is the postal service in several developed nations in the world that is used to ship material that is detrimental and that is used for all sorts of illicit acts that may involve the taking of innocent lives.

I do not want to make a link between this and all those matters, but to tell the House about the importance of the postal service. If workers are not treated properly by this administration and by the aristocrats on that side, then if they take industrial action and they turn a blind eye to certain procedures and practices at the nation’s postal service, they do not want to comprehend the full effects of a shut down, a go-slow, a work-to-rule, a strike in the postal service. To be foretold is to be forewarned. I hope they take note of the treatment of workers in the postal service.

They will not. They will laugh gleefully every week and say that they are there and we are here while the entire nation is being destroyed and caught up in trauma due to a lack of security for businessmen in this country who are now migrating—ghost gangs, corruption, and in the postal service matters involving the terms and conditions of the thousands of workers now employed.

Another critical problem, Mr. Speaker, linked to the postal service, has to do with the setting up of post offices throughout this country. There are innocent

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

citizens out there whose business it was, prior to the transformation of the postal services, to deal with the setting up of post offices in the country. There are innocent citizens out there whose business, prior to the transformation of the postal services, was renting their premises to the post offices; conducting business on behalf of the then fully run and owned postal delivery service and several of those persons now have serious problems. These are private citizens, not workers, who have serious problems arising out of disputes relating to the use of their premises due to the close down of post offices, the establishment of other post offices throughout the country.

It is the objective, Mr. Speaker, of those on this side when we were elected into government that we would set up a system where people in remote places, like Penal Rock Road, would benefit by having speedy access to postal services. The Minister with responsibility for the postal services has a role in that. He should have a say in the establishment of the post offices throughout the country so that citizens in rural areas can be serviced.

I know of one citizen in the Golconda area whose business was closed by TTPost arising out of the transformation process. That person now has some outstanding claims. That person has sought to meet the relevant Minister and is still waiting on an appointment. These are the citizens who are affected by that type of restructuring—innocent citizens, not only workers.

I do not want to go too far offline so I remind the country that it was not too long ago when a licence was granted to a particular individual at a radio station, who was connected to their party, to protect workers. Today, I am saying that just as they gave Citadel a licence to protect workers, they can intervene in the postal services to protect the workers and meet those postal workers who are grieved and seek to bring the authority of the Government to the boardroom of TTPost so that they may treat with those workers. That is a critical point. [*Interruption*]

3.30 p.m.

That is the man. In fact, they know of it. [*Interruption*] They know of that situation when they claimed to have intervened to “save 35 people job”. That was the Citadel licence. That was when “dey give de licence to dey friend in 48 hours but I doh want to go dere. I want to return to de workers in the postal service, Mr. Speaker”. Those workers have other complaints as well which I want to use the few minutes that are allocated to me again, the very few minutes, to speak about and bring their concerns to bear because we are on matters dealing with the postal service.

I would ask the minister with responsibility—it is a pity the Member for San Fernando East has vacated the Chamber because I would have liked to have asked the Prime Minister as well to consider the plight of those legitimate postal workers, men and women who go out there and work. They are on the streets in the hot sun facing people's dogs and people's wrath. They are out on the streets working day in and day out. We see the postal workers working. Those are not ghost gangs in the NHA. They work hard on a daily basis throughout this country in all the areas, facing people, facing difficult situations and facing, Mr. Speaker, bandits. When they are out there they could be robbed, as anybody else in this country. They could be home and they could be robbed. These postal workers work very hard. In the postal service you do not have Jennifer Lopez, Serena Williams and Janet Reno.

Mr. Singh: You only have Tommy Joseph.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You only have Tommy Joseph actually, coming to think about it, a celebrity there, and you only have hard working people. So if today they are meeting to treat with ghost gang workers, then, Mr. Speaker, the postal service workers deserve representation. They deserve the attention of the Government.

There is one other person in Debe in my constituency. In the immediate aftermath of the transformation, her premises ceased to be used as a place for the conduct of postal services. When she did not get a hearing at the postal service, she took her complaint to the relevant minister. She could not see the minister. She has spoken to me. I have advised her to take up her complaint elsewhere and it may well be that we have to go to an office in San Fernando with that complaint. Those workers in the postal service who have felt that the minister with responsibility for the postal service is not meeting and treating with them, it may well be that they have to “go in front of Whitehall”. It should not lead to that at all. So again I appeal to Members on that side as this citizen would have to take her grievance to the highest elected office-holder in the land, if that is what is called for, because they continue to suffer, those persons who feel aggrieved arising out of transformations in the postal service.

The postal workers, Mr. Speaker, are integral. I cannot re-emphasize that enough. The postal workers are integral to the effective functioning of our postal services and to security. Matters of security and terrorism have taken a new turn today. These are not matters when the UNC was in office; and the postal service is critical because, in case they did not know, if there is a breakdown in the postal service, that has very serious problems for our security.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Mr. Speaker, this Bill before us may appear simple but with this Government nothing is simple. In closing, I need again to indicate to those on the other side that whether we are in Government or Opposition, we see this measure as progressive. Whether we are in Government or Opposition, we will act responsibly in the interest of the citizens of this country. I need also to say in closing that collecting revenue is important but spending that is more important and if we continue to spend money, \$75 million in ghost gangs, in corruption and in fete, then it makes no sense that we come to this honourable House and seek to pass measures such as these. It makes no sense that we come to this honourable House to pass measures to raise revenue when the Government collects the revenue and gives it out to those people in the ghost gangs, those people throughout this country, in the URP as well.

I am heartened to hear the hon. Prime Minister calling for an investigation into the corruption at the NHA. We look forward to the report coming out of that investigation. We hope that that report will also come to the Parliament and it will not be like the report of the Member for Arouca North who investigated allegations of corruption in the URP about which, to this day, nobody has heard anything; and the Member for San Fernando East knows about that. He has been having meetings with managers in that programme.

So in closing, to return to this measure, Mr. Speaker, we see this as progressive and as long overdue. In fact, it is really a pity that we had to stand here and talk on this today when on October 05, 2001 this could have been dealt with, [*Desk thumping*] when they conspired to remove the democratically elected government and this Bill suffered. If today the hon. Member for Siparia says that there is intellectual dishonesty on that side, she knows what she is talking about. I come back to this because when the Member for San Fernando East speaks in this House, he has 32 years' or so experience in Parliament. So when he stands in the Parliament and he speaks, generally Mr. Speaker, unless I am not busy, you know, doing something else, I will listen to him because I want to benefit from those 32 years of experience, that wisdom.

When he notices that the profession of politics has fallen into disrepute, it is because of the conduct of politicians. That is his observation made, you know, with that wisdom, that age. Then, this Member for San Fernando East led his party on this side and did not support this measure because it was not politically expedient to support this measure, but today they will support it. It is now politically expedient. So the Member for San Fernando East should really lead his troops into looking in the mirror when they speak about the conduct of persons

holding high office in this land. This is just one example. There are several other examples of this dishonesty that the Member for Siparia raised. That was timely and, as we go along with other measures, we will have cause to come back to that wisdom of the Member for San Fernando East.

I took note when the Member for San Fernando East was speaking. He said, “We expect a certain amount of honesty.” He also said in that statement that young children are looking at us and we must be honest and we must conduct ourselves in a particular way. Mr. Speaker, this might be the moment when I could also make another call that is connected to the conduct of the Parliament. It may well be, as we proceed, that we make arrangements so that the debates in this House are carried delayed—because I know the issue of live telecast and so on—on The Information Channel rather than the soap opera of the Airports Authority enquiry. My call today is that the business of the Parliament should now be carried on national television so that the citizens out there will listen to us, will hear us [*Desk thumping*] and will understand the hypocrisy and the intellectual dishonesty and the corruption of those on the other side. Today they are accused of corruption. The NHA ghost gangs are inescapable and incontrovertible evidence that they are corrupt.

Mr. Speaker, on that note I would close and thank you for the latitude you have given me. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for acknowledging me. When I came here this afternoon I had no intention whatsoever to get involved in the debate, other than to follow and to participate in the voting, but, Mr. Speaker, I really could not sit here and allow the Member for Siparia and the Member for Oropouche to mislead you and the national community in the way in which they have done. So I rise just to touch on a few matters. My good friend, the Member for Couva South, did intervene to ask a question of our colleague, the Member for Oropouche, since he said he was not here and therefore did not have an understanding of what was being debated and who did what when. I think you are in the same position, Mr. Speaker, and therefore I rise to assist you in understanding what we are experiencing here.

The repetitive ramblings of my friend from Oropouche is a condition which is commonly known out in the streets, Mr. Speaker—maybe but I do not know how the streets are, so too you might not know the various levels of trauma that the national population ascribes to people who have some problems. There is one level, which is the lowest level, called “tabanca” and that is where people long for

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

a return to a past. *[Interruption]* They long for a pleasant past and that is commonly called “tabanca”.

There is a slightly higher level, that is called “foofooroo”, and that is where you start talking to yourself, you know, as if things were what they were. Then there is another level called “ufumbe”. *[Laughter]* When you are at that stage you stop eating and start pining away; and then you arrive at the stage of “tarangé” which is expiration. Mr. Speaker, it is for you to decide what state our friends on the other side are in, because clearly they are not normal.

Mr. Speaker, how do you explain the Member for Oropouche standing here and starting his contribution by complimenting our colleague, the Member for Caroni East, on the wonderful job that he has done with respect to this TTPost coming into being and it was the perfect job for which he should be congratulated? Throughout their contribution, having nothing to attach themselves to during their term of office that did not involve some element of disgrace, they repeat and repeat and repeat this success of TTPost but the reason we are here today, Mr. Speaker, trying to pass this measure, is not what they are saying. They keep saying over and over that it is to raise revenue and, Mr. Speaker, that is not so at all.

I want to repeat what my colleague from Diego Martin Central said, just in case you are confused, Mr. Speaker, because, after hearing the ramblings of the Member for Oropouche, anybody would be confused. The measure before the House has nothing to do with being a revenue raising one. It is a validation bill. It is to validate something. Let me tell you what happened, Mr. Speaker. The government of the UNC at the time, brought a bill to the Parliament. That Act was passed into law and assented to on September 26, 2000 and it was proclaimed by the presidency on Monday, November 06, 2000. The effect of that proclamation was that on that date of November 06, the requirements for the payment of stamp duty on certain fees to be paid by means of affixed postage stamps and cancellation of such stamps were removed. In short, from November 06, 2000 when the UNC was in government, postage stamps should have stopped being in use. Simple.

However, during that period November to whenever they were out of office, they were too busy counting government money that did not belong to them, so they never took steps to prevent what the bill said should happen. In other words, all stamp duty and fees previously payable by postage stamp became payable by money only. However, payment of stamp duty and fees by postage stamps after November 06, 2000 continued. In fact, in the Registrar’s office, fees were paid by

means of postage stamps until February 09, 2001. Even though the law was assented to and they passed it, while they were in office they kept conducting business with postage stamps until February 09, 2001.

As a result of that, thousands of documents and instruments were issued and registered in the Registrar General's office between November 06, 2000 and February 09, 2001. It is that misbehaviour and mismanagement of the UNC that we are here today trying to correct. [*Desk thumping*] So when we pass this measure today we are going to validate what went wrong between November 06, 2000 and February 09, 2001. That is the length and breadth of this thing.

Mr. Ramnath: Why did you not vote for it when it came up?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I will tell you why. That is what I want to touch on because, you see, in the state of "ufumbe" they keep forgetting and making reference to the day when this matter was brought to the House in October 2001, when the country was liberated from the most corrupt government the country has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote for you what was said by the Leader of the Opposition on the day when this Motion was before the House, because they are telling you it has something to do with us flip-flopping and we did not support the bill then and we are supporting it now and therefore it is some moral crisis on our side.

The PNM conducts its business in public, so on the day when the Member for Siparia, who was waxing eloquent this afternoon talking about moral high ground, presented the bill, this is what the Leader of the Opposition had to say and I quote:

"This afternoon, the Minister made a fairly lengthy contribution on this matter. I thank her for it. Mr. Speaker, with respect, the real issue before Trinidad and Tobago today and which this House should be considering, is not whether we should validate the cancellation of certain postage stamps, but whether the Government of Trinidad and Tobago possesses the moral authority to pass any legislation whatsoever, in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] Look at it. The Government has lost its majority and rather than see this as the national issue that it is, and recognize that it has precipitated a crisis in the national community, the Government is asking us instead to come today to validate some postage stamps that may have been cancelled. The Government is asking us today, in this Parliament, to accept minority rule."

It was a refusal to accept UNC minority rule that caused us to vote against this measure. [*Desk thumping*] You understand that? It had nothing to do with the

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

substance of the measure. It was voted against because a minority UNC government that had lost its authority to rule was trying to pass laws in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and the PNM said, “We shall have none of it.” [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, she made reference to “three foolish people” and they made reference to conspiracies.

Mr. Speaker: Not “She”; the hon. Member made reference to it.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I accept that, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member made reference to “three foolish people”. I want to draw your attention to the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the three foolish people who did not vote for the measure on the Government Bench was the Attorney General—

Mr. Ramsaran: No, not true.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The Attorney General—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Former Attorney General.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: On the day when the government of the UNC brought that measure in place—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramsaran: The former, the former.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—it was the former Attorney General, the former agriculture minister and the former foreign affairs minister, all three of whom left the government on the grounds that they were not supporting corruption in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] As far as they are concerned, an Attorney General, a foreign affairs minister and an agriculture minister withdrawing support from a government is foolish—their action is foolish—but the people of Trinidad and Tobago did not see that action as foolish. They saw it as salvation. We got rid of them [Desk thumping] and that is why this measure is before us. [Interruption]

Hon. Member: “Dah is irrelevant. Dah is irrelevant.”

Mr. Speaker: Excuse me. If it is irrelevant the Chair will rule, okay? It is very relevant. I can assure you, whatever is irrelevant I will rule.

Mr. Ramsaran: We are talking to the Member for Diego Martin West you know, not you.

Mr. Speaker: Continue please.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your intervention because you see—“doh go anywhere!” Sit down; I want to talk to you when you come

back. Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised he is going. I am not surprised he is running from the Chamber because he spent 75 minutes going back and forth over the same point, rambling and rambling and has the unmitigated gall to come here and talk about ghosts! Mr. Speaker, Jennifer Lopez might be a ghost in Laventille and so might Janet Reno and Serena Williams but I am sure when the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago went public and told the country that a member of his government, while working in the Prime Minister's office, was having an assignment ghosting in the hospital, using money that the Parliament appropriated for patients' medicine and care and security, that an individual working in the Prime Minister's office for \$20,000 a month was collecting a monthly salary out of the patients' funds in the hospital, that was no ghost. That is real, real!

To come here today and talk about ghosts is to confirm that these people have absolutely no shame whatsoever [*Desk thumping*] because he should be the last person to go anywhere, least of all the Parliament, to talk about ghosts and to come here today talking to the Member for Diego Martin East about security at the hospital. He has to build a gate. Do you know how many gates could have been built with \$10,000 or \$14,000 per month for how many years? We could have built a gate all around China; but they want us to forget and, Mr. Speaker, in their state of "fooforoo", they refuse to accept that there is something called truth and untruth. So whatever they hold on to, they will hold on to, to the death, to the state of "tarangé".

Mr. Speaker, you would have heard the Member for Siparia this afternoon once again stand here and talk about the PNM Government of the last few months spending \$18 billion. They had that talk across the country, right up to the election. They went through an election campaign with it. We won the election, we came to the Parliament and we presented a budget to them. In the budget of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, which was debated in this Parliament, I draw your attention to this document, *Draft Estimates of Revenue for the Financial Year 2002* page Roman V. It has "Revenue" on the left side, "Expenditure" on the right side. So there should be no need for any person, least of all a Member of Parliament, to stand here and pretend to be asking for information which was not provided. The whole intention is to give the impression, based on an untruth, that \$18 billion was spent and somehow the government of the day did not account for it and they have some requirement to ask about it.

Mr. Speaker, on page Roman V in this document, under "Revenue", you see all the heads and subheads of revenue—"Tax Revenue, Income and Profits,

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Goods and Services, International Trade, Other”. Under “Non-Tax Revenue—Property, Other, Repayment of Past Lending” and that figure totals, including capital revenues, \$14.008 billion. It is here. Under the head of “Expenditure—Personal Expenditure, Salaries, Wages, Other, Goods and Services, Minor Equipment, Interest and Other Debt Services, Transfers and Subsidies, Transfers to Statutory Bodies”, it is all here under each of those heads totalling \$13.874 billion.

That is the budget of Trinidad and Tobago that was the subject of a debate here for three days but I am not surprised that she did not know that because she spent half the time where she should not be, out of the Parliament. If she had stayed here in the Parliament doing the business—if the Member for Siparia had stayed here in the Parliament doing the business of the people of Siparia who sent her here, she would have known and would not have had to come here to mislead the country to give the impression that a government of Trinidad and Tobago spent \$18 billion and did not account for the revenues or the expenditure. “Who dey trying to fool, Mr. Speaker, you? Because dey not fooling us” and they are not fooling anybody outside of Rienzi Complex.

We are not going to sit here and have our colleagues on the other side systematically, day after day, seek to peddle misinformation to the population. One expects that when Members of Parliament talk in the Parliament, their word should mean something. I heard my colleague from Oropouche saying that we should televise the debates of Parliament. What is he calling for; an opportunity to televise lies to the population? Suppose you were televising this debate? Do you really think our children would have been impressed with what we saw for the last hour from our friend, the Member for Oropouche—repetition, misinformation, boldfacedness and, least of all, feigning an interest in good management of the country? He is talking about the need to take care of the country’s revenue. Rip Van Winkle suddenly awoke to discover that there is a need for government to take care of the country’s revenue. Where was he, Mr. Speaker, when his colleagues in the government of the period up to 2001 December were playing fast and loose with the people’s money? Mr. Speaker, I presume he was not here at all.

They are talking about this Bill and the bill of a previous time and saying it is a UNC bill. Let me assist Members on the other side. What this Government is doing is clearing up the mess that they left there, taking out of the pipeline matters which are, as you say in court, part heard, because we have an agenda; but before we move forward with our programme of new legislation, it is simply good

housekeeping to complete what was there before. So we are not going to engage in any debate about whose bill it is. It was a bill for the people of Trinidad and Tobago because their business was left unfinished by you and it requires the succeeding government to complete it.

While I am on that score, they are right. We could have completed this since January, you know, but they were the ones who pushed a pram-load of names into this building to ensure that no Speaker was elected in this House, and for nine months the Parliament could not meet. [*Desk thumping*] For nine months they ensured that the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago did not function because they moved heaven and earth to prevent us from electing a Speaker. The people of Trinidad and Tobago intervened, gave us a majority, allowed us to elect a Speaker so that their Parliament can function, and then they have the gall to come here now and talk about “This should have been done in January. This should have been done before!” Of course it should have been done. The reason it was not done is because elected Members of the House refused to carry out their responsibilities and took action to obstruct the functioning of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, they make heavy weather of the fact that this legislation to cover up their own shortcoming was laid by the UNC and our friend, the Member for Siparia, the distinguished lady, raised it in a moral tone. They seem to forget that the classic example of what they are alluding to was 1995. The Government of the day, outside of the Parliament, met with the Opposition, which happened to have been made up of many of those now on the other side, and we agreed that it is in the country’s interest to change the financial year from January to December—which is what it used to be—to October to the end of September. There were a lot of good reasons for that and the Government and the Opposition met outside of Parliament and agreed. We drafted the legislation and we came to the House.

The then Minister of Finance introduced the legislation and initiated debate to change the financial year so that it will begin in October and end September 30 the following year. Lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the agreement outside of the House, notwithstanding their support for the measure, when the Minister of Finance sat, the first speaker on the other side who stood, a member of the UNC Opposition, completely repudiated their agreement on the issue and voted against the measure; the result being that the measure failed. We could not change the financial year, so that in 1995 we would have begun the financial year on October 01, 1995. We went to the polls in November, I think it was, and they formed the government. What did we have? The same people who voted down that measure came to the House, brought the same measure—

Mr. Ramsaran: But you did not vote for it.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Of course we voted for it.

Mr. Ramsaran: Well, check the records.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—brought the same measure to the House. The same measure they voted down, they brought it to the House, the PNM Opposition voted for it and today the financial year has been changed from January to December to one of October to September. That is the PNM's track record and that is also the UNC's track record. So when they stand here to talk about who changed their mind on what, they are just wasting parliamentary time. We have come here today, having informed them that we intend to proceed with a number of pieces of legislation and they are filibustering (their style) standing and talking for as long as they want, even though they have nothing to say, even though it is not true, even though they have to repeat it five times. We, Mr. Speaker, have come here to do our duty.

What we say to our colleagues on the other side is this: we are prepared to listen to you, we are prepared to be patient, but we are also prepared to get the people's work done. So, as the Member for Oropouche spent 75 minutes misrepresenting the letter and spirit of the amendment for the validation bill, as he spent 75 minutes straying all over the world on matters which had nothing to do with the Bill before us, we are going to sit here until Members are finished with their contributions and then we will continue the people's business, because we have come here for that. As far as we are concerned, this side, we have no difficulty in doing what we have been elected to do. It is clear that those on the other side have a problem with doing what they are elected to do, and when they bring their internal difficulties into the House it is none of our business. When they come here to misrepresent the facts, it is our business.

So, Mr. Speaker, they talk about not having a vision—public service reform. I want to point out to Members on the other side that the postal service—TTPost was a part of the public service of Trinidad and Tobago. Before the amalgam of whatever they call themselves now, before they came together, TTPost was a part of the public service. It was a part of the public sector reform exercise that the postal services would be removed from the public service where it resided and be incorporated in the way it has been incorporated, to function in the way it is functioning now. That is one of the outcomes of the initiation of the public sector reform exercise, which predated anything called UNC. That is a fact, as part of the public sector reform exercise, and it went through a number of governmental initiatives.

The first minister of public administration was an NAR minister. Subsequent to that there was a minister of public administration under the PNM. Then came the UNC completing an exercise, the vision of which predated the creation of their party and their coming into government. So when they come to take credit, Mr. Speaker, all I say to them is, you must take credit for the things for which you are responsible. Take credit for a desalination plant that is flooded. I understand we had floods in Central the other day. I do not know. I have been enquiring. I guess when my friend, the Member for Caroni East, stands to speak, he will tell us if the desalination plant was flooded too. Take credit for that, because that is yours. When you have water up to your waist in Central Trinidad as a result of flooding, a country that floods in the way our country floods, a country that has rainfall in the way rain falls in this country, take credit for a desalination plant in our country.

You must take credit for the Miss Universe Pageant because that is yours. You are the one who brought a pageant to this country that cost us over \$100 million and today we are still owing tens of millions of dollars. We are about to lose the Convention Centre if this Government does not intervene to pay the bills that you left there. Take credit for that. You must take credit for the shed at Piarco which is called the “Millennium Airport”, which should have cost us \$400 million, which ended up costing us directly in loan funds \$16 hundred million, and a \$2 billion interest tab to come. You must take credit for that. When the Airports Authority is not in a position to balance its accounts and cannot pay its bills and comes to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as you are tempted to do to charge \$100 per person per time to use that scandal, you must take credit for that.

You must take credit for the fact that today WASA is bankrupt, notwithstanding the fact that you came to this Parliament and misrepresented the fact, telling the country that WASA made a profit in some year—absolute lie! WASA is bankrupt, deep in a hole, and today WASA has to pay \$170 million to buy water from your friends in the desalination plant. You must take credit for that and you must tell them how you intend to get the country out of that situation. Tell the people of this country that WASA, the largest producer of water in this country, producing water at a fraction of the cost of the desal plant, is buying water at almost \$200 million a year and the people of Trinidad and Tobago will eventually be called upon to pay for that. You must take credit for that; and that is happening while the country is under a deluge of water for all and for all who “doh” want, more water than we can use day in day out.

When the people of this country get the facts on the desalination situation and WASA’s financial predicament, they will see the disaster and the scandal that was

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

the United National Congress government; and that is to come. We are here for five years in the first instance and the people of this country will be taken into our confidence. We will tell them every day along the way, because it is their business. It is their business that you have mismanaged. It is their business that you have put in that situation. It is their interest that you have prejudiced.

So when you come here to take credit, taking credit for TTPost, as though, well, that is something, you know, to undo all your wrongdoings, the people of this country want to hear from you how you intend to fix that. Fortunately, it does not fall to you because, had it fallen to you, the same thing would have continued, because, Mr. Speaker, they are pretending not to know right from wrong. They continue to behave as though there are no lessons to be learned from their behaviour in the last two years. They continue to disregard the fact that the people of this country have said enough is enough to that kind of behaviour. That is why we say that the matters to come before this House, be they small matters, be they large, we will be guided by certain fundamental principles, and those principles are the tenets of good governance because the people of Trinidad and Tobago expect no less. The Member for Oropouche is here making a plea and bleating about workers and talking about the need to treat with workers.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has just been called upon—[*Interruption*] Yeah, we come to stay. We come to stay till tomorrow morning. Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] You only have 75 minutes. Mr. Speaker, this—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: He is speaking on everything.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: But he knows how to do it.

Mr. Ramnath: “Doh worry” about rulings. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please! [*Interruption*] Order please! Order please! [*Interruption*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: Open the debate; open it wide.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We have no difficulty—[*Interruption*]—we have no difficulty in waiting on the Members. We have no difficulty in treating with any matter except to say that the matter before the House is very straightforward and simple. The matter before the House is to validate an action of a previous period of administration. The matter before the House is not to be misrepresented. They

can say what they want but it is for us to put the correct version on the table, Mr. Speaker, and if after we put the correct version Members on the other side choose to misrepresent it again, then fine. We will respond to whatever they want to misrepresent because that is what the Parliament is about—they speak, we speak. So, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go further on this matter, except—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: Talk about InnCogen again. Take credit for it again. Let us open the debate, “nah”.

Hon. Member: What about National Quarries?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am not ready to talk about InnCogen. We will have ample time to talk about that. We have five years to talk about National Fisheries, to talk about InnCogen—[*Interruption*] What else do you want to talk about?

Mr. Sharma: BWIA.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: But for the moment, for the moment—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: National Quarries. Tobago.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: For the moment we will talk about the post office and we will talk about the desalination plant and in fact, you know, Mr. Speaker, having mentioned the desalination plant, there is a common thread that runs through all of them, you know. [*Interruption*] That is what you wanted me to say. He wanted me to point out the common thread that runs between TTPost, InnCogen and desalination. [*Laughter*] I am not going to—when my friend from Couva South stands, he is free to say what he wants about InnCogen. He is free to join the debate on the desal plant and he is free to support TTPost. I am not going to be used in any internal fight in the UNC. Fight your fight in the Rienzi Complex.

Mr. Speaker, when they talk about ghosts and talk about “lil’ people” who are out there trying to get “a ten dollars that doh belong to them”, we have systems to deal with that. That is why a chairman under a PNM administration could come on the national television and say zero tolerance on ghost gangs in the Government’s operations. Did you ever see that anywhere in the UNC? [*Desk thumping*] Instead, what you saw was a \$100 million bill run up in the RHAs and part of that bill, part of those moneys, was for ghost workers operating out of the Prime Minister’s office, you know, and not looking for a \$1,000 for painting a building, as some poor person was doing, you know. This was a man getting \$20,000 a month and walking up consciencelessly, to the hospital to collect \$14,000 more and if one

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

day passed after the end of the month and he did not get it, he phoned up to ask for it, you know! So you want to make an issue in the Parliament about poor people trying to ask for \$1,000 that does not belong to them and being told by the Government, zero tolerance on that, but it is quite all right for the high and mighty in the Prime Minister's office earning \$20,000 a month to ghost \$14,000 a month from the hospital and then leave it to the PNM to pay? The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago today is grappling with that. The chairman of the party that forms the Government is on the payroll of the hospital.

I mean, if they had gone to MTS where they did go, to Caroni where they went, to MTS where they went, one could understand that; but you go to the hospital too—to the hospital? Then while you are doing that, you did not pay WASA. The WASA bills are not paid; the TTEC bills are not paid; NIB—not paid; Inland Revenue—not paid. That is the kind of management we had. All those bills are there to be paid now and I take this opportunity to say that so that the national community could understand. I hear my friend, the Member for Couva South, saying I am widening the debate. Yes, because I would like to hear their response to this. How do you explain it? The population needs to know that there are these bills out there to be paid, bills run up by a previous government, millions of dollars in telephone bills.

In fact, do you know one of the bills we have to pay? A particular colleague of ours living in a government unit ran up a bill of \$20,000-odd. A significant portion of it is Info Zone charges. Do you know what that means, Mr. Speaker? At nights on TV6 there is this poll asking you to vote—"People Meter". Would you believe, in a government property with a government telephone, there is a high-ranking government official on the government phone voting on Info Zone every night [*Laughter*] and then government has to pay the Info Zone bill? So when you see the poll showing something in favour of the UNC, "is ah government minister voting on the government phone in Flag Staff whole night." [*Laughter*] Now we have to pay that bill.

That is what came to an end when we voted against this measure in October 2001. It was to put an end to that. It was to put an end to ministers of government using the government phone, voting on Info Zone on TV6 at nights and running up tens of thousands of dollars in bills that the public has to pay. So do you understand why we voted against the bill? It was nothing personal. It was our support for liberation of the people of Trinidad and Tobago from the iniquitous actions of the UNC.

My colleague, the Member for Oropouche, accused us of not being able to speak English. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you without fear of contradiction that no parliamentarians in the history of the Parliament ever brutalized the English language like my friends on the other side.

Mr. Ramsaran: “Don’ go dey.”

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You must say “don’ go dey”. My friend from Chaguanas, he should know, standing in the Parliament and telling us that my colleague, the Member for San Fernando East, must get a “paternal test”. The word is “paternity”. We were not the ones who introduced the word “paradigm” to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We are not the ones who consistently, week after week, have difficulty in getting our subjects agreeing with our verbs. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We were not the ones who came to the Parliament with a legal amendment. It was the UNC that came to the Parliament and confirmed that agents acting on their behalf changed the Nipdec tender rules so that singular equals plural and male gender equals female gender. We did not do that. *[Interruption]* Well of course—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I am advised by my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East, but I know that my colleague will join the debate and tell you about the complaints that he is getting. He is getting complaints which are not in keeping with the lofty exhortations of our friends from the other side. His complaints are not going to elevate the debate this afternoon.

So, Mr. Speaker, I simply advise my friends on the other side, as we have business to attend to on the Order Paper, this Bill to validate the cancellation of postage stamps, and there are three other items to come, item 2, item 5 and item 6, we intend to do those items tonight so Members are invited to join us in the debate. Talk as long as you want. We will be here until you finish. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate because the matter dealing with the bill really has its genesis in the reform process that I initiated. When I heard the hon. Member for Diego Martin West talking about public sector reform, clearly he was talking about a label because the hon. Member talked about it started in the period of the NAR and it continued in their administration of ‘91—‘94 but I want the hon. Member to say exactly what sector

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

Friday, November 29, 2002

[MR. SINGH]

of the public sector was reformed during that 10-year period. None whatsoever. So it remained a label. In fact, when I piloted the Postal Corporation Bill, Mr. Speaker, it was clear to me that when you went through all the reports from 1965, some 16 or 17 reports, down to the Alexander Report of 1973, it was there that paternity for the corporatization of the postal service took place, but nothing was done. However, I will deal with it during the post-tea period.

The Member said that we on this side are speaking to seek to systematically peddle misinformation. If there is one purveyor of misinformation in this honourable House it is the hon. Member for Diego Martin West [*Desk thumping*] because he said at the beginning of this debate that during debate on this Bill, when the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar was talking, “Ask the Member for Caroni East about the National Mail Centre” because there is a whole propaganda about the National Mail Centre, perpetrated not only by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West but also by the hon. Member for San Fernando East. In this measure the hon. Member spoke about corruption and I want to talk this afternoon, since he has opened the debate, about corruption PNM style—most recent example, Mr. Speaker.

“ADB bosses sent on leave over \$5m deposit”

This is in the *Express* of November 26, 2002. You see, the postal service is working so well that we now receive all our parliamentary material by courier mail but so too, through courier mail, I received a copy of a cheque made out to Colonial Life Insurance Company Limited, for and on behalf of the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), cheque number, Mr. Speaker, 00126130. It is dated the 4th of the tenth, 2002. The placement of investment—\$4.5 million—and hear who signed for the cheque, Mr. Speaker. The person who signed for the cheque “bol’ face”, you know, “brass face”! This is what his ID card number is—19481022046 and he signs with a flourish. The name of that person in bold letters now, with the date, 4th of the tenth, 2002, Keith Paul, a member of the board of the Agricultural Development Bank, a sales representative with Colonial Life Insurance Company.

So here you have a situation, Mr. Speaker, where a member of the board gave a directive to the CEO and to the officials of the management of the ADB to place this \$4.5 million cheque into an investment account. In fact, this placement is what is called a group advance protection contract. It is an insurance premium. It is a life insurance or an insurance policy. So when they talk about corruption, here you have a member of the board, Keith Paul, the chairman of the company, giving instructions to the CEO to sign this cheque and to place it in this group advance

protection contract and, having placed it there, a similar exercise took place in 1998 when the Auditor General in her report gave a severe qualification to such a placement. She said that this was a fundamental error. This was wrongdoing and the Ministry of Finance brought an end to that placement. However, now, in 2003, the chairman of the board, same chairman, who signed that placement, in 1998, Hubert H. Alleyne, together with Patrick A. Musaib Ali, Chief Executive Officer of ADB, they signed and made this similar placement of \$1.3 million. The Auditor General in her report said that this ought to be severely qualified. I will read it for you, and read it into the record. This is what they said. It is a public document; the annual report of the ADB, balance sheet, long-term investment.

4.30 p.m.

“Evidence of the receipt of this sum into the Funds of the Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and its payment out of the Funds of the Bank were not seen. In this respect the requirements of Rules (5), (20) and 49(1) of the Agricultural Development Bank Rules...were not observed.”

As a result, the Auditor General of Trinidad and Tobago said that this matter was severely qualified, that it was an error and that they should not proceed, but what has happened now, Mr. Speaker, in 2003, à la PNM style in “boldfacedness”, a member of the board waits three hours to collect this cheque to go and make the placement. A definite conflict of interest; and this is a matter, it is a scandalous matter that ought to be investigated by the Minister of Finance.

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

4.31 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.01 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. G. Singh: When we broke for tea, Mr. Speaker, I was dealing with the issue of the “brassfacedness” of the current PNM regime and the manner in which they conduct the people's business and the virtual corruption that is taking place at the ADB in relation to a specific transaction.

Now that I have more time, because I had a few minutes just prior to the tea break, it is necessary for me to give an appreciation of this particular transaction. Mr. Speaker, in the *Express* of November 26, 2002, it states at page 3:

“ADB bosses sent on leave over \$5m deposit

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MR. SINGH]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Two senior managers at the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) were sent on vacation last week amid concerns by staff in the bank's finance department over a board decision to deposit \$5 million with CLICO.

CEO, Seebalack Singh and Financial Controller Fiona Loo Ping Wah were given instructions last Wednesday to take all leave due to them after they hesitated in carrying out the Board's decision regarding the \$5 million deposit. It is understood that the executives were wary in following the instruction because of a query raised by the Auditor General over a similar transaction with CLICO a few years ago. In that case, the Auditor General made a scathing report and gave the transaction a 'severe qualification'."

Mr. Speaker, the article goes on.

"In the previous case three years ago, the Minister of Finance had intervened, forcing the termination of the deposit.

In the recent case, senior executives sought legal advice before preparing the cheque for \$5 million for deposit with the insurance company. The cheque was picked up and deposited by a board member."

As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, the copy of the cheque and the cheque voucher would indicate that that board member, ID card number 1948102246, was Mr. Keith Paul. Keith Paul, Mr. Speaker. He waited three hours for that cheque. Three hours!

"Singh, who was appointed CEO less than two years ago, is said to have been ordered on just over a month's vacation leave that was due to him. Loo Ping Wah has more than 100 days' leave."

Mr. Speaker, so the Auditor General provided a severe qualification on this particular transaction of 1998, and in the annual report of 1999, the Auditor General indicated that the rules 5, 20 and 49(1) of the Agricultural Development Bank Rules, 1969 were not observed. What are those rules? What are those rules in relation to the relevance of the particular transaction?

I took the liberty of acquiring the rules of the ADB. Mr. Speaker, it is the Agricultural Development Bank Rules, Chap. 79:07, rule 5(1) which says:

"(1)Every sum payable to the Bank shall be collected and received for and on account of the funds of the Bank and a receipt for any sum paid to the Bank may be signed by an officer of the Bank authorised by the Board generally or specially in that behalf.

(2) All payments out of the funds of the Bank shall be made by officers of the Bank authorised by Resolution of the Board generally or specially in that behalf.

(3) Officers of the Bank generally or specially authorised in that behalf by Resolution of the Board may retain in their hands sums as may be specified in that Resolution to meet petty disbursements or for immediate payment.

(4) Cheques on any banking account of the Bank shall be signed and countersigned by such officers of the Bank as may be generally or specially authorised in that behalf by Resolution of the Board.”

The Auditor General is saying that the ADB, in relation to the transaction that she gave—that the Auditor General gave a severe qualification—was a breach of rule 5 of the Agricultural Development Bank Rules, Chap. 79:07.

Also, rule 20, Mr. Speaker:

“The Bank shall keep adequate financial and statistical records, books and other documents to record in detail all transactions taking place at the head office and branch offices.”

The third breach that the Auditor General spoke about in relation to the 1998 transaction, Mr. Speaker, a similar transaction that is now taking place, that has already taken place on the 4/10/2002, rule 49(1):

“The Board shall cause proper books of account to be kept with respect to—

- (a) all sums of money received and expended by the Bank and the matters in respect of which the receipt and expenditure takes place;
- (b) all dealings and transactions by the Bank; and
- (c) the assets and liabilities of the Bank.”

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the transaction of 1998, that the Auditor General gave a severe qualification which, translated into layman's language, means that the ADB was guilty of wrongdoing, who were the parties to that transaction?

I have here an advance protection contract, a group advance protection contract. It is dated December 21, 1998. It is signed, by Hubert Alleyne, name in signature and in print, the Chairman of the ADB, and also by Patrick A. Musaib-Ali, the Chief Executive Officer. This is 1998. The Auditor General in the report said this thing should not have taken place. The ADB was in breach.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MR. SINGH]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, as we have seen from the newspaper report, a similar transaction is taking place, and by virtue of the contents of the cheque of 4/10/2002, Mr. Hubert Alleyne, Chairman of the ADB. The board on which Mr. Kenneth Paul sits as a member of the board, has given instructions to the CEO, notwithstanding the severe qualification by the Auditor General, that the ADB now should engage in a transaction of a similar nature as the one that was found in 1998 which the Ministry of Finance pulled off because of wrongdoing.

Mr. Speaker, when you have a situation like that, and then the Hon. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East says:

“PM assures public servants—”

In the *Guardian* of November 25, 2002:

“No ‘Wild West’ action”

I quote, Mr. Speaker, from page three:

“Prime Minister Patrick Manning has said his Government will not manipulate the Public Service.

There will be no ‘Wild West behaviour’ from his administration, he added...

Manning said recent events had shown how fragile parts of the Public Service were.

As a result, institutions must be given greater monitoring and investigative powers, he said, and the laws governing misbehaviour in public office be applied ‘without fear or favour’.

He said while the Cabinet is sometimes described as public servants’ political masters, ‘this relationship does not extend to obeying instructions which constitute an infringement and violation of the laws of this country.’

‘You must have the courage without being obstructionist to preserve the integrity of the State of the Republic of T&T,’ he added.”

Mr. Speaker, so this is what the Prime Minister said. I want to know whether the Prime Minister received a report on this matter, because I read in the newspaper when he was down in Point Fortin that he requested a report on this matter, because you see, in attempting to carry out the orders of the board; in following the instructions of the board, the CEO of the Agricultural Development Bank had to sign this group advance protection contract.

They are placing \$4.5 million of the state's money, the people's money, into a life insurance or an insurance company. It is not a fixed deposit you know, Mr.

Speaker. It is a matter dealing with—and I will take the above named applicant, and if we follow what happened in 1998, the above named applicant, Agricultural Development Bank, address, et cetera:

“The above named applicant elects the following riders benefit to be attached to the general advance protection contract. Tick the appropriate boxes below.

- (1) Executive retirement benefits and options.
- (2) Severance liability.
- (3) Executive critical illness coverage.
- (4) Disability benefits and income.
- (5) Retirees’ medical insurance.
- (6) Retirees' life insurance.
- (7) Income rider.”

This is where the ADB, on 4/10/2002 placed \$4.5 million on a group advance protection contract, and these are the appropriate matters for election for the ADB.

Mr. Speaker, so it is clear. It is clear that in the current situation, if it is that the management of the ADB, Mr. Seebalack Singh and Fiona Loo Ping Wah, refused to follow the directives of the board, they would have been fired. So, Mr. Seebalack Singh followed the directive of the board and signed the group advance protection contract. Same way as Mr. Patrick Musaib-Ali signed before, but when he approached the Chairman, Mr. Hubert Alleyne, to sign it, what did Mr. Alleyne say? He said the Chief Accountant, Fiona Loo Ping Wah must sign. “I 'ent signing, because on the last occasion, the Auditor General gave us a severe qualification. Tell us we had erred and we were guilty of wrongdoing.” And he gave instructions for the CEO to get her to sign it.

Ms. Loo Ping Wah refused to sign. She said, “I cannot do that. I am not being obstructionist”. She may have thought about it, in the Prime Minister's language, but “I will follow the law” and, therefore, as a result of that, in the Wild West behaviour, Fiona Loo Ping Wah and Seebalack Singh were sent on vacation. So all this talk they are talking about no Wild West behaviour, this is Wild West behaviour.

You see, Mr. Speaker, this is \$4.5 million, and that is the kind of manipulation. In other words, the Chairman and the board of the ADB were saying, “Do not

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

Friday, November 29, 2002

[MR. SINGH]

worry with the Auditor General. We have no time for the Auditor General. I tell you and you do it. You better do it or I go send you on leave.” That is what. Absolute scandal! Wild West behaviour on the part of the ADB. These are people willing to stand up for their rights in the interest of this country, but they are sent on leave. You see, Mr. Speaker, when we hear from the other side, we understand the hypocrisy. We understand the level of hypocrisy, and it goes even further.

You were a chairman of a bank at one time, Mr. Speaker. You were a Chairman of a bank at one time, and you know the prudential requirements of a bank. You know the level of confidentiality required of a bank. What would you have thought, reasonable man that you are, of a member of the board of directors, who is a sales representative of this company, CLICO, sitting down in the offices of the managers for three hours, Mr. Speaker—for three hours waiting for this cheque of \$4.5 million to deposit on this group advance protection contract?

Mr. Keith Paul, I am told, waited for three hours! Now, it raises for the reasonable man, Mr. Speaker—I make no imputation—that if you are a member of the board of directors of a company, then the whole question of your fiduciary duty to that enterprise comes into being. The whole question of conflict of interest comes into being—potential or actual—and you know better than most, Mr. Speaker, having been the chairman of a bank, how you are required to maintain that level of confidentiality—that level of fiduciary relationship.

We cannot condone that kind of action. In fact, it is clear that we on this side want an investigation of this matter, and we want the reinstatement of Ms. Fiona Loo Ping Wah and Mr. Seebalack Singh right away for standing up to the Wild West behaviour of the Chairman and members of the board of the ADB! [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is clear to us that any reasonable man looking at this situation where you have a member of the board sitting down and waiting for three hours, and you know that the insurance companies pay commission when one has a deposit, when one takes out an insurance policy—

Mr. Manning: Are you finished with the ADB?

Mr. G. Singh: No, no.

Mr. Manning: Still on the ADB?

Mr. G. Singh: Yes.

Mr. Manning: When you are finished.

Mr. G. Singh: You see, Mr. Speaker, when there is a situation where the insurance company is paying commission, I do not know whether or not the member participated in the deliberation of this board at the time they made the decision to invest this \$4.5 million in CLICO; he being a sales representative of CLICO. I do not know that. It is for the government of the day to find that out. It is for the Minister with responsibility for the ADB to look into that.

The hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I think, has responsibility for the ADB. If he participated in the deliberation of the board when that decision was taken—the member who collected the cheque—if it is that he participated in the deliberations of the board, well then clearly, a reasonable man could infer conflict of interest. A reasonable man could infer that, and the law is very clear on that. The ADB will be able to recover. The commission paid for that investment of \$4.5 million, and you have to ask yourself the question, Mr. Speaker, what motivated this board? What motivated the board of ADB to ignore the Auditor General? There must be some strong and compelling motivation to ignore the severe qualification of the Auditor General.

What was the strong and compelling qualification? Why did they do that? It could not have been merely a good investment. It had to be some other consideration, Mr. Speaker, because you see, they did not put it in the bank, because they are saying that the bank will give less interest; but it is common knowledge that directors who sit on public companies like the ADB, they must be more risk averse. They must not go and take the shareholders' moneys and invest it where their risks are greater. That is a principle, that you must confine your risk. You must be very prudent, Mr. Speaker, and in this situation, I want to read into the record an excerpt from Mason French & Ryan on company law at page 520 on "actual or potential conflict".

Mr. Speaker, I know you might be very familiar with this. At page 520 under the rubric "Actual or Potential Conflict":

"The rule against conflict of interest and duty is often formulated to comprehend actual and potential conflicts as if they were distinguishable. Lord Chancellor, in *Aberdeen Railway and Blakey Brothers*, 1854, (1) House of Lords said at page 471:

'It is a rule of universal application that no one, having fiduciary duties to discharge, shall be allowed to enter into engagements in which he has or can have a personal interest conflicting or which possibly may conflict with the interest of those whom he is bound to protect.'"

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MR. SINGH]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Mr. Speaker, the law then is very clear. In a situation where you have a member of the board waiting for three hours to collect a cheque, it raises questions. It raises fundamental questions.

I would really like to find out from the hon. Member who has responsibility for state enterprises how many state enterprises invest in this thing called a group advance protection contract? How many? What are the risks associated with this thing, having regard to the severe qualification of the Auditor General? It is certain, whilst we understand the convergence between the insurance sector and the banking sector, the fact of the matter is that there are significant risks associated with a matter of this nature.

You see, under the 1998 investment, the certificate for group advance protection contract which is similar to what is done on 4/10/2002, the initial premium was \$1.3 million, issue date, interest term, the agent, the interest rate. Mr. Speaker, in a situation like that, what is Mr. Keith Paul's interest in this matter? Is he the agent or is he a friend of the agent? What is the linkage between Keith Paul, sales representative of CLICO, member of the board of ADB, and this investment? What is the relationship? At the lowest level, it raises questions of conflict of interest, breach of fiduciary duty and misbehaviour in public office—at the lowest level!

So it is in this context when the hon. Member speaks about corruption and claims to have for the PNM a monopoly on virtue, we recognize that that is not so; and to merely indicate that \$75 million in the NHA ghost gangs scandal is money meant for poor people, Janet Reno and J-Lo, is to hide from the reality of the rampant corruption that is taking place.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with several issues also raised by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West who I consider to be, as I say, a major purveyor.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Caroni East for giving way. I just want to let it be known that we have taken and I have taken very careful note of what the Member for Caroni East has had to say. I have already asked for a report on this matter, and when the report comes, if anybody is found to be culpable, appropriate action will be taken. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, through you, I really want to thank the Member for San Fernando East, but I hope coupled with his action against the culpable parties, once they are found culpable, is also the reinstatement of those workers who stood up to the pressure and Wild West behaviour.

This is about the validation of postage stamps that were placed on instruments, and the genesis of that Bill really had its conception in the transformation of the Trinidad and Tobago postal services. I listened to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West when he spoke and sought, in an indirect way, to also claim paternity for the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation. The transformation—sort of take paternity. In Tobago he has paternity for a lot of things, you know. [*Laughter*] He built a beautiful home in Tobago recently. I am sure he has paternity for that.

Dr. Rowley: You would have preferred if I “thief” a home!

Mr. G. Singh: In dealing with this issue of the transformation of the postal service of Trinidad and Tobago, one had to have a sense of a clear objective where one was going to locate the postal infrastructure in the context of the competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago in the context of a globalization that was facing us—liberalization—in the context of where one is going to locate Trinidad and Tobago in the global economy.

So, therefore, when we had responsibility for the utility sector, Mr. Speaker, we sought to bring First World thinking, future tense thinking into being. We sought to bring, to recognize, okay—we wanted to locate this country as a competitive country, then clearly if that was our objective, we had to deal with the various infrastructure problems.

Mr. Speaker, you would have been in the Parliament and I would have provided you from 1963 to 1994 with the reports, and I would have regaled you with the content of those reports. I would not do that today, but it is clear to us that what we had embarked upon can be regarded as a kind of paradigm shift, innovation, creativity, institutional reform, institutional reform that incorporated corporatization and commercialization, technological reform and regulatory reform.

You see, that is how we were able to conceive of how we were going to make the postal services of this country into first world. We did not have an airy-fairy vision that talked about 2020. We took it up in 1995, you know, Mr. Speaker, and by 1999 we had brought it to fruition.

Mr. Manning: Water for all.

Mr. G. Singh: My brothers and sisters, so we brought that to fruition. We were bringing this to fruition. How did we go about bringing this systemic reform? Systemic reform is not easy to bring about having regard to the years of ossification of the public sector in this country.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MR. SINGH]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Systemic reform is not easy, Mr. Speaker. Yet, we were able to confront those challenges and how did we confront those challenges? We confronted those challenges by recognizing that we had to create a new model. We had to bring in all the stakeholders at every step of the way, and that is why I was disappointed to hear from my colleague, the hon. Member for Oropouche, that immediately, the formula of success is being abandoned by the now incumbent Minister of Public Utilities. It is clear that once one abandons the worker participation in any programme of systemic reform, one is doomed to failure.

Mr. Ramnath: You are talking as my leader, man! [*Laughter*]

Dr. Rowley: Take basket.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] I am here because I do not take basket. Tell Ramesh. He takes basket! [*Interruption*] Ramesh took basket from them.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear in bringing about the systemic reform we brought in the workers, we brought in the managers. We had a workers' forum. At one stage we had 1,100 out of the 1,296 employees in the postal service department in the Holiday Inn ballroom packed, answering questions every step of the way. We brought the World Bank, critical part of this component, multilateral funding.

Mr. Speaker, you are quite aware of the conditionalities associated with the World Bank. So, we went through this whole process, getting a private sector partner through international advertisements, every step of the way with criteria of transparency and openness, so that today, when you read about TTPost in an article, *The Postal Industry in an Internet Age*, Joint Publication of the World Bank and the Universal Postal Union, Mr. Speaker, you would be proud of this small country, but that was not achieved just like that. It created the kind of conditions to bring about the systemic reform of the postal services, so that our competition, we regarded, as Federal Express.

Federal Express, in the first state-owned postal service in the world, joined TTPost in a linkage, so immediately, you have the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation in a strategic alliance with FedEx, the number one courier company in the world now joining the number one postal service in the world. First they joined the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation as a strategic alliance, and then subsequently, they went and they joined in a strategic alliance, US Post. So what we did was right, because it has received the applause and the plaudits of international institutions.

Mr. Speaker, a critical component in that has been the construction of the National Mail Centre in Piarco.

Mr. Imbert: On your lands.

Mr. G. Singh: My land? I will deal with that because that is part of the purveying of misinformation and untruths in this country. I will come to that. [*Interruption*]

This Postal Industry in an Internet Age, Joint Publication of the World Bank and the Universal Postal Union is entitled: Reform Case, the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation. I will read from page 34 on processing improvements.

“The mail processing infrastructure has been strengthened with better sorting equipment, stronger IT support, and the building of a modern National Mail Center to process all mail. Further improvements to this network and to the retail and delivery network are also in process. Increases in customer satisfaction after just one year are an excellent example of the overall progress of the reform. Business customers are especially pleased with the expanded range of products and services, many of which are designed to meet their emerging mailing needs.”

You see, Mr. Speaker, we get all our parliamentary Bills, our Order Paper, our invitation to meetings by courier mail, TTPost. You could not have envisaged that a mere few years ago. It could not have been even contemplated. People who seek US visas, one of the most security conscious areas in fraud, they deposit it and then they are delivered by courier mail by TTPost. We must celebrate these things. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to come to the point made by the hon. Member for Diego Martin East and also said sotto voce by the Member for Diego Martin West, because you see, they talk about the land; the land upon which this National Mail Centre is built. They have perpetrated on the ground, sotto voce, that this land is owned by hon. Ganga Singh; that Ganga Singh bought that land. His wife owned the land. His relative owned the land; that me and a former Cabinet colleague owned the land. Me and my good friend owned the land.

Hon. Members: Who said all of that?

Mr. G. Singh: You said that! You have been saying that and perpetrating that. I want to tell the hon. Member for Diego Martin East, “Tell me about the land that you own”. That is what he said in this House. Members here heard it.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

Friday, November 29, 2002

[MR. SINGH]

When they started to praise TTPost, the Member said at the beginning of the debate, and he said it as an aside but I heard it, Mr. Speaker. I am not too sure whether the Hansard reporter heard it. “Tell them about the headquarters”. So they begin to purvey, to peddle misinformation.

Dr. Rowley: You sound very worried.

Mr. G. Singh: I am not worried; never at all. I intend to deal with your misinformation. Let me put the facts on record, and you can test those facts. You have appointed a board chairman whom you know well, Mr. Valley—very well, the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central. [*Interruption*] Of course. When she left TSTT.

Mr. Manning: It is a she? [*Laughter*]

Mr. G. Singh: The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central knows. The hon. chairwoman of TTPost is a good friend and she came to work for me for a short while after leaving TSTT—excellent woman, very qualified.

Mr. Speaker, in the attempt to systematically—this is the phrase that the hon. Member for Diego Martin West used. We on this side seek to peddle misinformation. That is what they are, in fact, guilty of in the same way they accuse the EBC of voter padding and facilitating the UNC when they were guilty of that crime. [*Desk thumping*] Same thing they are trying again—same thing, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, I want to—[*Interruption*] It was the board.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. G. Singh: It was the TTPost board. There was a consultancy done by Boos, Allen Hamilton, and they said if one is looking to establish a First World post office to deal with the competition globally—and we were benchmarking against FedEx—one needs to locate oneself in close proximity to one’s source of mail. So, therefore, Mr. Speaker, when in the 1950s—[*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you are interrupting the contribution of the hon. Member for Caroni East.

Mr. G. Singh: When in the 1950s, the General Post Office (GPO) was established on Wrightson Road, at that time the majority of mail was surface mail, but yet in the 20th Century, moving to the 21st Century, airmail became the principal movement of mail. So Boos, Allen Hamilton said that one ought to have the National Mail Centre in close proximity to the airport. It takes no big set of common sense to recognize that. What transpired, Mr. Speaker, the Trinidad and

Tobago Postal Corporation, under the chairmanship of Mr. Ash Seigall who was the Chairman of the FCB Merchant Bank, I think it was, whom you know well, I know.

Mr. Manning: I do, I do.

Mr. G. Singh: He conducted negotiations in several areas. Bestcrete was a possible location. Universal Metals which is now Blue Waters was a possible location, and a current Minister, he had a warehouse in Mausica, that was a potential location. All the parties came up with the best location which was the one right opposite the current airport, simply because, Mr. Speaker, the land space was available. There was no land available within the airport compound for industrial development at that time.

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. P. Manning*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Singh: I want to thank hon. Members, and particularly the hon. Prime Minister for rising and extending my speaking time. You see, Mr. Speaker, he understands because he listens to all the propaganda; because one sees in his contribution of April 05, 2002 this is what he had to say in the *Hansard*, the hon. Member for San Fernando East. This is what he had to say at page 16, at 1.30—2.30 p.m. in the last paragraph:

“What we decided not to do, Madam Clerk, perhaps in deference to some of our colleagues, was to leave out TTPost. We would have dealt with that later and by different arrangements. So we agreed on commissions of enquiry.”

The imputation was that there was something wrong in TTPost and this is what they have focused on, this land transaction, part of the misinformation purveyed by those on that side.

Mr. Speaker, the board went around looking. The board conducted negotiations. When the board sought a directive from me with respect to the purchase of the land—[*Interruption*] I said that was too high; that they needed to look again, so they went out again. I want the hon. Member for San Fernando East to go and look through the records, to go and use his forensic experts to trace this thing, and I am very serious, because you see when they talk about coming and

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

Friday, November 29, 2002

[MR. SINGH]

that we are honorable men and women in this House, they must also come not with hypocrisy and innuendo, but they must come on the basis of factual statement.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the board then decided to re-enter negotiations because I said if we are going to pay that price, then we will compulsorily acquire, because it is agricultural land and that, therefore, we had a tool of compulsory acquisition, because I had a time line. I had a time line within which I wanted to accomplish my objectives to make the TT Postal Corporation a first class, First World organization. As a result of that, the land was bought. The transaction can be traced from the registry. I know Mr. Hinds knows about the registry because he did register a lot of transactions.

The purchaser can be traced, the owner can be traced, the money can be traced. These are all things that are traceable. So, Mr. Speaker, the owner of the land is a constituent of mine. I have no kinship ties, no relationship, none whatsoever, and I want to put that on the public record and I challenge anybody to say otherwise. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, they must stop the purveying of misinformation. Do not bring my spouse and everybody into this. You see, having said that and having dealt with that kind of malicious purveying of misinformation, he must tell us why he did not register his deed; and he owes NIB \$300,000.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read into the record the conclusions of this article entitled, *The Postal Industry in an Internet Age*, Joint Publication of the World Bank and the Universal Postal Union. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please! Order!

Mr. G. Singh: Support for Economic Development. You see, Mr. Speaker, it is a critical part of your economic infrastructure when you have a very efficient postal service. I quote from this article, Support for Economic Development.

“The major beneficiaries of this postal modernization process are the rural and low-income communities that previously were isolated from most communications and physical and financial networks. Postal infrastructure improvement not only increases access to communications, but also expands business-sector opportunities in these communities. A strong postal infrastructure can also provide a platform for future electronic business opportunities and increased access to Internet related information and commerce. The postal modernization in Trinidad and Tobago is still in its early stages; significant new improvements in coverage, quality, and range of

services will continue to increase the postal sector support for economic development, particularly in economically disadvantaged parts of the country.”

In concluding, this is what the World Bank and the Universal Postal Union had to say, Mr. Speaker:

“Conclusions

The case of Trinidad and Tobago Post (TTPost) provides an example of the rapid and significant improvement that can be achieved with an ambitious postal reform process. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has transformed a government dependent postal agency into an autonomous, government-owned corporation. Management of this new entity has been arranged on a contract basis with measurable performance targets and defined responsibilities. A productive combination of policy framework adjustment, commercialization, restructuring and rehabilitation of the national operator, and increased private sector participation have produced rapid and dramatic changes in terms of improved financial and operational performance. Major improvements in universal service coverage, overall quality of service, and customer satisfaction have been achieved in just over one year. And perhaps most importantly, improvements in postal services are already benefiting remote rural areas of the islands and will continue to play a critical role in increasing access to communications.”

So the case is made out. The paternity, the action, the systemic reform, it is clear, belong to this administration when it was in government. There is no doubting that.

With respect to the particular Bill before us as to how this stamp duty impacts upon the postal reform process, I will go to an article, a review by Mr. John Mulligan, a consultant for the Ministry of Public Utilities who is reviewing on an annual basis the operations of the delegated management contractor.

He says in dealing with the stamp duty issue, and I quote from page 4 of his review, Mr. Speaker:

“Each year the assumptions underlying the Year 1 adjustment, including the estimate for Stamp Duty, are re-examined in order to arrive at a fully informed assessment of financial performance.”

In other words, Mr. Speaker, postal reform was ahead of its time. It was a good example of future thinking. It was a good example of innovation and

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

[MR. SINGH]

Friday, November 29, 2002

creation. It was an example of where you want to locate your society in the world, and, therefore, the other areas of bureaucracy did not play catch-up because this was a discreet reform process, so therefore, the Registrar General's department and other areas in which stamps were utilized as revenue measures into the consolidated funds had to play catch-up, and that is why, Mr. Speaker, we are here today to validate the revenue stream coming from that.

You see, one has to reconcile the moneys from stamp duty, because the delegated management contractor, it is not part of their financial performance. So the moneys that they get from the sale of stamps that are used for stamp duty, that money has to go back to the Government. So it is revenue. My colleagues were right. It is revenue, because otherwise we would be, in fact, double counting, because the revenues from stamp duties are not revenues due to the management contractor. Those are revenues due to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is what John Mulligan, in his review, is saying. Look, this is 2003, we need to look at the Year 1 assumptions on stamp duty, because stamp duty continues because of the failure of other areas to catch up. That is understandable. We were so quick and so fast and so ahead of our time, Mr. Speaker. So the other areas are playing catch-up.

What we are saying is that this Validation Bill is important because it will impact upon the postal reform process, because it will impact upon the financial performance target established by the management contract, and therefore, if they allow the revenue stream to go to the delegated management contractor, they will have a skewed appreciation of the financial performance of the management contractor, because they have to reconcile. They are validating the instruments but the stamps on those instruments are stamps that are bought and there is revenue accruing from the purchase of those stamps. [*Interruption*] I have to tell you these things.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to us then, that we must support this, because it is part of the process. So, I want to now, in the time available to me, deal with some of the issues raised by the Member for Diego Martin West. He wants me to take credit for desalination. I will, together with all my UNC colleagues, because I was the Minister in charge, take credit for it. [*Desk thumping*] I am not going to be hypocritical like Members on the other side, Mr. Speaker.

You know, prior to the last general election they printed invitations. The Prime Minister was supposed to speak for the commissioning of the desal plant. The Prime Minister was scheduled to be the feature speaker!

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, if any such thing happened, it happened without my knowledge. I know nothing.

Mr. G. Singh: I will tell the hon. Member. I will bring to this honourable House—because credibility—I will bring to this honourable House copies of the invitations that were circulated, and it is because of the campaign—

Mr. Manning: How come it did not come off?

Mr. G. Singh: Because of the campaign, they said “We cannot go and do that. We made so much hay about that in the Parliament that we cannot. People will say we are hypocritical.” Mr. Speaker, I will bring the copy of the invitation.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin West, planner that he is today, should tell us when he is going to build the dam that he talked about. There will be no dam in this country under the aegis of the Member for Diego Martin West. He always talked about a dam. That dam will be damned under him, Mr. Speaker!

Dr. Rowley: I talked about dam?

Mr. G. Singh: No, no. You said in your answer to the desalination plant that you will build a dam; that you will have water up to your waist. Where are you going to collect that water? The solution is a dam, but he will not build the dam. He will be dammed for not building the dam!

Dr. Rowley: The water up to your waist was floodwater.

Mr. G. Singh: I have to teach the hon. Member, geologist that he is. You have to harvest water before you can treat it and produce water in the pipeline. How are you going to harvest the water if you do not build a dam?

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to us. He says to this honourable House that WASA is producing water at a fraction of the cost of desalination. You see, the hon. Member does not do his homework, and that is why he will forever be the bridesmaid and never the bride! [*Desk thumping*] Production of desal water at the competitive price obtained was US 70 cents. It is \$4.20. When you work it out, WASA produces water in the—

Mr. Manning: \$4.45.

Mr. G. Singh: \$4.45. My good friend is good in maths. WASA produces water much higher than that. In the analysis that was done, when you look at the capital cost, the recurrent cost and the investment, much higher than that, but moreso, you have the water from the desalination plant, no investment from the Government of the day, water produced for the Point Lisas sector.

Dr. Rowley: It is free water.

Mr. G. Singh: No investment for the water sector charging \$7.50—that WASA is charging the industrialists down there.

Dr. Rowley: Keep talking that stupidity.

Mr. G. Singh: You had your chance. I did not interrupt you. What happened? You are like *coitus interruptus*. So, \$7.50 and, therefore, you are making \$3.05 on every cubic metre of water without one cent of investment from WASA. Then the hon. Member for San Fernando East knows this—because he has good friends in the Point Lisas area—that the quality of water that is currently being obtained is impacting upon less cost to the industrialists because of the higher quality of water.

It is not commonly known, but it takes three tonnes of processed water to produce one tonne of methanol. Therefore, there was a need for a dedicated supply. Today, how has that impacted upon the ordinary people throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad? I want to tell the hon. Minister of Planning and Development, he should go into the records in WASA and ask Errol Grimes, his CEO whom he appointed and displaced people so much more competent than him. Errol Grimes wrote a report supporting desalination.

6.00 p.m.

I know Malcolm Jones will tell you; I do not want to get into that. So the question, Mr. Speaker, is that we are willing to take credit for that because today in Naparima, Icacos, La Horquetta, Glencoe and other areas, [*Crosstalk*] when you look at the way the water supply has been impacted upon because of the use of desalination—and then the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) is making a profit in that area from that particular transaction—when the hon. Members talk about the profit and loss of WASA, it is part—[*Crosstalk*]—I am probably hurting the hon. Member. When you look at the investment profile of the UNC in WASA, \$1.2 billion of state funds spent in over 200 projects—over 200 projects—one of the principal beneficiaries of that project was a financier of the PNM, Mr. Emile Elias. You can go and ask Mr. Emile Elias whether there was any finagling in anything. We conducted independent audits ourselves; everything was open and transparent, over \$1.2 billion, because of the state of dilapidation that the infrastructure was in.

Mr. Speaker, the north and south water projects, Mr. Franklin Khan, the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro will tell you of the impact in the Moruga area, where

we utilized water from the Petrotrin dam in order to serve the Moruga area. He will tell you of the impact of that if he is not hypocritical. He is a new Member; I expect him to speak the truth. [*Crosstalk*] When you look at the impact throughout the country in every instance—but you know what is the problem today? It is the cost of carrying that Severn Trent contract in which \$450 million was spent with very little return; a contract that was entered into by the PNM a mere five days before the general election of 1995—five days before the general election! With any analysis of WASA's funding and the problems associated with restructuring WASA's debt, that Severn Trent \$450 million contract stands out, with little deliverables. That is why we got the postal sector right, we were clear with defined deliverables; that contract did not have that. Granted, we have to learn from our errors, but that was a \$450 million error perpetrated by the PNM Government. [*Crosstalk*] That is why that loan portfolio is now being carried. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. G. Singh: I am hearing the Member for Diego Martin West talking about reviewing it. The contract was signed, sealed and delivered; we could not effectively review it. We would have had \$54 million today in fees alone because we could not get out of it. In addition to that, we received certain legal advice that we could not get out of it so we were confined to it. [*Crosstalk*] You know, Mr. Speaker, we could not. That was the state of things. [*Crosstalk*]

In addition to that, you have the kind of situation where today, within the last nine months, we had a structure in WASA; we structured WASA. We benchmarked WASA as we did in the post, against first class water authorities worldwide. We were saying that you need so many employees for water connection and, therefore, we reduced it to a figure of 2033. But what has happened in the last nine months? Pork barrel politics of the first order! What is pork barrel politics? Pork barrel politics is where you give, not pork, but you give jobs that people do not deserve.

For example, the Member for Arouca South's husband, her spouse, no advertisement, no interview, no competence, no qualification—\$20,000 a month, motor car, no work to do! He is setting up communal tanks; that is after he was medically boarded. He ought not to receive—[*Interruption*]—“Yuh eh listening”. When you listen you will learn; read the *Hansard*. [*Laughter*]

In addition to that, a former councillor, Roodal Lalman, was made advisor to the Chairman. Roodal Lalman is a retired pump operator, a former alderman of

the PNM in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation; a pump operator. [Crosstalk] I think they have to have O'levels or no levels. He is advisor to the Chairman who is a university lecturer. What does it say about our university? He is a university lecturer, a former chief personnel officer, but Roodal Lalman is being paid a salary of \$15,000 to \$20,000 a month, motor car, everything, all the perks, to advise a chairman, Mr. Roland Baptiste, who is a university lecturer in management. You believe this thing! Pork barrel! [Crosstalk]

It goes even further, Mr. Speaker—over 200 people employed in WASA. Today, with that personnel expenditure, do you know what is happening, Mr. Speaker? Whereas under the tenure of Khamshan Kanhai the revenue collections equaled, most of the time, expenditure, today, do you know what you have? Collections have dropped and expenditure has increased; so they are laying a bed of thorns. But I know what is the agenda. [Crosstalk] They are laying a bed of thorns for the employees of WASA. [Crosstalk] Not the new set that they brought in, the old established employees, because it is their intention to bring Severn Trent back into this country; that is their intention. So then they would throw up their hands, “What can I do about WASA?”

Whereas we had taken the institution, began to invest in it, make the necessary changes and bring about a measure of discipline, [Crosstalk] in fact, in order to discipline the workers we went to court to make sure the essential industry remained. [Crosstalk] Now they are throwing up their hands once again, back into the arms of their favoured partner, Severn Trent. They want to have an English Christmas. [Crosstalk]

So, Mr. Speaker, when the hon. Member talks about WASA, he has no solution. I want him to take credit for Severn Trent. I am not talking about LABIDCO or anything like that; I leave that up to the hon. Member for Couva South, who is one of the most experienced Members in this House. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this Bill is necessary; it is important. Members demonstrated a level of hypocrisy not voting for it on the last occasion, but it is our intention to support this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join this debate that seeks to validate the cancellation of certain postage stamps. The main purpose of this Bill is to ensure that stamped documents are protected from any challenge based on the fact that the Stamp Duty Act, 2000 was placed on such documents. Therefore, poor people's deeds and so forth will be legalized and

unscrupulous lawyers would not be able to punish such persons. I know of certain cases that I read of in the newspapers, where certain landowners were put out from their lands by unscrupulous lawyers; I think this happened somewhere in Toco. But I am sure, as a learned lawyer yourself, Mr. Speaker, you would have the experience where poor people lost lands for various reasons, to big time, big shot lawyers; therefore, to protect our citizens, we on this side would have no problem in supporting this Bill.

I am sure you will remember that at another time this Bill was presented in 2001 as the Stamp Duty Validation Bill and was defeated on Friday, October 05, 2001. I quote from the *Hansard* of that day:

“Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to run afoul of you, today.”

This sounds as if it is today.

“I do not intend to engage in any lengthy discourse on this matter. We feel that that this House must establish its priorities well. It is more important that we debate the issues of the country today. We are serving notice to you that we on this side...”

Which is the PNM in Opposition.

“...will not support the Bill.”

That was the voice of the then Leader of the Opposition.

Last week we sat here and listened to the hon. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East preaching to us about what a parliamentarian is supposed to be; that we cannot come on one day and say something and come on the other day and say something else. When I read this paragraph which ended his speech in the year 2001, as a politician not with 33 years' experience, I feel I am very concerned, because of the Prime Minister of this country talking about double standards and today his Uncle Tom is trying to convince the country—
[*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please do not use that sort of language or expression.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I withdraw; I am sorry. That is a very famous term and maybe it does not fit the Member; I apologize. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: Offend me! Take a shave “eh”.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I feel very concerned. I want to know what caused this turnaround. The hon. Member for Diego Martin West, again, inside

*Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill**Friday, November 29, 2002*

[MR. RAMSARAN]

this House, when he said that on that fateful day they voted on principle against the Bills of that day. I want to put on record that on that day this honourable House passed the Bailiffs (Amdt.) Bill that was presented by my colleague the then Attorney General, the Member for Siparia and that was approved in this honourable House. Later there was some private meeting, I understand, and then the entire House turned “ol’ mas” and this must be put on the record.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question: In addition to this Bill which seeks to protect the poor people of this country, to validate their deeds and so on, which was defeated by the PNM in Opposition with the help of the three famous musketeers on this side—I want to be clear in my mind—what and why and how these people could come today and vote differently? According to the Prime Minister himself, we must have some decorum, we must have some style and we must make politicians people who will be respected. My colleague also spoke about intellectual dishonesty. We have to add that.

Mr. Speaker, last week when I sat here and heard the hon. Prime Minister’s exultation, talking to us as if he was on a pulpit, that we must listen to him, sermonizing about intellectual dishonesty, [*Crosstalk*] and today he comes to us with a Bill—[*Crosstalk*] That is why today I was not surprised. As a matter of fact, when I was preparing my little speech for this debate, as if it was prophetic, maybe knowing the Member for San Fernando East by now, when I read the presenter of the Bill, I addressed it as “Member for” and I left out San Fernando East, because something told me that he is not really brave enough to come to this Parliament to present a bill that he voiced his disapproval of one year ago and I was right, because the fact is, this is the hypocrisy that we must see the end of in Trinidad and Tobago.

I would just make some comments on my friend from Diego Martin West who stood there and continued—as if he is in any position to do that—to attack the daylights out of the UNC. By now, Mr. Speaker, one year has gone by and we on this side are still waiting for these untruths to stop being brought to this Parliament, because nothing has been proven against one of us.

Today, again, what did they talk about? I almost said the famous word. The Member talked about the element of disgrace and tried to point fingers at this side, but when he talks about disgrace I want to talk about the ghost gangs and this is now coming out; we are going to ask questions. That is why today I was not at all surprised—maybe today I should say that I am the prophetic one—that my question would not be answered, because this is going deep into the finding

out of what happened over the last nine months; but we on this side will come to this Parliament and talk about it.

In today's *TnT Mirror* it reads "Ghost Gang corruption continues" and I quote:

"It certainly did not take long for the youth backlash to manifest itself. The scandal over ghost gangs that surfaced in the drive to refurbish hundreds of National Housing Authority apartments throughout the country is just another joke to hit the town, especially the fact that people are still wondering how Jennifer Lopez and Serena Williams came to town to do a 10-days before returning to the US. It's as boldface as anyone could get."

I will skip a few paragraphs.

"Andre Monteil, NHA's Chairman, must take some of the blame for not managing the programme better on the ground."

I hope the hon. Prime Minister would stand and tell us that he would investigate and also get rid of Mr. Monteil.

"...and folks like Mr. Monteil and others must have left the programme in the hand of these people as a pay back. It is almost like spitting in the sky."

Mr. Speaker, and they talk about shame and element of disgrace. I go on to quote my favourite newspaper, *The Probe*, which is now in the Parliament library. It is headlined on page 6 of today's *Probe*:

"Ghostbusters needed for NHA"

What an apt headline.

"The people who voted for the People's National Movement (PNM) on the high moral grounds that they voted against corruption, must be having second thoughts about the incidents of PNM corruption now popping up all over the country.

The findings of the investigation...of how certain PNM operatives abused the national Treasury to bribe voters or persuade them to stay away from the polls in the Ortoire/Mayaro constituency and the use of terror to drive people away from voting, must be of concern to the anti-corruption voters of high moral and spiritual standards.

For those who might want to believe that the PNM would never 'sink so low' or claim that it was just United National Congress (UNC) propaganda, this week's disturbances in the National Housing Association's (NHA) flat-fixing project, must be telling them a different story.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

Friday, November 29, 2002

[MR. RAMSARAN]

The grand pre-election scheme espoused by former Minister of Housing, Danny Montano...

Well I am now worried that he is transferred, maybe he did not spend enough.

“to spend \$42.5 million fixing up the dwellings of PNMTes in the NHA development, has now backfired.

It is unveiling corruption on a massive scale in the PNM’s strongholds of Morvant, Laventille and Central Port of Spain with ghosts with celebrity names—Jennifer Lopez and Serena Williams (maybe even Patrick Manning) showing up for payment.”

[*Interruption*]

“Programme coordinator, Muhammad Shabazz, a former policeman/insurance salesman/show promoter and grassroots Rasta, must be holding his head and bawling at what he is seeing in the heart of his party.

NHA chairman/CLICO executive/diehard PNMTite and upper income earner, Andre Monteil, must today be wondering why he took on this job, as the situation seems to have gone completely out of hand, just as the cost of the project has jumped to \$75 million and climbing, with the job only 75 per cent completed.

PNM, the party that campaigned against corruption, is now finding that corruption has gone wild with its grassroots supporters.

And with just two months into its five-year term gone, one can only imagine what is in store for the country later on down the line. No wonder Senator Danny Montano wanted to have nothing to do with that part of the Ministry of Housing.

It is very possible that he got wind of what was going on and decided to pull out before the ghosts started invading his home.

It would be very interesting to hear what Prime Minister Patrick Manning has to preach about these ghosts.

Is he going to condemn the situation or turn a blind eye to what his supporters are doing?

Is he going to say noting about how they are trying to rob the Treasury of the nation’s money?

Or is he just going to leave it to Shabazz and Monteil to play the role of ghostbusters? We will be watching these developments.”

When I sat here this afternoon and listened to the Member for Diego Martin West talk about disgrace, this Government is just a few months old and when we hear about—I have a letter in my possession, but I will keep that for another time—maybe when the media are out here in full glare—saying that certain contractors approached a certain minister about payments due to them and that minister asked them for 10 per cent of the money owed to them. [*Crosstalk*] I will write the Prime Minister, once I have the permission of my colleagues; we have to get this out in the open.

They cannot sit there, talk about element of disgrace and continue to rape the Treasury. Again, my colleague said it and I would repeat it, when the PNM pointed out that the UNC was involved in voter padding and whatever to do with election fraud, they, on the other hand, went rampant, they ravaged this country in stealing the election and evidence will come out, I am sure, in due course, we are going to see. Whatever you do in the dark, Mr. Speaker, always comes to light.

The Member for Diego Martin West accused my colleague of disappearing from the Parliament, parading somewhere and not understanding what is happening. We ask the other side: What is happening to them? The Member tried to teach me the difference between paternal and paternity. Look at the dictionary; paternity and paternal mean “of the father”, and it could mean anything. When he tried to define paternity and paternal for me, I want to know why he is raising this issue. If you want to tell your hon. leader something, tell him. If you want to ask your leader something, ask him. Do not use me, as Member of Parliament for Chaguanas, to do your dirty tricks. Mr. Speaker, I want to go on. [*Crosstalk*]

We sat here and took it for six years. The Member stood again today and said that we were busy counting the Government’s money; I take great umbrage to that. The fact is that, today, we are getting evidence of their, not only counting Government’s money as their own, but counting people’s money as their own. More will come to light as we go on. I am warning the hon. Prime Minister that today we had one case.

Again, to add my two cents worth to it, I will read my favourite newspaper, *The Probe*, to talk about this, because [*Crosstalk*] I am so very concerned about what is happening in this country, that whenever it is printed and we could bring to the attention of the nation, we are going to do that. Page 3 of *The Probe* reads:

“Who got \$50,000 deal?”

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

Friday, November 29, 2002

[MR. RAMSARAN]

This has to do with the ADB scandal. I do not want to go through this to repeat what my colleague said, but just to again put *The Probe* in the *Hansard*.

This article was written by a very famous journalist in the country; if you read page 3, Mr. Speaker, you will see who I am talking about.

“Did someone collect a \$50,000 commission on the \$5 million Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) deposited with CLICO Investment Bank (CIB)? And if so, was there a conflict of interest involving an ADB director?”

Those are among penetrating questions being aired amid the move by the Hubert Alleyne-headed ADB Board of Directors to send two top officials on leave.”

Very, very consistent; different newspaper, different source.

“Chief Executive Officer Seebalack Singh and Financial Controller Fiona Loo Ping Wah were last Friday asked to proceed on vacation after they resisted the decision to make the \$5 million deposit.

CIB gave an insurance policy—and not a deposit certificate—following the \$5m transaction.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, just for your benefit and the benefit of other Members, I wish to draw the attention of the House to Standing Order 43 which speaks of irrelevance and tedious repetition of either your own argument or that of other Members. You are not there yet, but you could be getting there. So, please, if you could probably come back to the substance of the Bill, it will be in order.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am so guided. I am sure when you find me getting there, I know you will steer me off. [*Crosstalk*]

I just have two more paragraphs, just to put it on the record, because my colleague got his information from another source. I would like to tell you that this is something that bothers us all. I would not continue with this because, again, you have the record already on *Hansard*, but, again, we will respond to the Member for Diego Martin West.

He talked about high moral ground. I think that politicians on the other side should stop using the words moral and spiritual; it has served its purpose and that is gone. We do not want this country to go under, as in the days of Noah. Do you know what has been happening since the PNM got in office? It has rained every day. Let us get out of this spiritual and moral ground, because I am one who does not believe in blasphemy. We are supposed to stop talking about moral and

spiritual ground. For the hon. Member for Diego Martin West to preach to us about morality—[*Interruption*—you said that. You talked about moral high ground. [*Interruption*—I want you to just stop talking about morals.

Let us talk about the doctors' issue.

Dr. Rowley: Do you have something against moral high ground?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Do not take it; allow other people to do that, [*Crosstalk*] because you are blaspheming.

Mr. Speaker, I heard a programme on a radio station this morning and I heard calls coming in to that station. Our good friend, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was also at that station for about 25 minutes. When you listened to him, you can see that he really wants to solve the problem of flooding in this country. I told him to be careful how he chose his words in that Government, because they would haunt him. We see it here this evening with this Bill before us. They supported the Bailiffs Bill, but they opposed the Bill that would benefit the small man.

Do you know which is the other Bill that they voted against on that day? They voted against calypsonians and chutney singers getting a special bar licence. Do you remember that, Member for Siparia?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: A special liquor licence.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: They voted against a special liquor licence for people who would have a chutney or calypso show and pay a \$10 licence. They voted against those two Bills on that day that would affect the poor people. So I am telling the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro to be careful. I wish him luck, but people on that side really do not care about poor people in this country. Their record is there to show that.

What is happening in the hospital today? Rather than deal with the problem that is affecting the hospital and see how he could solve it, we have the Minister saying that it is political, "That is politics," and carrying on like that; no reason why. I am not talking about your ruling today, Mr. Speaker. I would not do that. The radio programme this morning had a poll and 85 per cent of the persons who called in said that Mr. Imbert should go as the Minister of Health.

Mr. Imbert: So low? That was Radio Shakti? [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Again, a serious issue, people losing their lives. We have little Luke in San Fernando. We do not play politics with people's lives but, the fact is, people are dying in this country. It could also be put on the record the

*Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill**Friday, November 29, 2002*

[MR. RAMSARAN]

negligence that is shown at these institutions. Rather than trying to solve the problems, my goodly colleague, the Minister of Health, is spewing politics.

Mr. Speaker, there is a time and place for politics. When you have to look at the health institutions in this country, that must be an exception. Let us deal with the problems there. Let us understand that we have lives to save and we have our young doctors to protect. So rather than going there with a big whip—what is the word from my colleague—with a short man complex, you go in there and you want to show your size, deal with the problem. Do not show them who is powerful; those days are gone; those days have vanished. We live in a modern society. I want people to understand that this is not a personal attack on the Minister. It is not about who is strong, who is weak, who could fire who and cannot fire who. Let us move on, and I move on from that. [*Crosstalk*]

I would like to tell the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, who is now Minister of Planning and Development that I am very, very concerned about what I am reading in the newspapers. I quoted a few examples this evening about moneys being spent all over the country and we cannot see what is happening. There is no evidence of any Public Sector Investment Programme. In my constituency, five schools were supposed to have started, none were started. Moneys were voted into budget, one year has passed and nothing has happened. Yet the Member talks about morals, element of shame, and element of disgrace!

I want to find out: where did this money go? Why was it transferred? Come and tell us; we want to know; the country wants to know. The country is waiting to exhale. We want to find out why money was taken from building our famous arch. Where did that money go, that was voted for the Caroni Hindu School? The money was in last year's budget. [*Interruption*] I am responding to the Member for Diego Martin West. I noted here and I do not want to be rude to anybody here this evening, but we on this side expect answers. I would like them to come quickly.

The name of this Bill is very instructive. We are validating certain Acts done between October 2000 and February 2001. We want to validate these things. I am asking for validation of the country's money and the country's resources. If the budget was changed, let us know. Let us know where the money went, because I have a problem with that. The other side cannot come and tell this country what they did five, six years ago through channel four. Whatever is happening in the country for everybody to see, we want to know what is happening today; what has happened over the last year, because we receive information; we read the newspapers. My colleagues and I on this side are concerned about the spending

that took place and I would like, as we are validating certain Acts, for that Act to be validated, if at all they could validate it.

The Member for Diego Martin East would throw things across the table. When we asked him, “Well, yuh against UNC people?” He said, “Yes, we against UNC people,” that is his job, but it is our job to find out what is happening with the country’s Treasury and we would like to get the answers as quickly as possible. [Crosstalk] I am reading what the Member said and I am responding to him. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, you see what is happening in this country today and my colleague alluded to it in different areas. I want to ask the Member for Diego Martin Central to tell the country why there was this sending home of senior officials from the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation? The country is supposed to know. We read in the newspaper that 24 were being sent home; we want to know why this was done—[Interruption]—TIDCO officials, Mr. Speaker. I do not know why, so I am asking the question. We are supposed to know what is happening.

Dr. Rowley: You are spreading rumours.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: That is no rumour; that is there. Self-Help Commission, which I know much about, two senior employees were sent on leave. I want to ask a question. [Crosstalk] I would talk about validation. I do not want to be smart or foolish, Mr. Speaker, but this is a serious issue and I want to get it off my chest if you permit me two minutes.

There was this period when the present Prime Minister was the Prime Minister of the country alone at that time, he was appointed just recently and then he appointed his Attorney General a couple days later and during that time there was not a minister responsible for community development and gender affairs. The then minister instructed the National Commission for Self-Help to send home two senior employees. Just like that, they got a letter to send them home. I want to know the validity of this. Would this be validated? Would these people be rehired? [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: The Standing Orders does deal with questions, but try please, hon. Member, to come back to the Bill.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I feel sometimes I am playing a little see-saw, sitting and getting up all the time. I want to continue with the few points I have here, so maybe I would come back to the Bill with your instructions.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[MR. RAMSARAN]

Friday, November 29, 2002

When the Member for San Fernando East said:

“We feel that this House must establish its priorities, it is more important that we debate the issues of the country today.”

I wrote the comment, “very instructive”. Well, really, what are the issues of today? Rampant murders, threat to our democracy by terrorists; when we read this in the newspaper—and people might feel we might not have a right to do this or that and we want to make issues of non-issues, but as Members of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago, we come here to Parliament. People might call it what they want, but when certain things are bothering us we have to talk about them. The whole question of terrorism in Trinidad and Tobago is headlined in *The Probe* today:

“December 22 Terrorist Attack”

There is an entire article here. [*Interruption*] Why is it that we cannot listen to the truth sometimes? I will not read the whole page this time, I promise you that, Mr. Speaker.

“A massive contingent of top American security officials is now in Port of Spain upon the discovery of a hatched terrorist attack planned for December 22.”

Again, we must not politicize everything.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we sat on this side and took blows from the Member for Diego Martin West. As usual we talked back; we got some blows. He is a very good debater; he gives blows, but sometimes when you give you must learn to take.

“US intelligence experts reportedly intercepted an underworld design to launch a deadly attack on the American embassy and key installations of multinational companies.”

The article went on to talk about this planned threat to our country and we must not just laugh at this and laugh at *The Probe*. We have to take this thing seriously. I am just asking the hon. Prime Minister, as head of the National Security Council, to deal with this threat seriously, because we do not want to have to say, “Well, I told you so; it was on the newspaper,” and something happens to this country. We must understand that.

Just to respond quickly to a couple points made by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, he accused the UNC of wrongdoings. I want an end to this. I think if

the hon. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East could come here, stand and preach to us, talk about politicians, who we are and our role in society, I think it is time that we have courts in this country. We have commissions of enquiry. You on that side, feel free to set up any commission of enquiry you want; investigate any wrongdoings that may have been committed on this side, but the time has come to stop coming to this honourable House and trying to attack Members and destroy the messengers. It is time we get rid of that. If you want to elevate the politics in Trinidad and Tobago and, as my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine has said, get the politics right, we have to do this and this is the place to set that example.

I got this letter about the 10 per cent request by the Minister and up to now I am not sure about it. I have to do my own investigation and get some more evidence from other contractors. I will not come in this House and call a minister's name. I am talking about raising the standard of politics in this country, as the hon. Prime Minister is apt to say. [*Crosstalk*] I said after investigation, so that is why I repeated it. [*Crosstalk*]

Another thing about politicians, I said it last week and I say it again this week, we must respect each other; we must get the country moving forward, not come and sit here and try to score political points. I am warning Members that those days are gone. We are now living in an age where everything we say here could reach our country. I do not want to talk about the negative effects that this might have upon this country, but it is very possible.

Mr. Speaker, we have come to debate this Bill and the presenter of the Bill does not tell us what is the intent. The Member for Diego Martin Central delivered the Bill to us, but had I not listened to my colleagues on this side and maybe if I had not studied the Bill myself, nobody would know what he was trying to present to this House. What does the Bill intend to do? As I said, we on this side support this Bill, because it is going to protect our citizens. It is going to make sure our citizens are given the support they need when an omission would take place, whether it is by the UNC or the PNM.

There are certain Bills which both sides approved, an omission took place and we come to correct that omission. We must come here and explain to the House what happened to the original Bill, why there is an amendment. Is it, Mr. Minister, that when you came in here the Prime Minister said, "Handle this Bill," and you were not prepared? We on this side would like to know. [*Crosstalk*]

I think when the Members opposite present a bill, they must believe in what they do. Tell us the purport of the Bill and what you are going to achieve. I want

*Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill**Friday, November 29, 2002*

[MR. RAMSARAN]

to ask a question through you, Mr. Speaker. What will happen if, for example, something happens to a landowner or anybody else, during that period when there was this omission? The Member did not tell us how he is going to correct that anomaly or what steps will be taken to maybe protect a rich or poor person. What would be there to protect that person? I did not hear anything about that.

Let us say, for example, Operation Anaconda. They may stop a person allegedly committing a minor offence and this boy's parents may go to the court for bail and then see that they use the stamps instead of the franking system. How could you penalize this person when there was an omission that took place in the Parliament of the country? I did not hear the Member say anything about that. [Interruption] I am not saying whose inefficiency it is. [Crosstalk] You have been there; you voted against this a year ago, so you have no moral authority to talk about that.

Mr. Speaker, we heard nothing about how we would deal with these anomalies which take place. That is why when we stand on this side to debate a bill, if the presenters would take their time and tell us how they are going to protect anybody who will be affected by the bill, we would applaud it. But they just come and wrangle and gaggle through a bill presentation and expect us on this side to just accept it; I have a problem with that. I am sure when the newspaper reporters left here, they would never know, by listening to the Member for Diego Martin Central, what was the origin of this Bill and why we came today to approve the amendments. Nobody would know. [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, you hear Members talking about collecting revenue and all I try to follow the presenter, I could not.

I want to tell Members opposite that we are hearing things on the other side; we are going to ensure that we are the people's representatives. We are the watchmen of our society. We will come here and we are not going to throw wild accusations as they did. You threw accusations right, left and centre; you threw mud hoping some would stick. You sit here and we hear you say that you won the election, but evidence would come out to show that the election was stolen from us and when that day comes I would want the country to appreciate the work of the UNC.

Mr. Speaker, for the Member to sit there and blame us for that omission, maybe when we are here as a strong and able Opposition and bills are passed with small omissions like this one—[Interruption] You cannot blame the then government; we were here on both sides. We are here to pass the Bill, and not

because something was omitted maybe by the drafters of the Bill, you come to Parliament and blame the then government.

We are here to pass legislation or make legislation, whatever you want to say. We are the ones to ensure that when bills leave this Chamber, they must be correct. So Members opposite cannot blame the UNC for that omission. We were all here. You voted for it in October 2000. [*Interruption*] In 2001 they voted against the amendment. Mr. Speaker, we are the legislative council. We sit here, debate laws, and we pass laws. It is unfair that when something goes wrong, you blame one side. We all sit here; we have to take collective responsibility to ensure that the Bill before us is worth its salt and we approve it.

Mr. Speaker, we can go on and on to respond to their allegations of corruption. We could share blows as they do, but what comes first, not the development of our country? Not to come here and talk half-truths, to accuse people of things that they do not know about. I would come to this House and whenever I accuse somebody on that side, it is because I have evidence. When I get any information I am going to investigate it. Of course, a little heckle here and there is beside the point, but when you stand, Mr. Speaker, and make an accusation, you must stand by it.

That is why I congratulate my colleague, the Member for Caroni East, who stood this afternoon and categorically denied and put on the record accusations made against a Member, because the rumour-mongers in Trinidad and Tobago would pick up this, take it to the country and people would commit. What is apt to happen is that people on that side would tell their supporters; they would try, they would persecute and destroy our members.

We on this side have no problem in supporting the amendment. [*Interruption*] I am not moving, that is your job. We have no problem at all in supporting this Bill. What I do have a problem with and what I want them to convince this nation through this Parliament and through you, Mr. Speaker, is how they could have voted against a bill less than a year ago and come today asking us to support them without changing one comma and without even explaining the purport of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, in winding up this debate, I must confess that I am amazed at the boldfaceness of speakers on the other side.

Let me again repeat that this Bill has nothing whatsoever to do with raising finance or anything of the sort. The purpose of this Bill is simply to cover the

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill

[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

inefficiency of the former UNC government; that is what this Bill is about. However you want to cut it, that is what it is about. Therefore, when Members attempt here to talk about raising \$12 million of finance, that is not so.

As a fact, there is an estimate that these adhesive stamps would normally bring in roughly \$12 million in revenues. If it is a fact, as the Registrar General has informed me, that as of February 09, 2001, the fees and so on have started to be paid in cash rather than via adhesive stamps, one would see that as from that date the fund money has been going into the Treasury and, therefore, that is not an issue today. So that for the Member for Siparia asking us to tell her what has happened with the money or have we recovered the money from TTPost, those are questions which are properly directed to their side, because they were the ones in government as of February 09, 2001, that they ought to account for whatever funds went to TTPost over the period November 2000—February 2001. They simply came here this afternoon, knew that they were in error and rather than admit that, attempted a boldfacedness that is difficult to understand.

The Member of Parliament for Siparia is concerned about the fact that we are still dealing with matters which were left in inventory, so to speak. Whenever a government takes over there would be items in inventory; there would be projects in the pipeline; there would be legislation at different stages of development and, as a fact, what a new and incoming government would do is look at what is in the pipeline, decide what it can go with as a holding position until it has time to get the Legislative Review Committee to look at its own legislation.

The argument that we have been in government since January, does not consider sufficiently the fact that we were able to come out with that social and economic policy framework; that was a major piece of work that engaged the new government for the period January—August. Having developed that document, having passed the budget, then there are certain pieces of legislation that flow from that; that is now engaging the attention of the Legislative Review Committee. When the Parliament resumes after the Christmas break, then one would normally expect to see the Government's legislation coming forth. Thus, the Government simply attempted to use this early period to try and get through most of the pieces of legislation in the current inventory that it considered worthwhile. I think if Members were to reflect, they would see that a similar situation occurred when they came in late 1995 early 1996.

Then there is the issue with respect to this legislation, the fact that it did not obtain the support of the House last year 2001. As a matter of fact, in that sense, this legislation may be considered critical legislation, because it was this piece of

legislation among, I think, two other pieces, on which the government fell on that fateful day, for all practical purposes. What was the issue there? As my colleague from Diego Martin West pointed out so clearly—and this is the file containing the proceedings of that fateful, important day for Trinidad and Tobago, when three members of the government at that time decided enough was enough and that they were no longer going to be supporting the government. [*Interruption*] Not treacherous, they stood for principle, a thing which some of you know nothing about.

As the Prime Minister of today, the Leader of the Opposition at that time, made it very clear that, yes, this legislation might very well be important. Let me just quote a bit more from the Leader of the Opposition at that time. He said:

“The point I am making is this, as important as the Government and the House believes it to be, to validate stamps that have been cancelled, it is far more important that we address the crisis in which the country has been plunged as a consequence of the Government losing its majority.”

In a democracy, as you know, Mr. Speaker, if a government does not have the confidence of the House, if it cannot rely on the majority in the House, then it ought to call election and that was the issue of that day, that the government had lost its majority and, therefore, it made no sense whatsoever looking at any other piece of legislation but, really, dissolving the House and calling elections.

Most of the other issues have been dealt with. I just want to deal with, perhaps, two others. The Member for Caroni East spoke about WASA. Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that only yesterday the Cabinet had to approve further borrowings by WASA of some \$250 million. I do not have the file here, otherwise I would like to go through and look at that desalination plant, where the Member attempted to misinform the House by stating that it is bringing in a profit. It is not.

One is buying from the supplier of the desalination plant in lumps and until the capacity of utilization gets to that point, it means that you are paying for water that you will not be using at present. It appears that that is the situation at this time; so there is revenue, expenses and the expenses at this time appear to be higher than the revenue. I think the Member ought to check his sources.

The Member also dealt with this issue relating to the Agricultural Development Bank and the Prime Minister has informed the House. He has asked me to get a report immediately. I have already asked my Permanent Secretary to do that.

Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Yesterday, the Chairman of the ADB sent me a little note dated November 25, it says:

“Please find attached, for your information, copies of the duly confirmed minutes of board meeting No. 499 held on September 25, and extraordinary meeting No. 2002/02 held on October 03.”

Mr. Speaker, it is only when the Member started his contribution I had to ask for what I call my finance briefcase, because it came in my dip today and I simply put it in the briefcase. I had to send for it, to read it and see what it said.

Let me just read a few items in the minutes, for the record, because the impression seemed to have been given that the board seemed to have something against their Chief Executive Officer. Let me just read something from the minutes. This is from Minute 499, Extension of Chief Executive Officer’s Contract. It says:

“The performance of the Chief Executive Officer over the past three months was assessed and it was agreed that a recommendation to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to have the Chief Executive Officer’s contract extended for a period of two years with effect from July 02, 2002.”

Now, the line Minister is the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I am de facto corporation sole. I am sure the Minister has copies of these minutes also. I wanted to put that in the record. It appears to me, and this is October, that the board was happy with its Chief Executive Officer. Let me put another matter here.

This is item four of the Minutes of October 03, at 11.00 a.m. Item four:

“National Poultry Company Limited Investment of Funds:

At the last board meeting held on September 25, 2002, a decision was made to invest the \$4.5 million received on behalf of National Poultry Company Limited in accordance with the bank’s rules and regulations. The Chief Executive Officer indicated that pursuant to the Board’s decision, a search was done on the investment options available in the marketplace. The search revealed that the best option for the bank’s funds was the group’s Advanced Protection Policy offered by the Colonial Life Insurance Company Limited, (CLICO) and guaranteed by their statutory reserve funds.”

7.00 p.m.

“Decision

Pending the establishment of the investment committee on completion of policies and procedures to guide the committee, it was resolved that the \$4.5 million would be temporarily invested in CLICO.”

I want to read just one more, Mr. Speaker, and it talks about where the \$4.5 million came from. You see that is what they have to explain. I was not there—

499.7 National Poultry Company Limited. This is the origin of the \$4.5 million.

“A cheque for \$4.5 million was received from the attorneys acting on behalf of the National Poultry Company Limited as full and final settlement of the debt of \$5.8 million.”

So they had a debt of \$5.8 million and final settlement of \$4.5 million.

“The board reaffirmed its earlier decision to invest the sum of \$4.5 million to yield the sum of \$5.8 million in accordance with the bank’s rules and regulations.”

So it appears that there is a debt for \$5.8 million, they settle on \$4.5 million and they are finding an investment institution that will provide them overtime. The \$4.5 million plus compound interest will grow to \$5.8 million so that they can liquidate the debt. This is what the Minute is saying.

I have asked my Permanent Secretary to get the *Hansard* of the hon. Member and send it to the chairman and ask for a full report concerning this matter. As soon as we have that, I shall come to the House and make the appropriate statement.

Mr. Sharma: Nonsense, you knew about it all the time. Before you came to the Parliament you knew about it.

Hon. K. Valley: I know about everything.

Mr. Sharma: Yes, do not try that.

Hon. K. Valley: My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, has dealt adequately with the other matter. As a fact, I think we need to validate the stamps so that the deeds and so on may be admissible in evidence and that is the protection, and hope that whenever—God forbid—they were ever to get into Government again, they would exercise a bit more care when they are doing things.

As I said in the opening, at the same time the legislation for TTPost was done we should have had the legislation with respect to the stamp duty. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2.

Question proposed, That clause 2 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Chairman, the Member for Siparia raised the question about moneys obtained from the sale of stamps, et cetera, and in his reply the hon. Minister made no mention of it. Before we confirm this clause, can we have a response?

Mr. Valley: I indicated that in fact the Registrar General informed me that as of February 09, 2001 money was collected in lieu of stamps so the UNC ought to be the ones really reporting on any funds that went to TTPost because as of February 2001, the funds would have been going to the Consolidated Fund.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Even if that is so, hon. Member, we cannot report on that because those records are with you. You are in office now, that is the first point.

The second point is what about thereafter? If you say that up to such a date in 2001, what about thereafter?

Mr. Valley: Thereafter it would be going into the Consolidated Fund.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: May I frame the question properly so that you can answer? The question was, here it is you are validating documents on which stamps were affixed, that money should belong to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Valley: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You are validating up to the date of this Act coming into force. If you read it, that is what it says. Therefore, moneys would have gone to TTPost for the payment of those postage stamps and I asked: how much was it? What steps, if any, had been taken to recover those moneys?

Mr. Valley: I attempted on two occasions to answer you. I said I have been informed by the Registrar General—I have a document here where it is stated that

as of February 09, 2001 the money started going directly to the Consolidated Fund, because rather than using the adhesive stamps from that date, the cash embossed and so on. So that the period one has to account for would be November 2000 to February 08, 2001 and I am saying you were in office at that time and therefore, you knew of the information—*[Interruption]* Listen, you were in office at that time and therefore, one assumes that you knew exactly how you would recover.

That question should be directed to the Member for Caroni East. He should tell us what TTPost did with those revenues and whether he was able to get it from TTPost into the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Chairman, the question was not answered. The first thing is the Registrar General is not the custodian of the funds, so the Member is misleading the House.

The second matter is that we have not been told about the quantum received and we are enquiring about that, and unless those questions are answered, we are going nowhere.

Mr. Valley: This relates to a period when we were not in office, you were in office. *[Interruption]* No problem. I promised I would find out whether the Minister at that time was able to identify the funds from TTPost and whether he informed the Minister of Finance at that time. Okay?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Where is it and how much is it?

Mr. Valley: I will find out. I will ask TTPost.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the third time.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask for a division on the vote please.

*Stamp Duty (Validation) Bill**Friday, November 29, 2002**The House voted: Ayes: 29*

Valley, Hon. K.

Manning, Hon. P.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Narine, Hon. J.

Boynes, Hon. R.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Achong, Hon. L.

Bereaux, Hon. H.

Rahael, Hon. J.

Khan, Hon. F.

James, Hon. E.

Hart, Hon. E.

Callendar, Hon. S.

Seukeran, Hon. D.

Roberts, A.

Job-Davis, Mrs. E.

Hinds, F.

Singh, G.

Dookeran, W.

Yetming, G.

Persad-Bissessar, Mrs. K.

Ramnath, K.

Ramsaran, M.

Rafeeq, Dr. H.

Sharma, C.

Partap, H.

Nanan, Dr. A.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Question agreed to.

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

PILOTAGE (AMDT.) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Franklin Khan): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend the Pilotage Act, Chap. 51:02, be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is to amend section 4 of the Pilotage Act, Chap. 51:02, to include within the membership of the Pilotage Authority, two members of the Pilots Association instead of one.

Secondly, the Bill also seeks to give the Minister the power to appoint all members of the Pilotage Authority.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have a unique opportunity tonight in piloting my first Bill in this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*] In uniquely piloting a Bill, unpiloting, and I hope with time, I would become an extremely good pilot in this House.

Having said that, I need to refer to a statement that the Member for Caroni East made while he was debating the previous Bill, indicating that I am a new Member and I am expected to speak the truth. For my own edification, I would like to ask him, how old must I be in the House when I am expected not to? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, pilotage is a term used to describe the navigation and safe conduct of ships into and out of the harbour and restricted waterways within Trinidad and Tobago. Every ship that navigates within specific ports, harbours and channels in Trinidad and Tobago must operate under the control of licensed helmsmen or pilots in accordance with the Pilotage Act.

Mr. Speaker, the second schedule of the Pilotage Act outlines specific areas deemed compulsory pilotage areas where ships navigating must be under the control of a pilot. These areas, all of which comprise the major port facilities in

Trinidad and Tobago include Chaguaramas, Port of Spain, Point Lisas, Scarborough, Pointe-a-Pierre, Brighton and Point Fortin. The provisions of the Act mainly apply to those vessels flying the flag of a foreign state. However, the following are deemed to be exempted vessels for the purposes of the Act.

The exempted vessels include ships belonging to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, pleasure crafts, fishing vessels, ferry boats operating between Trinidad and Tobago harbours, ships of less than 50 tonnes gross tonnage and ships that may be exempt by by-laws made by the Pilotage Authority. Currently, all licensed pilotage services are provided by the Trinidad Pilots and Boating Masters Association, a company incorporated under the Companies Act and first established in 1939.

Mr. Speaker, the statutory body known as the Pilotage Authority was established under section 4 of the Act to oversee all matters related to the licensing and conduct of pilots and the safe pilotage of ships within Trinidad and Tobago. Specifically, section 4(1) of the Act stipulates that members of the Pilotage Authority shall be appointed by the Minister and shall hold the appointment at the Minister's pleasure.

In accordance with the provisions of the Pilotage (Amdt.) Act, No. 6 of 1985, the present composition of the Authority is as follows:

The harbour master who shall be ex officio chairman, a representative of the Shipping Association, a member of the Pilot's Association, a representative of the Port Authority, a person who holds a certificate at Master Home Trade issued by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago or an equivalent or higher certificate, or alternatively someone who had obtained the rank of Lieutenant Commander in the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. The Authority also includes a barrister or solicitor and a person suitably qualified in economics, accountancy or commerce.

Mr. Speaker, the two amendments that are proposed today, the first of which we want to put two members from the Pilots Association instead of one and the reason is that when the authority was reconstituted in 1985, the impact of shipping in Trinidad and Tobago and consequently the need for pilotage service was not as developed as it is today. Since that time, we have experienced expanded port facilities in Scarborough, Port of Spain, Chaguaramas, Point Lisas, Brighton and Point Fortin. With the advent of Atlantic LNG, they have all contributed to a drastic increase in foreign flagged vessels calling to ports in Trinidad and Tobago.

All of the above are subject to compulsory pilotage under the Pilotage Act. In other words, all foreign ships coming into our ports must be piloted safely into the harbours.

Currently, there are 23 licensed pilots who are members of the Pilots and Boating Masters Association. The figures for 2001 read that a pilot completed 15,686 movements at national ports in 2001 as compared to 15 pilots and 9,665 movements in 1996; a figure that is ever increasing as a result of the expanded foreign vessels which are calling to the local ports in Trinidad and Tobago and is testimony to the expansion of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Pilotage Authority has considered the impact of these increased movements on its work and its programme to ensure the safe conduct of pilotage services in Trinidad and Tobago. More importantly, new vessels and equipment technology have increased the need for greater attention to be paid to policies and programmes geared to obtaining pilotage skills, training, and to ensure optimum safety of pilotage service at our national ports.

Because of this increase in activity, the Pilotage Authority has recommended that with the increased demand in pilotage and a consequence of the upgrading of policies and programmes related to the conduct of pilotage services in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a need for wider representation from the Pilots Association and, therefore, the number of the Pilotage Authority should be increased from one to two, which is the substance of the amendment we are proposing on the first Bill; small, but significant.

Mr. Speaker, one will recall that as originally constituted before 1986, if one reads the Act, that the Authority comprised of a harbour master, a representative of the Shipping Association, a representative of the Petroleum Association and two representatives of the Pilots Association.

Act No. 6 of 1986 amended section 4(1) of the Act and provided for the current constitution of the Authority and this is the crux of the matter for the second amendment. However, in doing so, the words "representatives" and "members" of the aforesaid association were inadvertently left intact. As a result, the Minister only according to the amendment, had the statutory powers to appoint the representatives of the Shipping Association and the Pilotage Association. The other members as stipulated in the amendment of 1986 which includes the barrister or solicitor, the Port Authority representative, the economist or commercial person, no longer fall under the Minister's purview. It is the intention of the second part of the amendment to bring all the representatives and members of the Pilots Authority under the purview of the Minister of Works and Transport.

Pilotage (Amdt.) Bill
[HON. F. KHAN]

Friday, November 29, 2002

So, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the Pilotage (Amdt.) Bill, 2002 is to amend section 4 of the Act in order to provide the following and I repeat.

To include two members of the Pilots Association within the Authority. The Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01 provides that where there is an even number of persons on the board and there is a tie in the voting matters the chairman shall exercise a casting vote.

Secondly, to give the Minister the power to appoint all members of the board of the Pilotage Authority.

I thank you.

Question proposed.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Mr. Speaker, sometime ago Members on this side raised the question that it appears as if the Government lacks vision.

I congratulate the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro in moving his first Bill, but let us look at what has happened here. What the Minister has practically done—and it may not be bad—is read almost exactly what was presented to this House by the former Minister almost one year ago, a Bill which Members on the opposite side voted against.

Now the question is, there must be some kind of coming together if this is going to be the approach to legislation in this House. There must be agreement. For instance we came here at 1.30 p.m., it is now 7.25 p.m., and we are on the second Bill. All we had to do was say listen: “We are going word-for-word and pass three or four bills,” and you could have been home and so could I, and we would have been able to obtain the same objective. We are prepared to stay here as long as is necessary, but what is the purpose of going over and over?

Mr. Speaker, I will touch on a few matters that the hon. Minister raised. The first thing is that one year later, under the PNM Government, we have seen no improvement at the Port Authority, absolutely zero. On the last occasion, the Member for Diego Martin East raised a concern about the boats that worked between the islands and, today, there is absolutely no improvement under the PNM administration.

In fact, I understand in the other place a Member raised the concern about the virus on a ship. I thought the Minister would have taken the opportunity to talk about it. I want to read an article that appeared in the Miami newspaper on Wednesday, November 27. It says:

“Disney Cancels Cruise by Ship hit by Virus”

It is an article written by Michael Connor in the Miami newspaper.

“The Disney Cruise Line on Wednesday canceled a Caribbean voyage by its Disney Magic ship, the second luxury vessel to be pulled from service by a prominent U.S. cruise line to combat a gastrointestinal virus that has hit hundreds of passengers.”

I thought the Minister would have taken the time to tell the national community of Trinidad and Tobago, more so with the number of viruses going around and the inability of the Government to provide at the public health institutions doctors to see persons who may be suffering with this virus, and the inability of the Government to provide medication and drugs.

“The two-ship line operated by Walt Disney Co., the entertainment giant famous for theme parks and cartoon films, said a week-long sailing from Port Canaveral, Florida, on Saturday had been canceled so that the three-year-old ship can be disinfected.”

A very important and serious matter.

“Another cruise ship, the Amsterdam operated by Holland America Line, last week canceled a 10-day cruise after four significant outbreaks of illness during October and November and is being scrubbed down in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in the hope of breaking a cycle of transmission.”

Again, the Minister came here today, one year later with the exact Bill, almost word for word and is not telling us what is taking place and is threatening the health of the national community of Trinidad and Tobago. Disease and pollution by motor vessels, boats, and ships are extremely high in this part of the Caribbean.

On Monday of this week, four days ago, “lawyers seeking restitution for 500 or more passengers” who got sick on the vessel filed a lawsuit saying: “the cruise line should have more quickly yanked the ship out of service...”

“Holland America, a unit of Miami-based Carnival Corp., also canceled a week-long Alaska cruise last summer by its Ryndam ship to break outbreaks of Norwalk-like virus that struck 388 passengers and 40 crew during two cruises.

U.S. government health officials and Holland America credit the week-long break without passengers on the Ryndam with curtailing the non-lethal virus...”

Pilotage (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is that it has come to the attention of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that there are a number of viruses being spread by these ships coming into the Port of Spain port as well, not just by the huge vessels, because the Minister made the point that he is talking not only of ships up to 50 tonnes, but pleasure craft, ships belonging to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and ferry boats operating between the harbours of Trinidad and Tobago. So it brings into focus immediately that the Government lacks vision to treat with developing situations that are life threatening.

“Experts tell us that this seven-day hiatus, along with additional sanitation procedures that are not possible for a ship in operation, will provide the best opportunity to eliminate this concern going forward.”

We have established under the UNC administration—I am sure it obtained under the previous administration—arrangements with these international agencies. In this instance, the Disease Control Center in Atlanta. In fact, we have had people from the Port Authority and persons from the Medical Association of Trinidad and Tobago being trained so that we have contacts there, but the Government for some reason is not utilizing it.

“Officials at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta said that at midday on Wednesday 104 passengers and 19 crew of nearly 3,500 people aboard the Disney Magic had stomach pains and other symptoms of Norwalk-like virus.”

In some countries persons have died from this, and others have not been able to return to work.

“Last week, during another seven-day voyage in the Caribbean...”

I am not sure if “the Caribbean” in this context means Trinidad and Tobago, the port of entry.

“...some 275 people on the ship reported vomiting, diarrhea and other gastrointestinal ailments. The Disney Magic was scrubbed down last weekend to combat the virus.

David Forney, the chief cruise-ship sanitation inspector for the CDC, said tests completed on Wednesday showed the infection last week on the Disney Magic was a Norwalk-like virus, whose foul symptoms generally pass within a few days.

CDC inspectors last fully examined the Disney Magic in June, when its sanitary practices and equipment were rated 99 on a 100-point scale.”

The second point he made here is when the inspection was done on some of these ships, while they obtain a very high level of sanitation, the disease still appeared and passengers were affected.

The other matter is the question of pollution. The Minister identified all these ships, pleasure boats and so on, and, up to now we have seen pollution from ships that transport oil and causes damage to the fish that our citizens are eating. Again, lives are threatened and the Minister has made no effort whatsoever—these are matters that exist, and in the last year we have seen absolutely nothing in that report.

In addition to that, there is very little protocol at the port for ships coming into Trinidad and Tobago in terms of proper inspection not only for viruses, diseases, and pollution, but we have seen in recent times in Trinidad and Tobago, a high incidence of kidnapping and the use of guns and it is felt that a lot of these guns are coming through the ports of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister identified the ports of Chaguaramas, Port of Spain, Point Lisas, Scarborough, Pointe-a-Pierre, Brighton and Point Fortin, and we are not seeing the measures in place. What is really happening is that the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are threatened by the lack of proper monitoring systems in place at all these ports.

The Minister also raised the question about the Pilotage Authority also being charged with the licensing of pilots. While they may meet the requirements to work on the boats, because of the current matters I have just raised; the area of viruses, diseases, water-borne pollution, and water-borne diseases, we are not seeing any educational material being extended to the pilots who work in this particular area, like the making of by-laws. Again, no effort whatsoever to treat with the global challenge of all these matters that are coming.

In recent times, the world authority on shipping and matters of this kind have become very concerned with human cargo, arms and ammunition, and moreso with the recent developments on September 11. It is felt that sometimes many things can be transported by these ships because they are not monitored, and I call on the Government to indicate to the national community what kind of policing is taking place ensuring the good governance of pilots.

We have seen in the last two or three years, three or four ships that were carrying chemicals and the pilots were intoxicated, and, we have seen accidents that have caused massive oil spills and the loss of life. Again, the good governance of pilots does not say anything. The Minister must explain what safety measures are put in place for passengers on such vessels, and moreso passengers on other vessels that may come into contact with these ships.

When the Minister speaks of approving the training standards for pilots, what exactly does he mean? How are these pilots trained in keeping with the global threats we are now facing? That is important and I get the impression that while the Minister meant well, he came very unprepared for this presentation. That happens from time to time.

The Minister also raised the matter of 23 licensed pilots. Mr. Speaker, you will remember under the UNC administration there was a national plan to train and retrain and get more people involved in areas where we are lacking. Twenty-three pilots for Trinidad and Tobago is too few and much effort—and again, the Minister must indicate what is the Government's policy for attracting people. The Member for San Fernando East would remember that the workers at the Port Authority at one time were known as “Party Group No. 5” of the PNM.

Hon. Member: No. 37.

Mr. C. Sharma: No. 37; sorry. I just wanted to make sure you all were hearing me. The point is that we have to make sure that persons who are employed do not go as we have seen for the other kinds of employment offered by the Government where there are no advertisements, people are just appointed, and the next thing they become pilots. This industry is one that is under international watch because of the global threats of terrorism and similar kinds of things and we have to make sure that we attract the right persons.

The Minister talked about the pilots having completed about 15,000 movements. While that may sound like a lot, it is not good enough in terms of numbers in keeping with the global trends. For instance, we need to have a certain amount to be considered and 15,000 is much too low. He also indicated that in 1996 15 pilots completed approximately 9,000 movements.

While the number is increasing it is not enough because we are attracting more vessels into this area. In fact, under the UNC administration, we have been able to make Chaguaramas a place where yachts come and feel comfortable and it is a whole industry. In fact, it is thought in many quarters the biggest market out of the United States, and Europe thinks it could be a billion-dollar market here in Trinidad. Under the UNC administration, much effort was made to develop it and many resources were put into it and it has given way to many of our local craftsmen, and teak from Trinidad was highly recommended for it. Again, it is an industry that needs assistance from the Government to develop.

The other matter that I feel needs to be raised today—and I think it was the Member for Arima who indicated that the airfare between Port of Spain and

Tobago would now be \$200 with a seven-day advanced purchase. While \$200 is much more than what now obtains, there should be some more effort to lower the cost of cargo going to Tobago especially from Trinidad, which would help the people in Tobago to develop their communities and build their homes. Again, if you look at the cost of goods in Tobago, it is much higher in some instances than in Trinidad.

It will also allow more exchange of labour, craftsmen, and training by encouraging more people to travel by the boat. It would also encourage the extension of the local tourist industry with people going with their cars. Of course, the boat that now services Tobago from Port of Spain and vice versa still experiences too many breakdowns, and in the last year we have recorded a number of breakdowns. We have seen where passengers have had to sleep in Port of Spain for more than a day and were not catered for. The Minister may want to indicate what kind of arrangement could be made in that respect.

In addition to that, I recall under the UNC administration that some effort was made to police it, by opening up the market to allow more boats to trade so that the commerce between the islands could be increased. I know under the PNM, for the last year, we have seen very little taking place in that area.

The Minister also raised the question of the fixed rates of payment for pilotage services and we should look at what obtains in the international market. I get the feeling that our prices charged here are much too low and, as a result, perhaps we are not attracting more people into it.

I do not know if the Minister is aware that the methods for conducting examinations for both masters and maids seem to be in conflict. There seems not to be a standard practice, and more than that, it seems that which obtained 20—25 years ago is what obtains today and you may want to revisit that. What you would have is two persons becoming masters and maids and writing an exam that was perhaps set in 1975 or somewhere around there, and in the year 2000 writing the same exam. So we want to develop that in keeping with the global trends.

I also wanted to raise the matter of the membership. While the Minister identified, for instance, the harbour master who is expected to be there, the representative of the Shipping Association, the Pilots Association, and a representative from the Port Authority, the representative from the Port Authority should be someone who is conversant, or made to become conversant with what obtains. Because oftentimes you just satisfy your own requirements by saying there should be somebody from the Port Authority and that person, from my own experience, is not conversant with what obtains at all.

Pilotage (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, November 29, 2002

One of the members should be a person who holds a certificate as Master Home Trade issued by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, or an equivalent to a higher certificate. In recent times we have had many people who have been trained abroad and for some reason, they found it difficult to obtain employment, or even consideration and you may want to look into that. In fact, I know where we have had Trinidadians who served in the US Army and Marine Services and when they returned to Trinidad there was no employment for them and you may want to look at that as well.

The Minister also indicated a barrister or a solicitor. Again you would want to have someone who seems or who would have been able to display some kind of experience in marine matters, not just any barrister or solicitor will do.

Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to raise a small concern about some of the ports that the Minister raised; Chaguaramas, Point Lisas, though not in any order, but the point I want to make is that there seems to be a high level of illegal activities in many ports. In fact, many times when you look at the daily newspaper you see persons charged for bringing in illegal goods: birds, car parts, et cetera; and whilst I raise that, the real concern is arms and ammunition coming into Trinidad and Tobago. If they are getting away with bringing in the birds, alcohol and other kinds of goods, they may be bringing other things. In fact, there was a large uproar recently over the use of firecrackers and it is felt that they come through some of these ports, because at many of the ports there is very little policing.

I know there has been some talk about expanding or creating a port in the Guayaguayare area and, before you consider if one of the existing ports could be expanded—because ports are extremely expensive—and more than that, sometimes they are underutilized and you may want to look at that.

During the UNC administration the dredging of the Port of Spain harbour went up to 12 metres and there was a further plan to do more of it and the Minister has not indicated where we are with that. The reason I have raised it is that in recent times two things are beginning to happen; one, more ships are coming into Trinidad and the loss of time when they stay out longer to get cargo offloaded the consumers pay for it. If a ship stays for five days when it could be done in one day, then the consumer picks up the cost for the next four days.

Whilst we have upgraded the electrical system and put aside moneys to purchase a generator—which up to this time has not been bought—and in addition to that upgrading to aid in the navigation, funding was made available for that and the upgrading of the container area under the UNC administration, but up to this time that has not been treated with.

Under the UNC administration, the Point Lisas port was becoming one of the success stories in global ports. Except for Singapore and Hong Kong, we were doing very well and we want to revisit that to make sure we can further that as well.

The Minister made the point that the Government recognizes the importance of the twin-island transportation system but he has not indicated how he is going to add value. It seems as if since last December very little has happened. While the *MF Panorama* is in service, too many citizens are not able to obtain seats. In fact, they tell us for a week or two they are still trying to get space on it, moreso if you need to take your car from Port of Spain to Tobago. We had considered at one time to bring in a cargo ship separate from the passenger ship and the port was beginning to show some profit. So that there is a market for it and you may want to consider or indicate to this House your willingness to treat with it.

Under the UNC administration, we had started the construction of the maintenance workshop and I have been told that very little is happening on the workshop. We had started the asphalt paving of the yard and some of it is still sitting there.

The Member for Diego Martin Central in his budget contribution indicated that there would be some kind of consideration for those persons whose cars are in the port. I was hoping that we would hear today that the revenue to be obtained from those cars would be “x” amount and the owners would be able to access their cars.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words I thank you.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

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 continue to sit until the conclusion of the debate on the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

PILOTAGE (AMDT.) BILL

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Franklin Khan): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to hear some of the constructive comments and recommendations made by the Member for Fyzabad, a lot of it is very—I do not want to get into conflict too early—I almost said unlike previous contributions I have heard during my presence here; but I must say that I think this time, the Member was focused and constructive and he made some good comments.

Pilotage (Amdt.) Bill
[HON. F. KHAN]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Not so specific to what pertains to the amendment *per se*, but he made some comments that I would take into consideration. Some of the recommendations will obviously redound to the more efficient operation of the Maritime Services Division in the country, especially with regard to the training of additional pilots to take into consideration the additional traffic we are getting. As we develop Trinidad and Tobago and the economy continues to expand in the energy, manufacturing, and the productivity sectors and as we increase trade and export, all sectors of the economy have to be commensurate with each other.

Under the PNM's vision for development, we were particularly concerned that no one sector should run too far ahead of the other sector, because what you would have is unbalanced and skewed development. It makes no sense that we continue to expand the energy sector, or trade and investment, and the infrastructure that supports the very investment that we make, like the ports and airports and some of the infrastructure in the economy, are not commensurate with the economic expansion that we expect.

Mr. Speaker, many of the comments from the Member for Fyzabad are very specific and may not be opportune without some level of research on these topics to make more focused response on those comments.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2.

Question proposed, That clause 2 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Chairman, before you proceed with clause 2, I want to make a suggestion to the hon. Minister that where you have the word "one" substituting the words "two members", I suggest that it should read "more than one member" for the simple reason that as we develop down the road, more than likely we will have to increase this by more than two members. When you look at what obtains outside, it is a much larger body.

Mr. Khan: We would want to stick with the two members for the time being. We have researched it and we feel two is a comfortable number. I do not want to

say more than two and then realize that was not probably the best way to go. The number “two” was not taken out of a hat, it was well thought through based on the volume of traffic we have seen, so we will stick with the two members.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question proposed, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

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

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 do now adjourn to Friday, December 13, 2002 at 1.30 p.m.

In moving the adjournment, I want to inform all Members that the Government plans to take the Finance Bill through all its stages on that day.

Members would receive the Finance Bill by December 09, 2002. We want to be able to take our Christmas vacation after that sitting so after passing the Bill it will go to the Senate on December 17, 2002 and Members would then be able to have a good Christmas and return in early January on a date to be fixed.

Eid-ul-Fitr Greetings

Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East): Mr. Speaker, before we move the adjournment of the House, having regard to the time line expressed by the hon. Leader of Government Business, I think it is incumbent upon us as Members of this House to take this opportunity to wish the Muslim community who would be celebrating Eid on Friday, December 06, 2002 a happy, holy and peaceful Eid-ul-Fitr. On behalf of the Members on this side I wish them well.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, of course I would have another opportunity on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to wish happy Eid-ul-Fitr greetings to the Muslim community and to all of the country. This being the last sitting of the Parliament before December 06, 2002, I too would take the opportunity on behalf of Members on this side, and be that true, I speak for Members of this honourable House, to wish happy and fraternal Eid greetings to the Muslim community, and to wish happy Eid greetings also to all of Trinidad and Tobago as we celebrate this national festival. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker would also like to join Members in wishing the Muslim community Eid-ul-Fitr greetings.

Before I move the adjournment of the House, there are three matters on the adjournment, two of which, by agreement, the House has decided to proceed with.

**Bacchus Bridge
(Collapse of)**

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the provision of paragraphs 2 and 3 of Standing Order 11, I want to speak on the matter of the collapse of Bacchus Bridge and the Agricultural Access Bridge on Bacchus Road off Nariva Road, Tabaquite which was washed away following the recent rainfall.

Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, November 13, 2002 following heavy rainfall, 30 farmers who cultivate over 40 acres in Tabaquite had lost hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of food crops.

It is unfortunate that when we look at the development programme for 2003, we see an allocation of \$5 million for agricultural access roads and bridges. Under the UNC administration, there was an allocation of \$21 million, and of that amount, PNM administration spent \$27,503, 1.3 per cent of the allocation for agricultural access roads.

Mr. Speaker, 2001—2002 fiscal year shows quite clearly that we are getting lip service from the Government with respect to the agricultural sector. As I said before, 30 farmers who cultivate over 40 acres, a capital investment that totals over \$50,000 lost their food crops.

It is unfortunate that there is a situation in the Ministry of Agriculture where I am informed that they were not aware of where Bacchus Bridge is located. So I will take the opportunity this evening to inform the Minister of Agriculture where it is.

Mr. Speaker, as you travel along the Guaracara-Tabaquite Main Road, possibly eight kilometres of roadway on your way to Navet Dam, you would utilize the Nariva Road, and it is off Nariva Road that Bacchus Bridge is located. To be more specific, Bacchus Bridge is located on Bacchus Road, and as you enter Bacchus Road, there is a cocoa estate before you encounter Bacchus Bridge.

8.00 p.m.

Bacchus Bridge is about one mile off the Nariva Road. Bacchus Bridge's dimensions are 40 feet by 15 feet. It is quite a large bridge and I will let you know

that the bridge is on a river that feeds into the Navet Dam run out—what we call a mini dam. There is also a teak plantation around that mini dam.

Because of the large amount of water coming into that mini dam, it is very important that I raise this Motion because the 30 farmers have machinery, which is trapped on the other side of the bridge, which has been washed away. They cannot get access to their equipment and they employ over a hundred workers to assist in the management of crops.

Not only will I deal with the agricultural access bridge, but right nearby there is also the Blondell Bridge, off Alleyne Road, which is near Nariva Road, another agricultural access bridge that is in a state of disrepair. The economy of this particular community in the Tabaquite area is built around farming and because of the loss of this large amount of food crops, we are seeing a loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars and no support coming from the Government to these farmers. Their equipment is marooned and they are just waiting for assistance from the Government. One hundred workers have been displaced, a whole community has almost been wiped out, in terms of the economic situation, because they depend heavily on food crops for their livelihood.

I urge Government to deal with this matter speedily in terms of the repair of Bacchus Bridge, so that the farmers can have access to their equipment. I mention also that money was allocated for the upgrade of those two bridges, but they only used one per cent of the allocation.

I thank you for the opportunity to raise the plight of these farmers in the Parliament this evening and look forward to a speedy response from the Government.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. John Rahael): Mr. Speaker, in the matter raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of the House—the collapse of Bacchus Bridge, an agricultural access bridge on Bacchus Road, off Nariva Road, Tabaquite, that was washed away following the recent rainfall—I wish to assure the hon. Member that the Ministry is well aware of the location of Bacchus Bridge. The bridge is located approximately 0.8 kilometres along the Bacchus Trace and the road continues another 2.5 kilometres. That is just to give you the assurance that we know where the bridge is located.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, as well as other ministries, agencies and departments, has been working assiduously since the flooding on November 05, 2002. We in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and

Bacchus Bridge (Collapse of)
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Marine Resources have been assessing the damage to agricultural holdings and relating with the farmers on their farms as we visit them to assess their damages.

In this matter, officers of the Ministry, together with officers from the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite Regional Corporation, officers from the Ministry of Local Government and some farmers who have been affected, visited the site on Wednesday, November 20, 2002. One of the findings include that the bridge on Bacchus Trace was washed away in the year 1995. Immediate repair work and some maintenance were carried out then. Since 1995 there was a temporary bridge and nothing further happened since then. The bridge was the only access bridge servicing 20, and not 30, farmers working about 40 hectares, which is about 100 acres. There were 20 farmers each with approximately five acres, totalling 100 acres. That is a more accurate figure than the Member is claiming. I do not know how he got his math.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the bridge is critical, essential and necessary for continued access to the area. Our officers have recommended, for construction, a longer lasting, durable structure, namely a pre-stress concrete slab bridge. However, we are cognizant of the fact that almost immediate relief must be provided so that the affected farmers can continue their activities to get their lives back in order.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you and this House that my Ministry, together with the Ministry of Local Government, is moving swiftly to construct a new wooden bridge on the Bacchus Trace, in the shortest possible time. The estimated cost is \$150,000 and the cost of the permanent concrete slab bridge is in excess of \$1 million. We need to identify the source of financing for the permanent bridge, but within our budget, we hope to start, almost immediately, the construction of the temporary bridge so that the farmers will have access to their produce.

The affected farmers and the national community are aware that we are conscious of their plight and are satisfied that we are taking remedial action. I thank you.

Government Moneys Owed

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Mr. Speaker, most times when a motion is moved on the adjournment, it is done for numerous purposes. I am making a large appeal, particularly to the hon. Prime Minister, on behalf of maybe 50 per cent of Trinidad and Tobago. This has to do with moneys owed to contractors and providers of goods and services.

It appears that close to \$2 billion are owed to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, including persons and business houses who are owed VAT refunds close to \$1 billion and contractors and providers of goods and services who are owed the rest.

Mr. Speaker, it has been brought to your attention through this House that many businesses in the health sector, for example, many suppliers are holding back their services. For that reason, some hospitals do not have simple medication at this time. In addition, a number of contractors, who have done work for the Government of Trinidad as far back as 1991—we are looking, in some instances, at a 10-year period—have not been paid their moneys for various reasons.

A few minutes ago, Eid greetings were extended to the Islamic community. As we approach Christmas, it will be in keeping with the greatest and noblest of traditions to make a genuine effort to treat with these people. It has come to the attention of Members on both sides of the House that persons have gone into bankruptcy, children have been unable to go to school, bills cannot be paid, banks are seizing properties, marriages are going on the rocks and workers have been left unattended. In many instances, the safety of workers is compromised because workers have not been paid.

I am making this appeal to the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to bring real Eid greetings and Christmas cheer to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, the Government is aware that sums are owed to suppliers, contractors and other business persons. These sums will be met on an ongoing basis from the current allocations of ministries and departments, subject to the presentation of the relevant documentation and verification where necessary.

At the end of October 2002, commitments of Central Government amounted to approximately \$70 million. This compares with the commitment of \$150 million, which this Government met when it took office in December 2001. A number of state agencies have outstanding commitments to suppliers and contractors. These include the Tourism and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (TIDCO), the National Maintenance Training and Security Company (MTS) and the Urban Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (UdeCOTT). These agencies owe contractors for works done under the National Road Enhancement Programme, which were undertaken by the last administration.

Government Money Owed
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, November 29, 2002

Some of the works executed under this programme represent firm contractual obligation. As at December 31, 2001, outstanding billings under such contracts amounted to some \$60 million and have been progressively reduced to approximately \$15 million. These outstanding billings are being addressed, however, there are other works, which were executed under the programme for which contracts were not awarded. The claims in respect of such works amount to approximately \$83 million. A team of government officials has been appointed to review and verify the validity of these claims. The contractors and suppliers will be compensated on confirmation of their claims.

Likewise, the Regional Health Authorities have not been meeting their financial obligations to suppliers and contractors. As at September 30, 2002, the RHAs owed \$33 million to suppliers and \$44 million to utilities and other creditors. A team comprising officials from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance has been appointed to review the total indebtedness of the Regional Health Authorities, including amounts owed to suppliers and other creditors, and submit recommendations for the liquidation of the debt.

In addition, one is aware of the outstanding commitments of the Value Added Tax Section to various business persons and at present the Ministry of Finance is looking into this to see how we can speed up refunds.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the question, may I inform you that dinner is provided for Members.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: There was another matter on the adjournment. Last week, there was some misunderstanding and it was not done. I would like the record to reflect what is happening.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, the reading of the appropriate Standing Order will suggest that motions on the adjournment should be completed by 8.15 p.m. The other motion is directed to the Attorney General, who is a Senator. She was here earlier because we had intended to do other pieces of legislation. I told her we were going quite late and she has left for home.

I have had discussions with the Member for Siparia, the leader, and indirectly with the Member. [*Interruption*] She has asked me not to say that she has agreed and I shall not say that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I did not ask him to say that we agreed because I did not agree to anything.

Hon. K. Valley: That is exactly what I am saying. Let me put it this way. She has told me clearly not to say that she has agreed. I want to know the exact words, so that I can say them. I am asking that it be deferred until December 13, 2002.

Mr. Sharma: My understanding is that when motions on the adjournment are deferred, the time 8.15 does not apply. For instance, if there were motions today from the previous sitting and there may be four or five, the time 8.15 p.m. does not apply. Am I correct?

Mr. Speaker: There is some uncertainty about the Standing Orders. I am looking at those particular provisions. On the last occasion, there was agreement between both sides of the House to do the three matters, which were postponed from the last sitting. My understanding is that there was an agreement to do two of the motions and, the third one, that of the hon. Member for Siparia, would be done on Friday, December 13, 2002.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.16 p.m.