

*Leave of Absence**Monday, October 27, 2003***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, October 27, 2003*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West (Hon. John Rahael) requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted. I have also received communication from the Member for St. Joseph (Mr. Winston Dookeran) requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave of absence which the Member seeks is granted.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Value Added Tax (No. 2) Order, 2003. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
3. Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order, 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

**RELATED MATTERS**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in the name of the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. In moving this Motion, I seek leave of the House to debate, along with this matter, Motion No. 2 which is of a similar nature.

*Question put and agreed to.***PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to move the following two Motions standing in the name of the Minister of Finance. Motion No. 1 reads:

*Whereas* it is provided by section 3(1) of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01 (hereinafter called "the Act") that where proposals for general or supplementary appropriation of public funds are made to the House of Representatives and are embodied in an appropriation or a supplementary

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appropriation bill, the President may, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in any such bill, by Order, provide for the imposition of a tax or the variation of an existing tax and from the date of the publication of the Order in the *Gazette*, the tax as imposed or varied shall be payable:

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

*And whereas* the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003, made under section 3 of the Act, provided for the variation of taxes in the written laws mentioned in the said Order to the extent and in the manner set put therein, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2004”:

*And whereas* the said Order commenced on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2003:

*And whereas* it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

*Be it resolved:*

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003 be confirmed.

Mr. Speaker, as noted, the Motion before the House is for the confirmation of the provisional collection of taxes. The Order was published on October 6, 2003, and of course we are at this special sitting because it is mandatory that it be confirmed by today, that is by midnight.

In this Order there are four measures: the first deals with the increase in the tax on gambling tables and other devices. The other measures concern the increase in the production levy payable by oil-producing companies, the collection of road improvement taxes and the payment of interest on VAT refunds.

With respect to the gaming tax, one would recall, I am sure, that there was great hue and cry on the last occasion that the taxes on gaming tables and devices were increased. There has, nevertheless, been a proliferation in the number of private members’ clubs that operate such tables and devices. Of course, this suggests that last year’s increases had little or no impact on the operation of these clubs.

Mr. Speaker, what started off as a peripheral activity has now become, in fact, the core attraction and the major source of revenue for many of these clubs. In

fact, several of these clubs have continued to circumvent the law to carry out full-scale casino operations. Until such time as the operations of private members' clubs are reviewed, the tax on gambling activities is the legitimate way of ensuring that gambling operators contribute to the society in a tangible way. It is no secret that our gambling laws are in need of reform and updating. Our existing laws fail to protect the vulnerable or to prevent unfair practices and criminal infiltration.

The provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order relating to the increase in taxes on gambling tables and other devices are to be found at paragraph 2 of the Order as follows:

1. For every Baccarat Table	\$40,000 per annum
2. For every Black Jack Table	\$50,000 per annum
3. For every Caribbean Stud Poker Table	\$75,000 per annum
4. For every Dice Table	\$25,000 per annum
5. For every regular Poker Table	\$20,000 per annum
6. For every Pool Table	\$2,000 per annum
7. For every Roulette Table	\$50,000 per annum
8. For every Rum 32 Table	\$75,000 per annum
9. For every Sip San Table	\$75,000 per annum
10. For every Slot Machine	\$10,000 per annum
11. For every other table or device not mentioned above	\$10,000 per annum

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the petroleum production levy, one would note that the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act was enacted in 1974. The aim of this piece of legislation is to provide a buffer against increases in petroleum prices. This Act provides for the collection of a levy from oil-producing companies to be paid into a fund known as the Petroleum Products Subsidy Fund. A subsidy is paid from this fund to wholesale marketing companies when the reference of petroleum products are higher than the wholesale prices.

In 1992 this Act was amended to restrict the amount of the levy payable by an oil-producing company to a maximum of 3 per cent of its gross income derived

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from crude oil production. In doing so, the government had implicitly agreed to meet any subsidy payments in excess of the 3 per cent cap.

An analysis of the swings in posted prices in relation to the petroleum subsidy shows that a subsidy is generated when crude prices are above the US \$20 per barrel for oil. For the years 2000—2002, Galeota crude mix averaged US \$26 per barrel of oil and for the year 2003 the price per barrel has averaged US \$29.60. During the period of high prices Government has had to meet the subsidy payments in excess of the 3 per cent levy.

Mr. Speaker, prior to 1992 production companies whose business produced petroleum at a daily average of 3,000 barrels of oil or lower were not required to pay the production levy. This changed when the 3 per cent cap was introduced in 1992. So that oil companies, whether or not their daily average exceeded 3,000 barrels of oil, were then required to pay the levy up to the 3 per cent threshold on their gross income.

The measure which is contained in paragraph 3 of the Order is intended to share the burden of the increased cost of switching from leaded to unleaded gasoline with the oil-producing companies. Moreover, the increase in the levy is also intended to protect the motoring public from the full brunt of the cost associated with making our environment lead free. Accordingly, it is noted in the Budget Presentation 2004, that the production levy of 3 per cent on gross income payable by oil-producing companies has been increased to 4 per cent. This increase will not apply to small producing companies whose output is below 3,500 barrels of oil per day.

Mr. Speaker, I turn next to the collection of road improvement tax. Paragraph 4 of the Order seeks to formalize the arrangement to have the United Petroleum Marketing Company Limited (UNIPET) collect the road improvement tax at the pump. In 1994 the road improvement fund was established and was financed directly by the imposition of the Road Improvement Tax on motor vehicles fuel. This tax was originally only collected by the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Company Limited (NP). Paragraph 4 of the Order would recognize UNIPET as another collector of the road improvement tax.

Mr. Speaker, I turn next to the VAT returns. No system of taxation system is eternally efficient; with the passage of time amendments are generally required. Paragraph 5 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order seeks to clarify the law relating to the payment of interest on late refunds paid by the VAT administration.

The value added tax liability of VAT registrants is computed at the end of every two months. Registrants are required to submit VAT returns on forms approved by the Board of Inland Revenue within 25 days after the end of the two-month period.

The approved form must include particulars of the amount of tax payable or the refund due and may include other information required by the board. Where a refund of VAT is due to a registrant the law requires the Board of Inland Revenue to pay the amount of the refund within six months after the due date for furnishing the return to the board, or six months after the return was actually furnished, whichever is later.

Failure of the board to make the refund within the six-month period prescribed by the Value Added Tax Act, would result in the board being liable to pay interest at the current rate of 1 per cent per month. The amount outstanding on a refund is satisfied when the board either pays the registrant the refund or applies the refund towards the payment of any outstanding tax, interest or penalty payable by the registrant under the Value Added Tax Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Board of Inland Revenue has noted that several VAT registrants have submitted claims for interest although their returns were incorrectly completed or contained incorrect information. In order to clarify the law, section 35 of the Value Added Tax Act has been amended to make it clear that the Board of Inland Revenue will only become liable to pay interest where it fails to make a refund after more than six months from the date on which the registrant furnishes a completed return which meets the requirement of section 31 of the Value Added Tax Act. This measure can be found at clause 5 of the Order.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, had announced several other measures which are not included in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003. As you know, the Order is specific and is only for items for the raising of revenues or the variation of a tax. There are other measures which would be contained in the Finance Act which would be brought to Parliament before the end of this calendar year.

Mr. Speaker, Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper, the Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order. This Motion reads:

*Whereas* it is provided by subsection (2) of section 13 of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, Chap. 78:50 that the Minister may by Order impose any new excise duty or increase duty and from the date of publication of the

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Order in the *Gazette* and until the expiry thereof the duties specified in the Order shall be payable in lieu of the duties payable thereto:

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

*And whereas* the Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order, 2003, was made under subsection (2) of section 13 of the Excise Duty (General Provisions) Act, and first published in the *Gazette* on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2003.

*And whereas* it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

*Be it resolved:*

That the Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order, 2003 be confirmed.

Mr. Speaker, as has been noted, the Order which is before this House was made by the Minister of Finance pursuant to section 13(2) of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, Chap. 78:50. Of course, it is noted also that an Order made under this section must, after four days and within 21 days from the date of the first publication of the Order, be submitted to the Parliament.

Moreover, where the Order is submitted to Parliament within the specified time, Parliament may, by resolution confirm, amend or revoke the Order and upon publication of the resolution of Parliament, the resolution shall take effect and the Minister's Order shall expire. On the other hand, where the Order is not presented to Parliament within the specified time the Order shall cease to have effect and any excise duties paid by a consumer after the expiration of the Order shall be refunded to the consumer.

This Order which is before the House today was published in the *Gazette* on October 06, 2003 and was submitted to Parliament on October 17, 2003. This latter date being more than four days after and within 21 days of the date of the first publication of the Order. The Order, therefore, has satisfied the procedural requirement of the law.

Mr. Speaker, this Government's aim for sustainable development is to ensure a better quality of life for everyone today, and for generations to come. Although

a high and stable rate of economic growth is vital for delivering an improved quality of life and rising economic prosperity, this should be achieved while protecting and enhancing the environment and ensuring that the long-term benefits are shared by everyone.

The phasing in of unleaded gasoline unto the market represents the bold move by this Government to bring the benefits of cleaner air to everyone. Unleaded 95 Ron is already being sold on the market and another grade, unleaded 92 Ron will be introduced on a phased basis as service stations use up existing supplies. It is expected that all grades of unleaded gasoline would be discontinued on the domestic market by April 01, 2004. Let us say the last day would be March 31, 2004 as April 01 may give a wrong connotation.

Unleaded 92 Ron would be sold at the pump at the retail price at which leaded premium gasoline is currently being sold. The wholesale price for this product would also be the same as the current leaded premium gasoline price, that is, \$2.52 per litre. As such it is anticipated that when leaded gasoline is phased out in April 2004, 80 per cent of the gasoline market will use the unleaded 92 Ron gasoline while the 95 Ron unleaded would account for the additional 20 per cent of the consumers. The purpose of the Order before this House is to confirm the imposition of excise duty on the new petroleum product, unleaded 92 Ron gasoline. The excise duty on this product would be 99.696 cents per liter. The excise duties on all other petroleum products will be maintained at their current levels.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Kelvin Ramnath** (*Couva South*): Mr. Speaker, I will confine my contribution to the issues relating to the petroleum industry, but I want to simply state that it appears as if the personal religious values of the Prime Minister and his cohorts influence the taxation policy of the Government. I would have preferred another reason for increasing taxes with respect to gambling and gaming in the country instead of the personal, spiritual preference of the Prime Minister. Of course, lately, I believe that something has overcome him and he is now being using the name of the Almighty at functions where a lot of alcoholic beverages are consumed. [*Interruption*] Of course. He must note that this is not a Christian State.

Mr. Speaker, while I must admit, like you, I am an active Presbyterian, and Christian, we do not, and should not, impose our preferences of religious beliefs

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on the society and it might serve the Prime Minister in good stead if he was to enquire from other sections of the community how they view matters of gambling and gaming in the country and seek to find some kind of other justification for these punitive taxes which have been imposed. That has been a policy of the PNM for a long time, particularly under the former prime minister, Dr. Eric Williams, but my eminent colleague, the Member for Caroni East, would be dealing with that in detail.

Mr. Speaker, when I came in I noticed a kind of silence on the other side. I thought there would be cause for celebration, but it appears that there was nothing to celebrate over the weekend so my friend, the Member for Diego Martin East, now has an opportunity to speak. He cannot speak elsewhere—he is not allowed to speak elsewhere—so if he should just be quiet and listen to some constructive discussions I would appreciate it.

**10.30 a.m.**

Let me come to this issue, Mr. Speaker, relating to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order with respect to the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act. First of all, I refer to a statement made a few minutes ago by the Member for Diego Martin Central. This has to do with having to subsidize the price of gasoline through contributions to a fund, which has now been increased by 1 per cent of gross production of oil companies in Trinidad and Tobago.

If we look at the price of gasoline at \$3 per litre—unleaded 95 octane number—one gallon will cost \$12 or approximately US \$2 per gallon. If we go to any pump in the state of Florida or any part of the middle and southern United States, we will see that 95 octane is being sold at US \$1.70 per gallon. There is no subsidy. This is the market price and it is less than the subsidized price in Trinidad and Tobago. The ex-refinery price of gasoline from the Petrotrin refinery is based on a formula, which the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Prime Minister know well. [*Interruption*] I do not know the details of the formula, but I can find out. It is based on the crude benchmark Bachaquero 25 to 27 API on the world market. But I am not in that business.

All I want to say is that the reason for the consumer paying higher prices at the pump, is that the overheads at National Petroleum are escalating to the point where the motorist is paying for the political administrative cost of managing the sale of petroleum products in this country. A simple line from Pointe-a-Pierre to Piarco to supply aviation fuel (AVJET) would obviate the necessity for shipping AVJET to NP's Sea Lots operation and trucking it to Piarco.

They have been 34 years in power and this useless regime could not see the need for piping jet fuel from Pointe-a-Pierre to Piarco. In fact, Barbados, which imports jet fuel from Trinidad, sells its jet fuel to airliners at a cheaper price than we sell at Piarco. As a result, planes prefer to go to Barbados to refuel that come to Trinidad. It does not really matter if it has to do with international negotiations. We are selling them the jet fuel, but our administrative costs are too high because the State wants to control the sale of petroleum products in Trinidad and Tobago.

The time has come when we should end the monopoly by NP and allow the private sector to operate that activity. I notice in a document called the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy, laid here during the budget debate, that there is a differential between private companies and state companies with respect to the gross margin per litre for petroleum products sold in Trinidad and Tobago. So that UNIPET will now enjoy TT \$.08 per litre of unleaded premium gasoline, while the National Petroleum Company will be accorded a margin of 15 cents, almost twice the amount. They are in the same business. If anyone takes a tank wagon and goes to the bond in Pointe-a-Pierre and fills it and takes it to a UNIPET gas station, he will be doing no less than if he takes an NP truck, goes to the bond in Pointe-a-Pierre and supplies another gas station. This is evidence that, in all cases, the margin afforded to NP is twice the amount as the private companies which are providing the same service.

**Mr. Manning:** I thank the hon. Member for Couva South for giving way. Is the Member saying that UNIPET and NP are in the same situation and therefore should have the same margins?

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** Mr. Speaker, I think that was meant to be a rhetorical question. All I am saying is that by putting this in the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Order, the Government is admitting that .08 cent per litre, as an example of unleaded premium gasoline, can be sustainable and profitable. The circumstances are very clear. This is an inefficiently-run state enterprise and I am saying to this House that there is need to speed up the privatization of the petroleum retail industry, which can be handled in a very efficient and competitive manner by the private sector. We have reached a point where protection is not necessarily being afforded to the population by having a middleman such as National Petroleum. Perhaps there was a time when this was necessary. It is no longer necessary.

As I have indicated, the ex-refinery price of petroleum products can make it economically feasible for companies to operate without subsidy. That 4 per cent

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of gross earnings of oil-producing companies is in fact wasted on subsidy and could be used for other purposes, such as improvement in the road network, building a decent interchange at Grand Bazaar, or connecting Barataria to the Princess Margaret Highway. Let me say without creating any controversy. That was in the programme a long time ago. That is not something new. That was announced by an old PNM regime—having a road connecting the Princess Margaret Highway to the Beetham and one just on the north bank of Caroni, going east, to prevent the traffic jams we have there. It is nothing new.

The 4 per cent levy, which amounts to roughly 6,000 barrels per day of crude oil, if you look at a production of about 140,000 barrels per day, amounts to about 5,600 barrels a day. If we look at a transfer price of US \$25 per day, multiplied by 365 days, you will see that the country will get a sizable amount of money; but that money should not go to subsidizing NP because the country knows that NP does not pay Petrotrin. The Ministry of Finance has to intervene all the time and pump money into NP for it to honour its debt.

Only recently NP paid \$200 million to Petrotrin after five years of owing the company in the vicinity of \$500 million. The Government now has guaranteed Petrotrin to pay the remainder in the near future. Why all the money to subsidize the price of gasoline when on the free market we can enjoy prices which are equal to or cheaper than what exists at the pump today?

Let me just say: if your car is running on 92 octane leaded gasoline, it will run on 92 octane unleaded gasoline at \$2.70 a litre, so you need not buy the more expensive one. I am giving you some free advice, Mr. Speaker. There is no need for anybody to buy gasoline at \$3 because your car will work very well on octane 92. There is not a car in this country that requires octane 95.

At \$3 per litre, those of us who are now paying that price, they will see a reduction when octane 92 is put into the pump and we will now pay \$2.70 per litre. But, those who were paying \$2.45 a litre for high-octane leaded gasoline will now have to pay more. It is really a measure to help the better off in the society. I can understand why. *[Interruption]* You will have your chance to intervene. I am always willing to give way on a Monday morning.

Let us deal with the subject of the production levy. This is really intended to assist small oil-producing companies, which have come about as a result of Petrotrin's decision to lease certain acreages, which contain old unproductive wells. My friend, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, is an expert in these matters. He worked for a well-known lease operator joint venture company named

Venture Production and I had the honour of doing some work for him in my capacity as an environmentalist. He was very pleased with that work, at least they paid us for it. [*Interruption*] He had a choice. He paid for quality.

There is not a single company in Trinidad and Tobago that is making 2,500 barrels a day. Assuming that upper limit was designed so that one day somebody would achieve that, they would not have to change that every year, I concede. There are 13 operators who fall under this legislation, who are called lease operators and there are a number of other joint venture partnerships and what we call farm-outs, where the company has farmed out or licensed or caused a sub-licence to be issued to a company to carry out drilling and production operations.

In the year 2000, the total production of farm-outs and lease operators was 3,700 barrels per day. Today, it is 4,671, so there has been a marginal increase in production. On the average, out of the 13 small companies that operate, eight of them produce less than 200 barrels of oil per day. The other five are above the 200 barrels per day.

If we look at levy payable under this legislation at 200 barrels of oil per day, the liability of these companies with respect to the production levy is 8 barrels per day. If we multiply that by US \$25 per barrel at 365 barrels per day, the savings that will occur to a 200 barrels-per-day company is TT \$44,000 per year. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro will tell you what it cost per day to pick up a rig to continue exploitation.

So the legislation really does nothing to encourage the small oil companies to increase their production and expand their operations. This is a big joke. This will not in any way impact the expansion of the industry among the small operators. I cannot understand why the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries did not seek the advice of the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, who now holds a very senior position as a newcomer to most on that side. Clearly he must have superior ability in the eyes of the Prime Minister—and he failed to consult him. He would have told him, from his personal experience, that his boss in Venture has been articulating a number of proposals for a long time in order to make a small company as his sustainable and viable. He understands the difficulties. Every time we spoke in industry forum, he spoke about capturing stranded reserves, so much so that the word “stranded” has come to be associated with the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. Simply put, you will not recover that using conventional means and operations. You require low overheads, high technology, drilling of horizontal wells, 3-D seismic because you are looking for reserves that people historically have discarded.

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These new small companies are technology driven, generally speaking. They take an area that has been reduced to sub-marginal status and introduce new technology to try to improve production. The incentive you gave them as a government that has the advice of the stranded Member for Ortoire/Mayaro will not be accepted. It was clear, when the Member for Diego Martin Central presented the matter, that he himself seemed unaware of the details of such an important piece of legislation, so he performed a mere messenger's role. It is my intention this morning—I do not intend to speak for very long—to show how this measure will have little or no value, but that there are other measures that could be introduced to save that industry.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in a presentation to this House recently spent a long time dealing with the economics of oil production and how to qualify for developed country status, but neglected to deal with the practical realities of the oil industry. I think everybody is happy to know that negotiations are taking place to have the entire southern basin of Trinidad undergo a 3-D seismic investigation so that previous attempts to drill deep wells will not be the end of exploration in this country.

I am happy, although the Minister carefully avoided the issue of ExxonMobil's role in Trinmar, to hear that at least discussions are taking place; but that is a different matter. It is more scandalous than what FW Oil was perceived to be by the PNM. When the facts have come out, Mr. Speaker, you will see that the UNC government in its wisdom had decided that we should not have pursued this FW initiative any further, which is something I am prepared to deal with on another occasion.

The Ministry's representative on the board of Petrotrin resigned over the decision of the Prime Minister to stop Petrotrin in its track in rejecting the ExxonMobil initiative. As you would know, ExxonMobil has, under the production sharing agreement for a deep-water block on the east coast, certain obligations to fulfil as part of this contract.

The Prime Minister, in his anger at Piarco Airport—I know that Prime Ministers like to make statements at Piarco Airport, but this one was extraordinary. He threatened to fire the board of Petrotrin on his arrival at Piarco Airport. When he did arrive at Whitehall, three Petrotrin directors could not be accounted for until today. The basis for that is the opposition to having ExxonMobil come into Trinmar operations in order to “fulfil” an outstanding obligation with respect to the production-sharing agreement on the east coast. It

is reported that the liability with respect to the deep-water block on the east coast is about US \$40 million.

When I raised this matter in this House, the Prime Minister said that the financial obligations were met but the work obligations were incomplete. It is therefore, my view that this House is owed an explanation of what exactly are the obligations of ExxonMobil with respect to the deep-water block on the east coast, which they have not fulfilled, and how that obligation is transferred to work they are doing in Trinmar.

You see, Mr. Speaker, ExxonMobil is not simply going to Trinmar to do 3-D seismic as part of this outstanding obligation. They are going to do 3-D seismic and there is going to be a sharing of the reserves below the current horizons which are explored and which are now produced by Trinmar. That is a serious matter because Trinmar was in the process of acquiring 3-D seismic data. It would have been costly, but nevertheless in the oil business, one has to invest large sums of money to have the returns consistent with the oil industry.

When the Petrotrin executive were asked exactly what is going to be the role of ExxonMobil, up to today we have not had an explanation because it is suspected that that arrangement has become very clandestine. I intend to file a question at the appropriate time to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to give us the details of such a matter.

That is why I think Hellena Inniss-King from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was booted out of the board, when she strenuously objected to waving the obligations of ExxonMobil with respect to the deep-water block on the east coast and transferring some of that obligation to Trinmar using Petrotrin as a state-owned enterprise to deal with a matter that would cost ExxonMobil over US \$40 million dollars.

The Minister in a recent speech to the Parliament went about enunciating this grandiose plan for exploration in Trinidad and wishes to claim credit for the BHP find on the east coast as if there were no government during 1995 and 2001 when all these activities were taking place and under whose aegis this set of exploration activities were taking places. He neglected a most critical aspect of the oil industry and that is the sustenance of 5,000 permanent jobs.

The current Member for San Fernando West, who I understand may not be there very long, and the former Member for San Fernando West, who now occupies another position in this Parliament, know exactly what is taking place with respect to the service companies that operate in and out of San Fernando.

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The logging companies, the mud companies, the drilling and work-over companies, the service industry with respect to tubulars and so forth have ground to a standstill with little work being made available to them; and the Minister is talking about 3-D seismic across the southern basin.

Further work to be on the East Coast is all well and good, but it comes with a bill, which will have no impact on the viability of those small operators. A good example of how a small operator can contribute to the economy of San Fernando and to the oil industry is the work being done by a company called LOL, Lease Operators Limited. I can assure you it is not a financier of this party. Because of the resources of that company, they have been able to drill up to 10 wells with an initial production of 100 barrels per day on average. This is big oil even for Petrotrin.

**11.00 a.m.**

These wells are being drilled in areas that have been considered sub-marginal or stranded. After the wells have stopped flowing, they are put on pumps and they are now averaging approximately 60 barrels per day on pump. I assure you that level of production would be sustained for a long while.

We have been able—as a result, as a country, of these small operators—to reactivate 700 wells out of a possible 3,000 which were leased to these small operators. These 700 wells would have been left alone and would have been virtually abandoned. We have been able to reactivate those 700 wells without any help from the State. These operators are also being asked to pay onerous taxes in situations where they should be assisted. Let me give you an example. On the average they pay approximately 10 per cent of their gross revenue in royalties. Before any expenses are deducted you pay 10 per cent of whatever revenue you collect from the sale of your oil. On top of that, when oil price goes from US \$14.01 per barrel, a supplemental petroleum tax kicks in. For quite a while, they have been paying supplemental petroleum tax, even if they have been producing 75 barrels or 100 barrels per day. They are being made to pay 55 per cent taxes because they are considered to be an oil company. They have to pay petroleum profit tax of 55 per cent of the profits they have realized. These are people who are making less than 200 barrels per day.

There exists the potential for a viable oil industry on land. The PNM dreams about finding the elephant—a term used by the Prime Minister—on land. He is looking for this big field. While they are dreaming about it, they are allowing the industry on land to die.

When I started to work for Texaco—this was not in 1905, it was in 1974—the Prime Minister had vacated office then, having drilled a few dry holes in Barrackpore. He then went on to greener pastures in a no-vote campaign. He is a rather lucky politician. A lot of accidents of history have visited him, in 1986 as well. At that time Texaco was producing 50,000 barrels per day. Today, all of land operations in this country amounts to 19,000 barrels per day. Texaco was making 15,000; TRINTOC was making 12,000; Tesoro was making 30,000—35,000 per day on land. We are not taking about their one-third share of Trinmar or their east Galeota fields. All of Trinidad's land production is now 19,000 barrels per day. It appears to me that the lower the production, the higher the employment. There is a policy in your Government, Mr. Speaker, to single out.

**Mr. Speaker:** You need to rephrase that. You said "policy in your government, Mr. Speaker,"—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. B. Panday:** That is correct.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** When I was a young “fella”, the Queen used to say "my government", so I substitute you for the Queen. Male and female means the same thing these days.

There is tremendous potential out there. We will not return to the normal levels of production on land because it is a wasting asset and if you do not find reserves to replace what you have produced, there would be decline. It has been clearly demonstrated, by local business people, that we can create a viable oil industry with respect to these land production operations, but you need incentives.

If Mr. Brash could drill 10 wells in the last year and increase his production by 1,000 to 1,700 per day, others can do it too. But people in this country do not have that kind of capital to inject. His company, Well Services I think it was, has been drilling for a very long time and they have a number of rigs that were idle. They were able to do it, but Venture cannot do it. If one wants to drill replacement wells in Brighton Marine—the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro would tell you, most of the wells in Brighton Marine have mechanical damage, but there are reserves that we can go for in that area—we need to put a rig there. We cannot trust the integrity of the platform to put a rig on it; we would have to drill outside of the platform. That requires money and injection. While many of these lease operators have put in a lot of money, offshore operations are indeed very expensive. They cannot sustain that level of capital injection; having to pay 55 per cent petroleum profit tax. We should not tax these people any more than we tax any other business in this country, because they are really not to be compared

with the British Gas, BPs and BHPs; which must be taxed because of the nature of the business and the difficulty in replacing reserves or the removal. The Member agrees. Can I get the Prime Minister to stand and say he agrees to drop the tax of the lease operators from 55 per cent to 30 per cent?

**Mr. Manning:** The Member is in a very provocative mood today. I think he recalls that in the Budget we said the taxation regime right now is the subject of review and that a new regime comes in place with effect from January 01, 2004. Perhaps, what I did not make as clear to the Member is that the new regime that comes in place is designed to stimulate activity in the petroleum sector in Trinidad and Tobago. He can rest assured that the land operations would be adequately looked after. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** I am happy that I am able to stimulate him this morning. It looks as though he has come out from the weekend with some new ideas. Could you imagine in a most significant presentation to the House of Representatives, he omitted, as a Prime Minister, to talk about the main driver in the economy and how he can stimulate that sector. I am glad that I am able to get him—but I would like to see what the proposals are at the appropriate time. I am willing to wait. I never heard a word from his Minister who spent 75 minutes praising the vision of his namesake, a former Prime Minister and never referred once to the current Prime Minister. He recognizes, like the rest of us, that the current Prime Minister has no vision. I feel sorry for these once-upon-a-time aspirants for political office in the ruling party. CEPEP has destroyed them. That is their internal matter.

There is no room for affirmative action in the development of the oil sector. There is no room for quotas, for people of particular ethnicities. [*Interruption*] The Member cannot agree with that. Prof. Cudjoe is actually enunciating what the Member has enunciated in the back rooms. I saw the Prime Minister in a televised mumbo-jumbo press conference with Rafeeq Shah smiling from ear to ear, as though he was so honoured to interview the Prime Minister in his office at Whitehall. I saw the end of the programme. I saw a production of the Prime Minister's Office. I thought it was a TTT interview. The Prime Minister was pronouncing on his own propaganda. Do you know what he was saying? He was saying: "Equity does not equal equality. Equality does not equal equity. Everybody knows that, so that when we do not provide you with anything in Couva is because you have Point Lisas. The Unemployment Relief Programme is for criminals." Could you imagine that?

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** I do not like to get into that type of discussion, but it is very clear; there is a hidden agenda on the part of the Prime Minister and his government. Whether it comes to the appointment of Industrial Court judges, public works programmes, the admission to COSTAATT and the University of Trinidad and Tobago or the resuscitation of a dying oil industry on land, there is always that agenda of having certain policies to accommodate groups to destroy the whole basis of merit and to secure political entry into a number of areas.

Once the Government starts interfering with who goes into business and who does not, and who it is going to help and who it is not going to help, we will become like Jamaica, where the Chief Justice says: "This has become a totally ungovernable country." When the Chief Justice of a country who has the ultimate responsibility to adjudicate on matters of the law, could throw his hands up and say so, it tells you what has happened to that country. Increasingly, we are faced in this country with a government with its hidden agenda trying to implement that agenda and going public and talking such undiluted piffle such as URP is for criminals.

If the Government wants to assist people, whether it is in the oil industry or public works programme, it should not make such an outrageous remark as the leader of a country. That can connote all kinds of meaning to people in this country, the Caribbean and the wider world, especially having regard to what is currently taking place in Trinidad and Tobago today.

Let me return to the subject matter. Petrotrin laid off 14 contractors rigs some time recently. From a company standpoint, that was an imminently reasonable thing to do. If we have to maintain the current level of the labour force in Petrotrin, 4,300 plus 1,000 temporaries—I do not want to use this debate to tell you how the Prime Minister is directing the hiring policy of Petrotrin. I will deal with that on another occasion.

The kind of activities which are taking place—it looks as though we are now moving from "Petrosingh" to "Petromanning." That was a totally irresponsible statement. I do not know of one person in that company, under the UNC

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administration who did not have more than 25 years' service, who was elevated to any senior position; including myself. Yet a Prime Minister unashamedly walks around and talks about "Petrosingh." That was a racist statement for which he has not apologized up to today. They are now, without interviews and advertisements, bringing their friends into the company and installing them in high office. *[Interruption]* I will tell you during the break. I would file a question; I have no problem with that.

I do not get any response from this side nor from the PNM's daily called the *Newsday*. I do not need the *Newsday* to report anything I say. It does not really matter to me. I do not mind that if they decide to blank my contribution. I speak from my soul. Whoever wishes to hear what I have to say can hear what I have to say. The fact of the matter is that they are interfering in every aspect, particularly when the State is in charge. Instead of bringing evidence to show that there was mal-administration, they went on a campaign of ethnic cleansing at Petrotrin.

I have a document that lists all the Indians who held high positions in Petrotrin and where they must go. One of these days I will show you how they implemented it systemically; a campaign of racial discrimination against people in Petrotrin. I have the document which was prepared by one of their hatchet men called Anthony Chantac. I can show you when that document was circulated, how it was effected and all the people who were to be moved under this administration; people who did not come from outside. I am talking about people who had over 25 years' service. They continue to interfere.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at a company that now produces 19,000 barrels of oil per day. Their liability under this production level will move from \$28 million per year to \$44 million per year. This is a company that cannot pick up rigs because even though oil prices are very buoyant at this time, to explore—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Member could enlighten the Parliament. How much did Petrotrin pay in taxes of any kind in fiscal year 2002 and what are the profits that Petrotrin would likely declare for fiscal year 2002?

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** It is published information, after tax profit for 2000 was \$250 million. I do not know what the last figure is. I am glad that the Member raised that. We need to keep the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery going. Over the next two years we need \$3 billion in capital injection. We need another \$5 billion by 2007, in order to upgrade the refinery so we can deal with the bottom of the barrel. The Member is talking about \$400 million profit after tax. Instead of

making that \$44 million a year available to the company to carry out its exploration and production activities, they prop up the National Petroleum Marketing Company (NP). NP is absolutely not needed in this country at this time.

**Mr. Imbert:** We should close it down?

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** I agree with the Minister of Health. The Government is taxing people who need the money in order to run the industries which are supporting the political objectives of the party in power.

**Mr. Manning:** Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan?

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** That was when we had a chairman who placed the country's interest before political parties. [*Desk thumping*] New capital injection is needed. We do not know what is doing to happen to oil prices in a few months time. It is quite possible that we can return to the days of \$18— \$20 per barrel. It is as a result of good prices today, we must be in a position to finance expansion. The Prime Minister was asked: in his private press conference where he selected a few, Ria Taitt, Rafique Shah and two others who were given the questions— "Why are you supporting Mr. Franklin Khan?" He said: "Well we need an Indian at the helm because Rowley does not have a good enough face and image."

**Dr. Rowley:** Leave me out of your race talk.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** The Member for Diego Martin West admits that he does not want to be a part of this race business but the Prime Minister has involved him.

**Mr. Manning:** I rise merely to place on the record that nothing he has just said is correct. The Member knows that but I did not want it to remain unattended on the parliamentary record.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** I really did not hear what he said, but I will continue. He can cause the records to be adjusted how many times.

We cannot continue to tax companies which, at this time, cannot afford— Because they enjoy higher prices, this does not mean that they could afford to inject large amounts of capital into the industry. The Prime Minister, at his arranged press conference; a production of the Prime Minister's Office, said he made an important policy announcement that Petrotrin is now seeking a joint venture partner for the refinery. That was made in the context of raising gas price. He said that Petrotrin cannot be seen as subsidizing gasoline prices, so they have to raise gasoline prices because of the ex-refinery price at the gate based on

the free market, because Petrotrin is now going into a joint venture partnership with respect to the refinery. The Prime Minister said so.

**Mr. Manning:** I did not say that, that is the point.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** The Prime Minister should go and revisit—perhaps that was just a thought that he put out. He said that Petrotrin is now engaged in finding a joint venture partner for the refinery.

**Mr. Manning:** Yes, I said that.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** He makes that in a televised prearranged press conference, but not to the House of Representatives. There was no need for him to go on the television. He had no opposition. He did not have to campaign. He is accustomed with the bantering and infighting. Every time he turns to his right he sees the man who gave him sleepless nights, who challenged him for the leadership. He admitted that was the most difficult period in his political life.

**Mr. Imbert:** He is now the Prime Minister.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** Not with your support. If he depended on the support of the Member for Diego Martin East, he would not even be in the House of Representatives.

The company is looking for a private partner company because it requires \$5 billion over the next five years to keep that refinery going. Do you know what is the position of his expert advisor Dr. Julian? It is either he builds a new refinery, shut down the Pointe-a-Pierre Refinery, or upgrades it at an enormous cost. To upgrade the refinery, in order to meet the FTAA requirements by 2007, will cost this country \$3 billion. That does not improve the processes at all. Because of the metallurgical condition of many of the plants in that refinery to keep the current level of technology, you require, according to Purvin and Gertz, \$3 billion. To upgrade it, another \$3 or \$4 billion is required. They know if they continue to operate the oil industry in the manner they are operating, they will not have the capacity to borrow money and to pay the loans. We are still paying the Inter-American Development Bank for the refinery upgrade of US \$400 billion that was taken a few years ago.

When the Prime Minister talks about the profit the company is making they have a lot of debts still to pay. [*Interruption*] Of course they are paying it. The problem is that after you pay your debts you do not have any new capital to inject. The Prime Minister comes with this Mickey Mouse proposal giving the impression to the small operators that they do not have to pay any production levy if their production is below 3,500 barrels. This is not going to help anybody.

**11.30 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, what is needed now is the removal of supplemental petroleum taxes on all lease operators. *[Interruption]* I do not need you or Malcolm. I have served in the oil industry for 29 years. I am ready to retire and take up politics as a full-time career. *[Laughter]* *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, order.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** Mr. Speaker, let me return to the discussion. We need to remove supplemental petroleum taxes. In the proposed taxation regime, I want to ask the Prime Minister to talk with all the stakeholders. The Prime Minister must not behave as though this is his private property. With respect to the new tax regime for the industry, all stakeholders should be involved in this discussion. We are totally in support of consulting everyone with respect to constitutional reform. So much so that I heard the Prime Minister made a statement that constitutional reform is now absolutely necessary. So, at least, the Member has learnt some lessons. The Government cannot run this country without us—just remember that.

There is need to vary the royalty for those marginal fields. You cannot charge a man who is producing 200 barrels a day the same percentage of royalty as someone who is coming in with a field of 80,000 barrels of oil per day. In these marginal fields small operators must be designated a deserving special consideration. Do you know what they did in Texas? They have increased the oil prices for the purpose of ensuring that tax payable to small operators would be subsidized to keep their five barrels a day wells going. In fact, stripper production in the United States forms the bulk of oil production in that country. They no longer fined big fields unless, of course, they go to Alaska. There must be special consideration for these marginal fields.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that we could take the oil production among these small operators to 10,000 barrels per day in the next two years, if the right amount of assistance is given to them in the form of fiscal incentives.

**Hon. Member:** What is your interest there?

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** I have no interest to declare. The Member probably has interest to declare, and he may also have custom duties to declare. So, we need to designate them as marginal fields, and have a special regime to deal with them. We need to remove the 55 per cent corporation tax, and treat them as any other company in Trinidad and Tobago. We do not only need to remove this

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production levy liability, but we need to give them certain special write-offs with respect to drilling wells.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you an example. Before this Government came into office on the last occasion that is after they had served 30-odd years in power—they like to give the impression that the Government started when the current Prime Minister became Prime Minister—at Petrotrin we approved five new blocks to be leased to lease operators, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who is not here today, has been frustrating the granting of these sub-licences so that we could have five new blocks operated by these lease operators.

The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro knows that in the Oropouche Swamp that block has been awarded to API Construction Company, and that was done in a fair manner. The Minister is only prepared to grant API Construction Company a two-year lease, because the lease for that block expires in two years' time. The Minister says that he cannot give them more than two years, and there is no guarantee that the Government is going to extend it beyond that two-year period. Which businessman, in his right sense, is going to put millions of dollars—at least, \$15 million to start with—to reactivate a field and he is being told that he could only be guaranteed a lease for two years?

Mr. Speaker, do you now what the UNC did in Moruga west? We had a lease which had been expired for four years. Not only did we give the lease for the fifth year, but we also gave them another lease for five years, so they could have gone in there and conducted their work. This Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries are now getting involved in things that they ought not to be involved in. Here is a state-owned company saying that they have looked at all the issues, and they have decided that they are going to give out five new blocks, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is sitting on the matter, two years now, and the blocks remain unproductive. Petrotrin had advertised in the newspaper a block for tender and said, please bid, but this was subject to the Minister's approval. When the Minister saw this advertisement in the newspaper, heads began to roll at Pointe-a-Pierre. The Minister said he never gave Petrotrin permission to go out and tender for this block, as if the company was being run by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and not by the Board of Petrotrin.

We need to get more leases out. We need, at least, 10 new leases to go out, so that the ambitious and hard-working entrepreneurs who wish to invest money and expand the industry could take back all those rigs, and put some life into the economy so that people in south Trinidad could invest their money, and we could see an improvement in production, as a result of economic activity. But, as usual,

the Minister was probably instructed. We also need to be careful that our policy of Hugo's affirmative action is not breached; as a result, they are holding everything to their chest to decide who should get what and who should not get.

This is not a gift that the Government is giving to businessmen. This is an offer by businessmen to once again create a viable land production industry. Petrotrin is unable to keep its exploration and production labour force at the current level if the production continues to decline. We are surviving because of high oil prices. If there is a decline in oil prices to US \$20 per barrel in the near future all hell will break loose and you will see their good friend Mr. McLeod walking up and down the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery and the Santa Flora refinery protesting any move to lay off people. I do not think that the Government should come with this kind of piecemeal approach. They have no energy policy. It is not a policy of substance nor is it written with literary excellence.

The Government knows that there must be a natural gas law in this country. The Prime Minister knows that more than anyone else. The Prime Minister knows that he ought to leave a legacy of having gas piped to every home in this country, before all the gas is exported to Spain, New England and to the United States of America. We should not have a home without natural gas piped to that home, and yet because of the absence of a policy, the Government cannot take any initiatives in order for citizens to benefit from that.

The UNC in its wisdom caused to be erected one of the most modern electricity generating plants called the InnCogen Plant, and all you hear from them is what they are accustomed saying, without any evidence whatsoever, they are prepared to point fingers in people's face. If the Government is going to have an aluminum smelter plant constructed in this country, there is need for a reliability rate of 99.9 per cent. InnCogen will contribute significantly to that requirement. *[Interruption]* One of these days we should talk about the arrangement with Southern Electric and how PowerGen was created in the country. We will give them that information one of these days.

Mr. Speaker, when you supply gas to homes in this country—and in particular to all these homes that the Government is building in San Fernando on the base of the hill, these mass-production homes to bring in their supporters using the policy of affirmative action—every one of those apartments should be supplied with natural gas. Do you know why? They have negotiated with Amoco 100 million cubic feet a day, a special tranche, in lieu of the royalty arrangements or the lack of proper royalty arrangements. Could you imagine the savings in electricity generation, and the ability of this country to improve its electricity-generating

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stock, so that we could prepare for more industrial expansion? Only a visionary government could have done that. Had it not been for InnCogen, today we would have been experiencing far more blackouts than we are experiencing presently. But it is nonsense to pipe gas to homes, according to them, and this is because of a lack of foresight and vision.

I wonder whether Vision 2020 talks about piping gas to Diego Martin—people who own the national patrimony as much as those anywhere else in the country. They are not interested in an energy policy that will benefit the people, but they are interested in making it appear that they represent a particular group in this country so that they will constantly vote for them, depending on some handouts—whether it is in the form of the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) or the Community-based Environmental Enhancement and Protection Programme (CEPEP)—without any sustainability. I want to urge the Government that the earlier we have a proper energy policy for debate in this country to ensure that the laws are modified and that our national patrimony is not abused, the earlier we do that, is the earlier we will ensure that we are in control of our energy resources.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Adesh Nanan** (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, this PNM government should not be allowed to levy one farthing of tax on one person in this country unless we have accountability for taxes. We have seen over \$200 million from the Green Fund disappeared, and we did not get a report on the matter. The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment said nothing about that \$200 million allocation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with a matter with respect to the Member for Diego Martin West. This weekend the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West was very quiet, but like a mapipire, the Member was waiting to strike.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is a macajuel.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Not a macajuel my friend, get your zoology correct. Mr. Speaker, we know that ambition does not go away, it surfaces at the right time, and so I want to warn the Member for San Fernando East, that while he is sailing on calm waters to be careful.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to deal with the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West. It was reported that the Member spent a lot of time on the Chaguaramas Golf Course, and he spent a lot of time cursing the Prime Minister,

and Member of Parliament for San Fernando East. *[Interruption]* That is not my business whether the Member cursed the Prime Minister or not, but what is my business and the business of the Opposition is to deal with the issue of the Chaguaramas peninsula.

We are dealing with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order which is a revenue raising measure, and the money from this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order would go into the Consolidated Fund, and it will be funding everything that I am going to talk about. *[Interruption]* With respect to the Chaguaramas peninsula, the PNM has missed the boat. The Chaguaramas peninsula is one of the anchors of the tourism pillar in Trinidad.

While the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West was playing Golf on the Chaguaramas Golf Course, one would have thought that the Member would have seen the importance of the Chaguaramas peninsula. This weekend, when the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East was looking through the windows at the Convention Centre, the Member should have recognized that valuable piece of real estate in the public domain. The Chaguaramas peninsula is one of the assets of this country. It is an anchor for the tourism pillar, and it is important to trace the history in that particular peninsula to show the kind of revenue that can be generated from that peninsula.

**Mr. Speaker:** Are you dealing with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am dealing with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

**Mr. Speaker:** But you must relate it to the orders that we are debating and the Motion before you.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order that is before us today talks about revenue. Part of the Chacachacare plan was to have casinos, and we are dealing with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order with respect to gambling. *[Desk thumping]* With respect to the tourism plan for the Chaguaramas peninsula and the casinos that could be on the Chacachacare Island, I want to deal with an issue that is very dear to my heart.

Mr. Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West is in that particular area, and it is an active piece of real estate that can produce millions of dollars. In fact, the projection was US \$98 million, a revenue generating measure. And when the Government comes here today to talk about increasing taxes for

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unleaded gasoline, I want to remind the Prime Minister and the Member for San Fernando East, that when the Government is raising taxes there is an economic decline, and the Government is looking for money in other areas.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard from the Member of Parliament for Couva South about the price of unleaded gasoline. It is cheaper to produce unleaded gasoline.

**Mr. Manning:** It is not. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, it is cheaper. I am dealing with the matter before the House which is the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

**Mr. Manning:** Will the Member give way?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, I am not giving way because we are dealing with an important real estate asset. Ten thousand years ago, there was a titanic undersea battle, and a mountainous chunk of land separated us from the South American continent. [*Interruption*] With this mountainous chunk of land that we have now, the Island of Trinidad was born. The creatures that occupied this piece of land were separated from the South American mainland by seven miles of water.

Mr. Speaker, the legacy of the parting of this land gave Trinidad an opportunity to have a diverse ecology different from anywhere else in the Caribbean. That is the point I want to drive across here this morning. The diverse ecology in the Chaguaramas peninsula is an asset that the PNM Government has missed.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you must relate your argument in terms of the Motion that is before the House. So, if you are talking about gambling, certainly I can hear you. If you are talking about ecology, you have to relate it somehow to the Motion.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, I am coming to that just now. I just wanted to get the history out of the way. The reason I am taking a little while—I just want you to bear with me—I am sailing close to the wind. The diverse ecology in that particular area is an asset. When I speak of the tourism potential of that particular peninsula, the PNM has missed the boat. The tourism plan for this area includes casinos on the Chacachacare Island, and we are dealing with that matter here.

We have seen the marine industry flourish, and it has not been harnessed. There is a plan for the area. In 1972 the Chaguaramas Development Authority

was born, and in 1974 the Chaguaramas Development Plan was passed in Parliament. The Chacachacare Island was part of the projection for casinos.

Mr. Speaker, I want to get back to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, because we have what we called conspicuous consumption, and the Member for La Brea will know what I am speaking of. What we are seeing here in terms of raising taxes on these tables, and what I want to put to the Government this morning, is that if the Government really wants to tax these casinos it should tax the winnings, because what we are having in this country is money laundering in casinos. *[Interruption]* A lot of people are using these casinos as a front, and what we are saying is that the winnings should be taxed as it is being done in the United States of America. What we are seeing here in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order—which is a revenue raising measure—is that excise duties are also a revenue raising measure. In that particular Chaguaramas peninsula which is five and a half miles from east to west, and three and a half miles from north to south, we have the possibility of a potential tourist attraction.

Mr. Speaker, you will know that on cruise ships there are casinos, and part of the plan for the Chaguaramas Development Authority is for a cruise ship port. The cruise ship terminal that was proposed for the Chaguaramas peninsula will be a fillip for the tourism industry and, of course, as I said before, cruise ships have casinos.

What we are also seeing in terms of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is a revenue raising measure with respect to gambling, and the raising of the price of gas. There are other areas that the Government could have used to find revenue without putting the burden on consumers. Why must the Government raise the tax on unleaded gasoline when the economy is flourishing? Why is the Government putting a burden on the poor man? I am talking here about the increase in the price of gas. This has a ripple effect throughout the society. What we are seeing today is that the taxi-drivers are raising their fares, and the commuter has to pay a considerable amount of money in terms of this increase. So while the Government is giving on one hand it is taking away on the other hand. This is what we call a sleight of hands. The Government could have found another mechanism. The poor man is being burdened by this increase in the price of gas.

With respect to this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I have put on my suit to come to this Parliament, but I want to remind the Member for Diego Martin Central that the Order was signed on October 06, 2003, and 21 days after,

which is today, they have summoned us to the Parliament. Why was the Member for Diego Martin Central not aware of this matter? The Minister of Finance has once again blundered with respect to timing. This is not something new.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue with respect to the hardship that this PNM Government is putting on poor persons. The Government is saying that it is strengthening the social sector. The poor domestic consumers have to pay more money now in terms of travelling to get to work. As I said before, this is having a ripple effect on the society, and this is a time when gas prices are high and oil prices are high. The Government is putting that burden on the population, and the Government says that it is a government for all.

In terms of raising revenues, we are seeing wastage by the PNM Government. On one hand they are trying to raise revenues through this tax measure, and we are seeing squandermania and wastage taking place in all sectors. When I read the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), the Member for Diego Martin West made sure that the Member for Diego Martin East in the PSIP reported over \$30 million unspent. Over \$30 million the Minister of Health gave back to the Treasury, and we are here to talk about revenue raising measures. If all that money in the last financial year was not wasted, the Government would not have to come here for a revenue-raising measure like that.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member is preparing a budget he must be aware of these things. The Government is saying that the revenue that it is going to get from this same increase in gas prices—which is over \$249 million—will be funding part of this reforestation programme.

**Mr. Imbert:** And you are against that.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** I am not against that, but let me remind the Member for Diego Martin West that when there is a fire on the Northern Range—again revenue is going back into the Consolidation Fund—there is only \$800,000 to fight forest fires.

What are you doing? Every year it is the same thing, and we are seeing perennial problems during re-afforestation, where the seedlings are planted and fire is destroying everything. You have to take cognizance of the fact that in the Northern Range there are abandoned private estates, and that is the problem with respect to fires in the Northern Range. They start there and they spread to the re-afforestation project. Again, we have wastage of money.

**12.00 noon**

We are saying that the Government is supposed to come here with a proper fire protection programme before they come with a re-forestation programme of that magnitude. I am dealing with squandermania because the revenue-raising measure here, of the \$249 million, is going to fund part of the CEPEP programme, and we saw the disaster that that CEPEP Programme has caused this country. *[Interruption]* Do not go there?

**Mr. Speaker:** I have allowed you some latitude, but I think you are, in fact, overdoing it. Please, let your contribution concentrate around the Motion before us. There are two Motions before us and I would be very obliged if you would concentrate and make your contribution around the Motions before us.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about revenue-raising measures here. **Mr. Speaker:** Please deal with the Motions before you.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Okay, Mr. Speaker. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order before us here today, talks about raising taxes on gambling tables. I dealt with the issue with respect to the casinos, and the possibility of cruise ships coming in with casinos, casino gambling can take place in that particular area, and that is the importance of having a cruise ship terminal in the Chaguaramas peninsula. Also, part of the development plan is to have four and five star hotels.

The Chaguaramas Hotel and Convention Centre—where the Member for San Fernando East was this weekend—has a capacity for 2,000 persons. In fact, it is one of the largest in the Eastern Caribbean, but it has a potential for upgrade, and the upgrade could be a casino, depending on the situation with this particular policy of the Government. We are seeing the importance of the tourism potential in that area.

I want to get back to the increase in gas prices. The Member of Parliament for Couva South spoke about the various gas finds and these particular blocks on the east coast. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries came in this honourable House and beat his chest and talked about how the PNM Government is responsible for the big find on the east coast. Mr. Speaker, it is the UNC administration that has set the platform for these explorations. I wanted to put that on the record. This gas find and more discoveries of gas and oil would boost the economy, resulting in an increase in foreign exchange coming into the country and there would also be economic growth taking place.

If you look at the consumer price index you will see a variation—and I think right now it is increasing. So how come on the one hand you say that you are

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helping the social sector when the consumer price index keeps spiralling upwards? Mr. Speaker, the country must be aware of the PNM's poor performance. We cannot tolerate a Government that runs on public relations. We are dealing with global issues, and we have to deal with facts and figures. Mr. Speaker, there is a Green Fund that was supposed to have about \$200 million on the eve of the budget and it cannot be found. The Green Fund was part of the environmental upliftment. The Green Fund would bring revenue. All these Provisional Collection of Taxes Order are revenue-raising measures.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have to relate it to the Order in front of you.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** [*Interruption*] It is not a crisis. Mr. Speaker, I will not be distracted because I came here to do a duty. I represent persons in my constituency and I will not be distracted. With respect to this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, there are revenue-raising measures and the variation of taxes, so revenue is generated into the Consolidated Fund. All the money that is going into the Consolidated Fund has to be used to fund salaries and the development programmes for all the various ministries. That is the link with respect to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. We are varying taxes and we are collecting revenue to go into the Consolidated Fund and that would have to come back and fund all those development programmes for the year. That is the major link. So whether it is a revenue-raising measure coming from a different source; whether the oil prices are going up; whether you are getting more buyers of oil or gas, all these are revenue-raising measures.

The tourism plan is also a revenue-raising measure and when we come here today and we see that the Government has failed in the tourism sector, and possibly to diversify the economy and, as a result, has not been able to generate any kind of revenue, that is why we have to resort to these punitive measures on the population. That is what we are dealing with. All these programmes that require funding from the Consolidated Fund must be revenue-raising measures.

I also want to deal with wastage in the Ministry of Education. The relevance there, as I said before, is that if you did not have that kind of wastage, there would not have been this kind of severe taxing on the population. Why is the Government building block in SEMP schools? What is wrong? That is a total waste of taxpayers' money. The plan was to have schools of a certain size for the population, and we are seeing an extension and an increase in the cost and a waste of taxpayers' money. Why is that taking place? Why is the Government now not

utilizing the amount of money that it had in other loans? Again, we are seeing—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you are really going way out! You have to concentrate your arguments in terms of the Order in front of you. We are dealing with taxes on gambling tables, the Petroleum Levy and Subsidy Act; there is a clause 4 of the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, UNIPET, and clause 5 talks about VAT. You are going way out, and if you continue I would have to ask you to take your seat.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are dealing with an increase in taxes on the gambling tables. We are also dealing with an increase in the prices of unleaded gasoline and gasoline pricing. We are here today to tell this Government that it has no moral authority to raise taxes. We are saying so because of the squandermania that we have witnessed over the last two years by the PNM administration. If there was not that kind of squandermania but proper management in those ministries, we would not have to come today with these punitive measures—this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order—for the raising of the price of gas and the raising of taxes on gambling tables.

What is also important here is that the poor man is being targeted at every level with respect to that administration. We have also seen that it has failed to generate revenue in other sectors, and that is the importance here. The importance of generating revenues in other sectors would have nullified this kind of increase on the taxes imposed on the population. We have seen opportunities to generate revenue totally wasted and discarded. And we are seeing a Government generating revenue by taxing the population and then giving handouts to various sectors. We are saying that this should not take place. This Government should not be taxing the population. If they do their proper management, there is the ability to manage the economy without this kind of tax on the population.

We are also saying that the Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East must be aware that when he makes off-the-cuff remarks it has a potentially dangerous effect. We have seen that with the statement about the Unit Trust Corporation (UTC) and the First Citizens Bank (FCB) merger, and the relevance of that statement is that there could be a flight of capital, and then there would be a ripple effect in the society, where economic growth can be threatened. And if economic growth is threatened there could be a downturn in the economy, and you can also have all the possible programmes that the Government has put forward, shelved, and there would be a situation where the handouts and all the

programmes that they have promised to put in place, collapse. We are saying that we want proper management so that they would not have to tax the population and put that kind of burden throughout the society. It is being felt throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The man in the street is complaining about this particular measure here, which is the tax on gas.

Even persons in the casino are complaining because by having this kind of increase on the tax table they are threatening people's livelihood. I heard the Member for San Fernando East say, that in this particular time people can afford to be laid off, because they can find jobs elsewhere. Where? When we are seeing that kind of racism taking place, and the kind of selection criteria being used by the PNM administration—How can the ordinary Indo-Trinidadian be able to access employment if that kind of policy that is being put forward by the PNM administration goes forth? Mr. Speaker, as I said before, how can the same casino workers—who are being displaced by this measure here—compete, when the PNM administration has a policy that is against Indo-Trinidadians? The Member for San Fernando East talks about equality. *[Interruption]* It is your statement, Member for San Fernando East. So that particular policy has a negative effect, and we have seen it in a written documentation.

As I wind up, I want to let the PNM administration be aware—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Ramnath:** They are trying to frustrate you, but continue until 12.30 p.m.

**Mr. Hinds:** You are getting the point, go ahead.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, we are seeing the suffering caused by the PNM administration and their policies. They may come to this Parliament, or they may go in a press conference and try to convince the population that what we, the Opposition, are saying is not true. But for the last six years—when they were in Opposition—they continued to use the word “corruption” without being stopped in this Parliament. I read every single *Hansard* contribution on the Internet and the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin West are the culprits. They would stand on that side and shout obscenities on this side. How could you tell the then Prime Minister to shut up? *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** Who did that?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** The Member for Diego Martin West. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** But I was called a “rat” from a Member on the other side.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please!

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, we have seen that in the *Hansard* record. The Member for Diego Martin East, in his 2001 contribution in this *Hansard* debate, used the same approach when he was pulled up for that particular situation of irrelevance. The Member for Diego Martin East came with that particular slant, with the Consolidated Fund, the Treasury and the revenue raising measure and he was allowed to go through. So there is a precedent. I just wanted to make that point.

Mr. Speaker, getting back to the particular issue with respect to casino workers and how they are being displaced. This tax measure is also displacing a number of persons in terms of employment in this country, and I do not think the Member for Diego Martin East or the Member for Diego Martin West, in terms of planning and development, really paid attention to this particular measure. Now, this measure of unleaded gasoline is a UNC plan; it is not the PNM administration. If you read the *Hansard* record you would see the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in the UNC administration, was putting forward this removal of unleaded gasoline, but the UNC never had the plan of increasing the gas price. Because we recognize that when you look at the ripple effect and what is happening now, you are seeing that persons who use travel—and a large percentage of the population travel within communities—are a number of domestic workers who are being displaced, and the Member for San Fernando East is saying that now is the time where you can access another form of employment. Why does he not say that to the CEPEP workers? With respect to another form of employment, they are saying that they are creating businessmen and a business atmosphere. How could you condone painting stones in an atmosphere and he is talking about businessmen?

They are creating a society of low-level skilled people. A society is supposed to be built on various skills. When you want to introduce affirmative action at the university what signal are you sending? Again, we are seeing that this particular measure is creating unemployment in various sectors. Many people are already being laid off, because they work for a small—and thank God for the UNC with respect to the minimum wage. If the UNC did not raise the minimum wage many people would have been suffering now. Many people are being displaced, and they cannot find another form of employment. What do we have in this country? We are second in kidnapping in the world; crime is out of control. The Minister of Trade and Industry is not even aware of how he is going to access FTAA and NAFTA, so how are we going to proceed? We are seeing a country that is being marginalized by the rest of the world. I do not know if they are aware that

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tourism is such a buoyant industry. It vacillates to and fro. The people who normally go to destinations can easily move away. When there is a crime situation out of control and the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East is saying that when you compare our crime situation to New York, it is favourable—people do not look at that!

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, when he spoke in the Senate, said that he read from a letter that the P and O cruise ships are coming back to this country. I want him to lay that in Parliament, because I do not believe that. I have to see that letter. We are saying that the crime situation has a ripple effect. Mr. Speaker, if you read the newspapers on the Internet everyday you will get an image of Trinidad and Tobago where you would never want to come to this country. All these measures that they have tried—they have sent the Ministers to all these different countries—failed. We are getting back to the revenue raising measure and this increase in oil prices and the tax on the gambling tables. What I am saying is that the gas price in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is creating rampant unemployment.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have made that point several times, could you move on?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, we have seen the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West ravaged this country in terms of the Caroni (1975) Limited workers. So the number of unemployed will be increasing by this tax measure. What about the consumer prices at the supermarket? The prices in the supermarket will increase; because once gas prices go up there is a ripple effect and all those commodities will be going up. Eventually, the consumer price index will be going up again and the people will be suffering. What are you doing? The consumer price index would be going up, food prices would be going up and as a result people would suffer.

So you are seeing, again, where prices are going up and people would have less money to invest in this country and to have in their pockets, people would be suffering. So the Government is putting a harsh measure on the population at this time, and we are saying that they should not be taxing the population because they have no accountability. They have not accounted for the \$200 million of taxpayers' money that they collected for the Green Fund, and they are talking about legislation and they cannot find the money. So they cannot come to this honourable House today and expect us to support this measure.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Dr. Fuad Khan** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Mr. Speaker, does anybody on that side want to speak?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have my attention.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I am just being polite. [*Interruption*] I was not speaking to you. [*Interruption*] I will sit if the Member for Tobago East wants to get up.

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker is in the House!

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you stood up, I recognize you, so address the Speaker.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always give way to my good friend from Tobago East, but I will abide by your ruling. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to enter this debate for a very brief contribution. With respect to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order 2003, I remember the hon. Prime Minister, when he was Leader of the Opposition, made a contribution in this Parliament, indicating that if he ever reached on the Government side he would decide on gambling—I cannot remember his exact words, but he did indicate that he was going to do something about the gambling that was running rampant in this country.

The increase in taxes on the gambling tables—and we go through the baccarat tables et cetera—was quite markedly, but I fault the hon. Prime Minister for increasing the taxes on the gambling industry. I hope he took into consideration the jobs that might be lost, et cetera. Maybe, that is why he increased the CEPEP allocation to \$225 million from the \$83 million that it was previously. So we may have a little more CEPEP contractors. I took the liberty of asking around and the members of the gambling industry have said that there has been a mushrooming of gambling houses in this country under the guise of private members clubs, where people go for entertainment and, at the same time, lose their money in certain volumes.

However, I think now that there is dire need for the establishment of a gaming commission in this country to determine whether the consumer is being ripped off; whether the devices that are being used in the private members clubs—for want of a better word—I see casinos now, which are supposed to be legal—are being honest in their activities of the devices. I took the liberty of looking up the

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Internet on the California Gambling Control Act. Interestingly, this is the legislation. Article I, section 19801 says:

“(b) Gambling can become addictive and is not an activity to be promoted or legitimized as entertainment for children and families.

(c) (1) Unregulated gambling enterprises are inimical to the public health, safety, welfare and good order...

(2) Gambling establishments were first regulated by the State of California pursuant to legislation which was enacted in 1984.”

**12.30 p.m.**

It further goes on:

“(e) It is not the purpose of this chapter to expand opportunities for gambling, or to create any right to operate a gambling enterprise in this state or to have a financial interest in any gambling enterprise. Rather, it is the purpose of this chapter to regulate businesses that offer otherwise lawful forms of gambling games.

(f) Public trust that permissible gambling will not endanger public health, safety, or welfare requires that comprehensive measures be enacted to ensure that such gambling is free from criminal and corruptive elements, that it is conducted honestly and competitively, and that it is conducted in suitable locations.

(g) Public trust and confidence can only be maintained by strict and comprehensive regulation of all persons, locations, practices, associations, and activities related to the operation of lawful gambling establishments and the manufacture or distribution of permissible gambling equipment.

(i) To ensure that gambling is conducted honestly, competitively, and free of criminal and corruptive elements, all licensed gambling establishments in this state...”

Which is California:

“must remain open to the general public and the access of the general public to licensed gambling activities...”

It goes on to this one, Mr. Speaker, that is further down:

“(m) Records and reports of cash and credit transactions involving gambling establishments may have a high degree of usefulness in criminal and

regulatory investigations and, therefore, licensed gambling operators may be required to keep records and make reports concerning significant cash and credit transactions.”

This is in money laundering, et cetera. However, the part that is most interesting, Mr. Speaker, is the 19801.2 part of it.

“The Legislature further finds and declares as follows:

Appropriate regulation of banking and percentage games or of gambling devices consistent with public safety and welfare would require, at a minimum, all of the following safeguards:

- (a) The creation of an adequately funded gambling control commission with comprehensive powers to establish minimum standards and technical specifications for gambling equipment and devices.
- (b) The creation of an adequately funded law enforcement capability within state government to inspect, test, and evaluate gambling equipment and devices and modifications thereto.”

It goes on to (e):

“The enactment of standards regulated to the trustworthiness and fairness of equipment and devices, upon the commission’s recommendation to the Legislature.”

And (g):

“The enactment of statutes providing for appropriate inspection and testing of equipment and devices, upon the commission’s recommendations to the Legislature.”

Mr. Speaker, I bring these points because it is very important that Trinidad and Tobago establish a gambling or gaming commission to inspect, test and verify, on a regular basis, whether devices that are being used are being fixed otherwise in the pursuit of gambling activities. You see, in certain states there is legislation. I think there is a place called Skodak where there is legislation enacted stating that the house must pay out 98 per cent of its take and keep 2 per cent. The reason behind that—and this is done by means of transactions, et cetera—if you continue to increase the taxes on these establishments without putting regulations enacted by Parliament, you will end up with the private members’ club or the casinos going out of business and illegal activity occurring and once you have illegal activity occurring you would not get any taxes, one, it will be clandestine, and

you will end up with a situation that we did not want, no taxes but yet clandestine activity.

It was also said in a nutshell that the gambling areas are susceptible to corruptive and criminal elements and money laundering and we have heard that bandied about in our country, yet no system of regulation is taking place whereby members of the state arm, members of the protective services, whoever they may be, can go into an established gambling area and, as I said, quite adequately test the equipment and whether the consumers are being ripped off.

I remember one of my patients won a lot of money at a gambling establishment which refused to pay him and he had absolutely no one to whom to go or to report. The protective services say that those are private members' clubs and basically what occurred there, there was no legislation on it. However, when he went back to the establishment to argue his case that he should be paid the money he won, he was roughed up by the hooligans and sent off and feared for his life. If there was a gaming commission to which he could report these activities, if there was a gaming commission that could inspect, test and close down an establishment if necessary, together with the Legislature and arms of the law, such illegal and illicit activities would not take place. So coming to this honourable House to raise taxes to attack the gambling industry, you are attacking the gambling industry that has been established.

I remember we had the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB) a long time ago. The National Lotteries Control Board had the normal run-of-the-mill lotteries in the early days and that went well and all of a sudden we came in with GTECH, the online lottery, the online gaming. With GTECH and its online terminals, with its sole distributor rights, we ended up with a situation—now this was, I think, between '91 and '94 which was the period when GTECH came in, and it produced such a frenzy of gambling in this country that people wanted to win the million dollars, et cetera, and they were taking their whole salaries and playing the lotto.

Mr. Speaker, it is a good idea to tax gambling but, at the end of the day, you have to ask yourself whether the punitive taxes that are being put on the industry that you helped create, would it be better to tax it, one, and at the same time in the movement, start off speaking about the need to regulate the industry as a result of gaming commissions and you establish legislation for that. So I call on the Prime Minister and the members of the Government to speedily bring legislation to the House where we could assist in the establishment of gaming commissions.

I am going to read a letter from the *Sunday Express*, October 05, 2003. This was written by Bishop Claude Arthur, President of the Christian Council Against New Gambling (CCANG) Hands Around the World Organisation, 123 Henry Street, Port of Spain. It is a paid advertisement in the newspaper. It says:

“A 2nd Letter To The Honourable Prime Minister  
From The Christian Council Against New Gambling  
Joining Hands Around The World  
No More Gambling/Crime.

Dear Honourable Prime Minister,

Once again we write to urge that in the name of God Almighty you stop your plans for new gambling in our country.

More Gambling = More Crime

All statistics throughout the ages have shown that gambling increases crime. Already our society is burdened with Lotto and Play Whe which, since you introduced it, has created many gambling addicts and ruined unsuspecting families. Some have undoubtedly turned to CRIME because of their GAMBLING habit.

Only Gtech, the foreign company, have benefited. Now they announced they will make at least \$70,000,000 from new slot machines (disguised as lottery terminals) which will be placed in CINEMAS and SHOPPING MALLS.

God protect our children. We urge that you, Honourable Prime Minister, protect our children from this menace.

We urge you, a fellow True Christian, that you DELIVER - no new gambling. We know you share our moral values.”

We have a picture, Mr. Speaker, of a gentleman in handcuffs, similar to what the PNM did to supporters of the UNC in voter padding cases.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of gambling and addictive behaviour goes hand in hand. Addictive behaviour is a type of behaviour where people—like with cocaine, people who are on cocaine or any addictive chemical drug, it is the same as gambling, the system occurs in the same manner. They produce a sort of a personality disorder and, as a result of them, the addiction becomes so great that they are channelled towards the activity or the drug. Gambling in this country, believe it or not, has reached unprecedented levels of this type of addictive

behaviour and, from the addictive behaviour of gambling, it transfers across to the addictive behaviour of alcoholism and also cocaine and drug abuse.

Together with that pot-pourri of activity you tend to have a mixture of elements in the gambling world and I call upon the Prime Minister—I wonder which AG to call on, if I should call on Mr. John Jeremy or the one we have right now—the new AG who is coming on. I read about it in the papers—whether we should call on the AG to bring legislation, a certain legislative agenda. I wonder if the Member for San Fernando East could help us, if there is going to be that reshuffle, and see that—*[Interruption]* Arouca South may or may not become. In case you do become the hon. AG, we need a new gaming commission.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I chose the topic of gambling in this—it is a bit ironic in that here am I speaking about gambling on the first day of Ramadan, but this is what the House does to you, they attack you in all different forms and fashion, you know. *[Interruption]* No, well, this is an important—*[Interruption]*—you see, this is an important—*[Interruption]* this is an important aspect of the gambling industry in this country. We need to focus on that regard.

Another thing, as we are on the topic of gambling, if you allow me a little leeway, I would indicate to the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development, that the National Lotteries Control Board oversees the lottery terminals. In the contracts, I think it has not been changed, a lot of my constituents have been saying that to get a lottery machine, they must have the permission of the owner of the building, not so much the person themselves, and, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, if the owner of the building that they are renting will not give them permission to utilize the machine there, because they want it for themselves, what happens to a little person who wants a machine who is renting an establishment? I call on the Government to look into that part of the contract and determine that.

That is important because a lot of people who rent bars, et cetera, and certain strategic areas, end up with problems as a result of the ownership of the machine and when the machines were first given out it was given to a lot of the PNM supporters, so I think you should talk to your supporters about that, that you should make it equitable, above the board, as they say, now that we are having constitutional reform. Mr. Speaker, I see we are having constitutional reform. The hon. Prime Minister said that at the Convention but he is afraid of proportional representation. I wonder why he is afraid of the proportional representation when it will give equality to everybody and it will take care of the House padding and the voter padding in this country. Maybe when the criminals

“run out” most of the non-PNM supporters, then he may consider proportional representation.

On another note, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, could I get your protection, please?

Mr. Speaker, this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I just want to—as I said, a very brief presentation—I call for the establishment of the gaming commission, one, and, two, I want to talk a bit about the part—I think it slipped the hon. Prime Minister—there is a tax break that was given to sporting bodies, I think, well it was \$450,000 and it is now a million dollars. However, what has happened is that the sporting bodies have come to me and said that they are not able to access this money because the legislation for that million dollars has not been passed. So saying it in the budget and doing it is—I am just indicating what they have said, so look into that.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when I was in Barbados the Barbados Cricket Board of Control—the Barbadian government gave the Barbados Cricket Board of Control the right to run their own gambling system, their own lottery, for the sport of cricket and they would sell the scratch games, et cetera. So I say, maybe the sporting bodies like the one that the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin West—it is because of those two guys that Deryck Murray was not chosen. The sporting bodies, this is the problem, the supporters—*[Interruption]* So you see, Mr. Speaker, we need to let the sporting bodies—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Dr. F. Khan:**—let them get their own lottery terminals or their own casinos, et cetera, so that they could use that money to finance and subsidize their sporting activities.

Mr. Speaker, the National Lotteries Control Board, when we asked the question, to whom they gave donations, we saw a number of people and I saw on it a number of people got \$120,000 for medical expenses. *[Interruption]* Could I just finish the point?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and will be resumed at quarter to 2.00.

**12.45 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.45 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, before the luncheon break I was indicating that the National Lotteries Control Board were the people in charge of gambling and online gambling, et cetera, and I was saying that they have a policy of donations. What I have found, after we asked our question, certain people were the recipient of as much as \$120,000 of donated money for health expenses. However, seeing that as it occurred, I requested, through my patients, some assistance in various medical matters. Unfortunately, every single one was disapproved or not approved. So I say that maybe there should be a policy for such gambling activities and their donations to be equal in their distribution.

Also, if you notice, the National Lottery online games, what is happening in the gambling industry, it is on a simpler basis. The take into the system and the payouts, I think that the payouts should be more to the consumer as compared to the takes and as I was mentioning, in certain parts of the United States and different gambling areas, the payouts are as much as 98 per cent of the take.

There has been, Mr. Speaker, according to the *Review of the Economy 2003 Charting The Course*, et cetera, a decrease in the cruise ship arrivals. This is page 29. It said:

“During the period October 2002 to June 2003, 77 cruise ships visited Trinidad...27 less than in the corresponding period...an overall decline...of 26 per cent. Of these, 47 vessels berthed in Trinidad and 30...in Tobago, representing a decline of 41 per cent...”

However, Tobago enjoyed a 20 per cent increase. Mr. Speaker, punitive taxes on the gambling industry without regulation may lead to situations where the industry itself may close down. However, I issue a call to the Government that we should regulate the industry, although it may be expensive, and stimulate certain parts of the island towards something like a Las Vegas, Nevada-style type of gaming industry. Not only does it provide jobs but also it provides peripheral industries around it in different forms and fashion. It is not that I am advocating gambling in whatever it is, but I say to you, sometimes good sense has to prevail where your economy is taking play, you know.

One has to—I am a representative of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not the representative only of the Muslim community. I may be a Muslim [*Desk thumping*] and I am a representative of all the communities, so what I say is, what one has to understand—[*Interruption*] On another note, Mr. Speaker, from the aside, the UNC government introduced Sunday shopping in this country—

legislation to allow Sunday shopping—much hullabaloo by the other side and religious whatever it is and they kept going on. Mr. Speaker, have you ever tried to buy anything on a weekday when you are in this Red House or if you are working? You cannot go outside to buy it because you “doh” have time—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Keep the Speaker out of it.

**Dr. F. Khan:**—and by the time you—all right, keep the Speaker out of it—any one of us—on a Sunday, if you notice the traffic in Movie Towne and PriceSmart and those American-style industries, you will understand why it is necessary to have Sunday shopping because it increases the jobs, et cetera, it increases the intake and the movement of schools, as you say, schoolchildren, et cetera. As I say, with the gambling industry, what is the long-term objective of a government of a country? It is to provide jobs, it is to make a country richer so the people who belong to the part of the country will benefit in different jobs, different exercises, et cetera. So if we are to nurture certain parts of the online and the gambling industry, rather than punitively taxing it out, one has to ask a basic fundamental question.

Mr. Speaker, for six years, 1995—2001, taxation on the public of this country and price rise was insignificant or not at all. Lo and behold, we come into 2002—2003 then 2003—2004, we end up with a situation—back to the taxation on gasoline. I remember the old days when we had taxation on—you would look at the budget in fear. What is going up? Cooking gas always went up, cigarettes went up, bread went up, the price of this went up, and these were basic staples. Now we have gasoline prices going up and everybody said there was not going to be an increase in fares but now we have a significant increase in fares to the point where the people from Laventille East/Morvant blocked the roads because of the exorbitant increase in taxi fares. I did not hear the Member for Laventille East/Morvant mention anything about that. I mean, he did not come to the plight of the residents there but they had a significant increase in fares to the point where the people had to block the road.

Now, if we had properly regulated gaming industries, that money from these gaming industries could go to subsidize the cost of gas, and if you subsidize the cost of gas you would not have to raise the price. Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan said the cost of manufacturing the gas, R something, the unleaded gas, is less than that of the gas we have now, yet the price has gone up. What I am indicating, Mr. Speaker, the economics of the whole thing, if you have a regulated industry where the consumer is being protected, the consumer is not being ripped off, you will have greater participation from both local and foreign guests and this is the

function and the mechanism of approach of Las Vegas, Nevada. By doing that, you are able to instil consumer confidence in the industry and if you instil consumer confidence in an industry, more participation will take place.

The other evils of addiction, et cetera, if the regulation has taken place, and, as the Member of Parliament—I was speaking to him—for Diego Martin Central said, let the buyer beware, then if you are going to attack the gambling industry punitively—[*Interruption*] No, we talked, I mean, “that ain’ mean nutten wrong ‘bout dat. Dah wasn’—I mean, it wasn’ dat bad. I mean, I ain’ go attack yuh nutten major.” What I say—no, but it is a good idea, that the buyer has to beware of it, but then we have to say the same thing for alcohol, Member for Diego Martin Central. You follow what I am saying? So what you are saying for alcohol, say the same for cigarettes, not so? It is the same addictive personality that takes place—same addiction, same destruction. So I call on the Government to find some mechanism to introduce measures to regulate the gambling industry, not only by punitive taxes.

During the luncheon interval I researched this article in the *Express*, October 25, Saturday, where Prior Beharry wrote that gambling operators are put off by new game machines. He went on to say what we are saying:

“‘If the intention of the new taxes is to get rid of private members’ clubs, which are considered immoral, then what is the idea in bringing in this new type of gambling.’ George Laquis Jr, president of Private Members’ Clubs (APMC)...”

Which is the video lottery terminals. He goes on to say:

“‘On the announcement that the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB) and GTECH were entering into an agreement which would see video lottery terminals (VLTs) featuring traditional casino-type games in facilities at Gulf City, Movie Towne, Chaguanas and San Fernando, Laquis asked: ‘Would they operate as we do as private members’ clubs or allow anybody within the legal age to walk off the street and gamble?’”

He also wanted to know whether these VLTs would be taxed under the same regime as private members’ clubs were being taxed.”

John Wallis, manager of Sunny, said that his company produces software similar to that of VLTs and:

“...was not given a chance by the NLCB to put forward a proposal for the new systems.

But Devant Maharaj, marketing and public relations officer of the NLCB, said the NLCB had a contractual arrangement with GTECH which made it unnecessary to invite tenders for the VLTs.”

So you have a situation which is being monopolized by a foreign firm, GTECH, with the assistance of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] This is what this article is saying. You have to refute it. So we have the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with their antimonopoly laws, I think there are some here still, or there should be, assisting a foreign firm, GTECH, without tender, to produce video lottery terminals in this country. So that reeks of a, you know—yet we have the Member for Arouca South—consumer affairs—saying that the price of chicken is too exorbitant because there is a monopoly, so, “We are going to break the monopoly and bring in cheaper chicken.”

So on one hand you are saying this and on the other hand you are saying that. Our argument is, if you are going to have gambling-type organizations in this country doing certain things, then should we not get the overall tendering process and transparency and accountability that was preached by the regime in place right now and let that prevail in the tendering process? What I have heard through the grapevine—I mean, I could mention it in Parliament under privilege—is that the people who own Movie Towne had these online video lottery terminals in this country long ago and, as a result of it, they were kept in various areas and they have now gotten the opportunity, with the assistance of their friends in the Government, to swamp and flood the country with these video lottery terminals, so you could play lotto in any part of this country.

So on one hand baccarat tables, Black Jack tables, Caribbean stud poker, dice tables, regular poker tables, pool tables, roulette tables, rum 32 tables, every Sip San table, for every slot machine, for every other table or device not mentioned you have a large tax movement; what about these video lottery terminals? It is not mentioned here. Are they considered slot machines? This is where the regulation will take place. What are they considered as to be taxed on a certain level? Are they lottery terminals such as the one you use for your lotto movement? Are they going to be classified as lottery terminals?

Is the arrangement between GTECH—which enjoys monopolistic movement—and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, via the National Lotteries Control Board, going to be such that when you take in 100 per cent of the winnings, 50 per cent or 40 something per cent goes to GTECH, about 20 per cent goes to the payout of the lotto people and some to the public? What is the arrangement? Mr.

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Speaker, these are questions that need to be answered. It is quite easy to come into this honourable House and say that “We are going to raise taxes on gambling tables, we are going to raise taxes on gasoline prices, we are going to raise, we are going to do this and do that”, but at the end of the day, if the objective that you are focusing on is consumer confidence or consumer progress or country progress, does this system provide for it?

I do not want to go into CEPEP and those things, but money has to come from somewhere to finance that. Money has to come from somewhere to finance the NHA programme. Money has to come from somewhere to finance the accelerated housing and you keep going on and we could say this thing, as they say, ad infinitum. There is a decline in cruise ships coming to Trinidad and Tobago. Why is the decline taking place? How can we attract more tourists to this country? What mechanism can we use? Do they still want sun, sand and sea? Is it the ecotourism or could we slip in some designated area for gaming such as the—Las Vegas took a desert, Nevada desert, and created it into the economy that is one of the most vibrant in the United States of America with the largest amount of taxation—billions of dollars—and they had the figures.

So, Mr. Speaker, I urge the Government to protect the consumer. What they should do is start the establishment of a gaming commission similar to what could be accessed via the Internet, because we are not reinventing the wheel, we just use the wheel of some other people, and continue to focus on that so that the consumer, whether it be foreign or local, when they enter the joints, they know one thing, that they are not going to be taken advantage of because somebody has set a machine or set a table or set a dice or loaded it unfairly.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Eudine Job-Davis** (*Tobago East*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me as I rise to support the Motions before the House. Permit me, before I do so, to offer sincere thanks to hon. Members of this House and those in the other House for their expression of condolences and comfort on the passing of my mother. I sincerely thank you.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, I rise in support of the Motions before us, the Order cited as the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003. I know in a debate one is supposed to respond to what the other side says and I am not quite sure at this point in time what I am supposed to respond to save and except that I take issue with Members speaking about the Government attacking the gambling industry and proposing punitive measures against gaming establishments. Those

are harsh words but I would certainly believe that the Government, in taking that decision, would have given due consideration to, one, the employment creating capacity of those establishments and, secondly, to the income earning capacity before they would have talked about increasing the taxes. Certainly we live in a society where the policy is to pay as you earn so I do not see why the gaming establishments should be exempt from paying as they earn. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, what I would talk about this afternoon is how those taxes would improve the lives of the average citizen in Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and certainly Government has proposed in its fiscal measures for 2003/2004 \$900 million, the most that was ever given to Tobago to carry out its projects. Clearly, this is going to help us in the area of human development because, as we proposed our Vision 2020, we understand that our human resource is critical in us achieving that vision, and, given the taxes that we would be collecting from these establishments, I am certain that it would be put to use to repair some of the damage that has been done under the UNC [*Desk thumping*] in terms of education.

You see, Mr. Speaker, we have been subjected to the policy of school for all, education for all, and a lot of our students have been put into secondary schools but we have a serious problem in Tobago where there are children who, at the age of 14, cannot read and cannot do basic maths. They are in secondary school, now in first form, and cannot read. We have to correct that injustice that was done to our children and therefore we are using the taxes to ensure that we provide remedial teaching for those children, one, in the secondary schools, but not just in the secondary schools as purported by the hon. Member for Siparia some time ago. We have to start the process in the primary schools, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] While we have a few teachers who are capable of conducting the remedial classes, we still have need for many more of those teachers because the situation is grave, and, I can tell you, if we want to achieve Vision 2020, we must understand that our children are the future of this country; they come first.

**Mr. Hinds:** We have it in Trinidad too. “Tabaquite need remedial training.”

**Mrs. E. Job-Davis:** Mr. Speaker, out of that issue as well, I would just indicate that what we have as well are students who fight, they smoke, they run away from school—they are frustrated with the system. Why? Because they just do not understand what is happening in the classes and so they have to find something else to do, and what do you think they do? They get into mischief. So we have to find a way now to rectify all of that. Unfortunate, but that is the reality, Mr. Speaker, and so I want to impress on the Members on the other side why they need to support this Motion before us.

Mr. Speaker, what does Tobago need in addition to its educational facilities, being our human resource, coming on par that the taxes would help to facilitate? We would like to see—well, in Tobago East in particular, the industries are more fishing and farming and what we want to see would be the establishment or the construction of fishing depots, and, as we are doing right now in the 21st Century, not just fishing depots, we want to create facilities where we could generate social activities as well as economic activities and when we talk about creating social activities we are looking at how they do things, possibly in the Bahamas in a place they call—

**Mr. Speaker:** I can understand the Member for Tabaquite; he missed the budget. I know you did not contribute in the budget but, please, you have to centre it around the Order.

**Mrs. E. Job-Davis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am just showing why we should support the Motion to collect the taxes because, you see, we cannot give effect to the measures of the budget unless we have the revenue to do it. So that is where—

**Mr. Speaker:** You have to concentrate it around the Order, not the budget.

**Mrs. E. Job-Davis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but I was saying that we really need the moneys to construct things like our fishing depots so that we would—and I was linking that to say that in doing the economic and social activities, we can also improve facilities like pool tables, which are very prominent in Tobago, where the young people would find recreational activities. It will also give the Government the opportunity to increase the taxes-generated earnings.

Mr. Speaker, in Tobago we have a problem with our health facilities and, further, what we are going to utilize the funds to do is continue the construction of the hospital. I had reason—Mr. Speaker, permit me—to visit the hospital or practically live in that facility for the past nine days or so and it is a virtual health centre. Under this Government we have started the construction of the Scarborough regional hospital and we need the money to continue the process. You know, there was a time when we could boast that people in Tobago never used to get sick so often but that is not the case. In addition to that, we need the money to employ more doctors because what obtains now is that there has been an increase in the number of cases that require dialysis. One doctor comes from Trinidad every week but that is not enough and, therefore, hon. Members on the other side should assist us in Tobago by supporting the Government's measures to increase the taxes on these institutions and also to increase the taxes from 3 to 4

per cent on those businesses that produce petroleum because, you see, once we outline those social problems that we are experiencing I am certain at the end of this session they would all agree that we need to increase the taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the price of land in Tobago is really, really out of control. The funds from the gaming tables and other devices would continue the process of housing construction because, as we stand here today, the cost of land in Tobago is about \$40 to \$50 per square foot. That means that one lot of land costs approximately \$200,000 to \$250,000 and this revenue from these taxes would continue the process of housing that would assist the average Tobagonian to own a piece of property, otherwise, if we per chance are able to purchase a piece of land, all we can do is to purchase a rocking chair and put it there—unfortunate but true. So, hon. Members, we are appealing to you to support the measures before us.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, certain parts of Tobago East do not have access to proper television viewing. I am certain that the Tobago House of Assembly would utilize some of the funds gained from the collection of taxes—*[Interruption]* I am certain—to boost the signals from TV6 and TTT so that the people of Speyside, Charlotteville, L'Anse Fourmi, Parlatuvier and Castara can move forward in tandem with the rest of Tobago West and the rest of this country because, Mr. Speaker, if we are proposing Vision 2020 we know that the access to information is critical to our people's developments.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan and the Member for Tabaquite mention the fact that the Government has ignored or is ignoring tourism. I would differ, certainly because we have proposed a three-year rolling plan for Tobago and some of these funds would be used to develop the product, one, and for marketing, advertising purposes, and we have to be careful in doing that—*[Interruption]* we will be—that we do not repeat the mistake of the other islands. Some of those funds would also be used to train our people, to ensure that the objective of tourism is achieved, because the primary objective of tourism development is to ensure that the people of the host country benefit and that is why we need the money to train our people—you would know about that—to access these opportunities.

For example, Mr. Speaker, we are into the dive market in a big way but most of our people are not trained dive masters. The dive masters are foreigners, basically, but the people who know the dive sites and who can do the work are the local people. However, they have the capacity to be trained to be dive masters

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and therefore we have to use some of the money that we can raise from these taxes to train them to be dive masters and, therefore, owners of the plant so that, one, we could ensure that the moneys that we gain from tourism would permeate throughout the island, of course, and that would certainly have implications for taxes, and, two, that the tourism multiplier is effective in that we would put in place the measures to ensure that the tourist dollar does not just flow back out of the country as it does in many of the other Caribbean islands.

Mr. Speaker, since I have mentioned tourism and since the other Members have done so, I cannot really speak on tourism unless I talk about the domestic transport situation, which the Government certainly subsidizes and would be subsidized again through the collection of these taxes. There is a serious situation existing where, since the Government in its wisdom decreased the air fare to \$200—basic economics; price went down, demand gone up—what is happening now is that there is a serious problem on the air bridge where you cannot get to Tobago or from Tobago when you want to, bearing in mind, Mr. Speaker, that the Government subsidizes these airlines.

I would suggest that the airline, Tobago Express, find a way to ensure that our peak periods are taken care of, whether they have to wet lease, dry lease or buy an airplane because normally the peak periods used to be Christmas to carnival, Easter and August. Now there is no peak period, it is just year-round, and the frustrations of that essential service are really driving us up a wall, and, as Members of Parliament and representatives of the people, we do not have a lien on the airline but because the Government subsidizes them I know that the hon. Minister, my colleague on this side, would certainly put the measures in place to ensure that the Government subsidies would be commensurate with the type of service that is offered on that air bridge.

Mr. Speaker, some of the other issues with which I think the collection of taxes and the funding of the THA's budget could assist, would be the establishment of maybe community colleges or night schools because we have completed construction of several schools in the island which would normally close after 3 o'clock in the afternoon—3.00 p.m.—so we need to put in place measures to capture a certain part of our Tobago market. For example, those women who have two or three O levels but do not have the wherewithal to continue their studies, maybe we can use retired teachers, but certainly we have to find a way so that they too can move forward with this Government and this country in obtaining Vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to be very long but since I have mentioned—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Let us hear what London is doing in Tobago.

**Mrs. E. Job-Davis:** London will tell you that for himself. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, since I have mentioned how we would utilize the taxes that would become available after we pass this Motion in the House this afternoon, there are two critical issues that I believe, with your permission, Sir, I must mention because somehow I think they tie into the achievement of the objectives outlined in the budget for which these taxes are proposed, and one of those would be the mouthings of racial discrimination that we hear in this honourable Chamber almost every day. I cannot help but wonder because I think we are blessed to have come from Tobago where we do not know about who is Indian and who is African. What we see, Mr. Speaker, when we look at our people, are the faces of Trinidadians and the faces of Tobagonians. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, permit me please to even go as far as to quote our late hon. Prime Minister who said that there is no mother India, there is no mother Africa, there is only one mother, and that is Trinidad and Tobago. That just goes to show that the People's National Movement has always maintained national unity and has always maintained that the people of this country would move forward together. He was ably supported by Lionel Seukeran who said, when the founder of the Maha Sabha went to him to tell him, "Look, we want to promote Indian culture in Trinidad and Tobago", he turned to the gentleman and he said, "You are wrong. You are promoting the Indian contribution and the African contribution to what is Trinidad and Tobago's culture" [*Desk thumping*] and the sooner we understand that, Mr. Speaker, the better for all of us.

I just would say, Mr. Speaker, that the national pride that existed then should obtain today because when we have people writing songs like *God Bless Our Nation* and the National Anthem, when we sing these things, I would hope that Members take these words seriously. As a matter of fact, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that when we come to this House every Friday we stand and sing the National Anthem. That way Members would understand what happens and they would understand how they should contribute to not misleading this nation and not having them participate in the nation building aspect that these taxes and the measures outlined in the budget are supposed to achieve.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that I want to talk about very briefly with your permission, is the issue of crime because I have heard it mentioned several times this afternoon. You know, we have a saying in Tobago, "When green leaf fall dong ah water it nah rotten de same day" and what we have done is to inherit a

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situation that existed about five, six years ago. That is the situation that we inherited and that is the situation with which we have to deal. I would also support the measures outlined in our budget, the measures with which these taxes are supposed to deal in order to deal with the situation of crime that exists in our country, because, if at all we have to move towards 2020, we must understand that crime has to be a thing of the past.

I also would mention that crime is not just a Government effort, it is a national effort and the Government has outlined plans, the social programmes, the crime initiatives, the family, the focus on the family and all of that, in addition to which I would suggest that the church cannot remain silent and the schools have a serious part to play. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I believe that hon. Members would laud the initiatives that are being taken by this Government and would support the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, which would give effect to the budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing I would really thank you for giving me the opportunity to add my voice in support of the Government and its Motion to pass the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003 in this House.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town*): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I too extend my sympathies to the Member for Tobago East on the passing of her mother because losing a mother is really a difficult thing. I must also thank her very much for opening the debate. [*Desk thumping*] She has now opened the debate—so we could go—when she said, Mr. Speaker—she went off.

Before we go on to that, I also congratulate her for fighting like an Opposition Member in the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] When one heard her speech about, “We want this” and, “We want that” and, “We want this”, it seems to me that “somebody in Tobago not speaking to somebody”. Having gotten \$900 million you are coming here to this Parliament and to this august Chamber to ask the Government to do things for you? I really must tell her she is “fighting good”. You could fight a good fight and may God be with you.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, she opened the debate nicely when she said the UNC government put all the children in school when they brought Universal Secondary Education and that now is causing a problem because some of the children in Forms I and II cannot read and write so therefore the monies which are collected will be used to rehabilitate them. That was a—okay, those are problems, so be it, but what was the philosophy in it? The philosophy in it, Mr. Speaker, is that the United National Congress government at that time wanted to include everyone,

[*Desk thumping*] whether you are from Tobago, whether you are a little slow, the point about it is, that was national unity and no discrimination whatsoever, and this was the philosophy of the United National Congress.

She also, at one part of her contribution, talked about racism and racialism or, as she says it, that we speak about it on this side and we should stop doing it. Well, I want to let her know that that same man who said, “Father Trinidad and Tobago”, “Father—mother Trinidad and Tobago” or “No mother India” is the same man who started a kind of racism in this country, but the racism, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*—yes, Eric Williams. For example, “you ever watch *Mausica*”? “You ever watch the kinds of”—the composition, ethnic and racial, that happened in *Mausica*? A hundred and twenty students were taken. You check the records and the records will speak for themselves. It is not for me to call you racist. Records will do that for us.

### **2.30 p.m.**

It seemed to me, Mr. Speaker, when she spoke, we must not talk about race. We must not talk about racism and discrimination, let them practice it and we will support them. Support Caribbean Court of Appeal, make them look good, but they perpetuate racism.

Mr. Speaker, look at the composition of the army. Any time they need people, people of ethnic groups will pass the exams, but the moment they come to a point of interview and they have those PNM hacks interviewing them, they cannot say they can pass any interview. Same thing happens with the police service. Look at the ethnic composition of the police service. It was an underground movement by the PNM to perpetuate racism. Then when we speak about it, people like the Member for Diego Martin West will jump up and say nonsense, rubbish. I will come to him in a minute. It is rubbish when they perpetuate racism. Look at the public service. Look at the number of constitutional motions that had to be brought by people because of ethnic and racial discrimination by this government against the people.

The Privy Council in a case, Mr. Speaker, had acknowledged that it was not only incompetence and mismanagement, but it was the kind of racism perpetuated by the PNM. This is why I feel sorry for the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. He will understand why. I see a face cringing, but those are the facts. We must take this and hit it so hard! Keep on talking about it all the time. We must shout it up in the air! We must shout it on the ground! We must shout it in the sea until common sense prevails.

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When the Member for Tobago East said that the UNC tried to give everybody an education, what she has done there and not knowing what she did, she has compared the UNC which is all-inclusive, embracing everybody as against this vindictive, nepotistic, racist PNM regime! What had happened is that they had carried out this racism in a sort of unofficial manner in that when you go for interviews, they “lick” you up! They dance you around. There was a kind of lurch in the public service where all of us, you and me, had to pay money, and they feel that when we speak about it, and they curse us, shout at us and push us down, we will stop speaking.

Anyway, in their sins they have become so powerful and so strong that now they have formalized the institutionalization of racism. That is what they have done, and she, that Member for Tobago East, has exposed it today. I would like to quote from the Social & Economic Policy Framework 2004, to show them where this is an official document of the PNM Government, and hear what they said; hear how the minds of those evil people on the other side, those wicked people on the other side, those racist people on the other side [*Desk thumping*], hear what they say on page 39 of this document. Look how they shamelessly formalized this racism. I am certain that our hearts, all right thinking people's hearts in Trinidad and Tobago are bleeding today at the racism being perpetuated by the PNM government. It reads:

“A Development Master Plan for COSTAATT will be formulated with the assistance of the Caribbean Development Bank.”

Mr. Speaker, you know when it is time to pay back that loan, all of us who are being discriminated against by this PNM Government will have to pay that loan. So they are imposing upon us responsibility and liability, and when it comes to sharing the plum, they share not like how the UNC government shared it equally for all the children, even those who could not take it, we gave it to them so they would get the chance to develop. It continues:

“Through this initiative, Government will ensure that COSTAATT becomes, by the year 2005, a major contributor to the attainment of a 15 per cent national participation rate in higher education of the 18—22 age cohort.”

When one looks at that, a whole racist document now, when one sees what Cudjoe said about what affirmative action preventing people, giving pressure to people of Indian descent from going to university, dealing with meritocracy but going on that kind of behaviour, COSTAATT will concentrate on broadening the access to higher education for previously underprivileged groups as well as a diversifying programme offering to address the new training leagues.

That Member for Tobago East has said that when the United National Congress was there, that the United National Congress government tried give everybody education, but when the PNM has gone into office, hear how the PNM mind operates. Access to people who are underserved groups. They are talking about underserved groups. When the United National Congress was in government, we never talked about underserved groups. We never talked about underclass group. What we spoke about, national unity, all of us coming on board, let us go forward. That is the way to build a nation, but the way the PNM is doing it, the action of the PNM, they are ripping the hearts and the guts and the soul of this society apart. We must stand for the National Anthem when the PNM government betrays the National Anthem. Where every creed and race finds an equal place!

When they talk about typographical error in the next place, it is no typographical error. It is well organized and well orchestrated in the mind of the PNM. Racism! Rank racial discrimination by the PNM! Rank nepotism by the PNM! Look we have them black and white, their document. I ask the Prime Minister today, Sir, did you read this document? Did you read the budget documents? Because he boasted in this Parliament. He thanked this one and that one for writing and putting input into it. Did he read it or is it his boys, his cohorts, his dagger men who wrote this?

Mr. Speaker, it says:

“To fulfill its mandate, a number of critical inputs are required...”

Hear where the trump comes in now. The hope that after COSTAATT comes in, that there will be need to establish standards for the purpose of educational accreditation. So, they are trying to create a back road to fix themselves.

Who are those people, Mr. Speaker? Who are those people in COSTAATT they speak about? I am not “mauvais languing”. I am not speaking from newspaper reports. I am speaking from an official document of the PNM Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We go on. I will read, Mr. Speaker, the Social and Economic Policy Framework Matrix 2004/2006, the same document. So when they cross reference the same document, one sees what we mean, how it is in the mind of the PNM.

It says on page 38/93, Human Capital Development. The United National Congress Government, when they spoke said that we must bring everybody together. We must bring all the threads of the society together so we, working as a united people, as one people, can go forward. But they speak about the

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underprivileged and human capital development. What happened? Human capital development is only for one set of people and against the other set?

I will read it for you:

“Policy Area                      College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts  
(COSTAATT)

Policy Objective              Promote improved student recruitment, retention and  
graduation rates.

Principal strategies & Measures”

Not simple strategy, the principal strategy and measures of this PNM Government:

“Establish targeted recruitment programmes for male Trinidadians, aged 17—  
24, especially Afro-Trinidadian males.”

That is an official document. While the United National Congress was speaking about giving everybody, sharing the patrimony, hear what this wicked and shameless PNM Government is doing.

They ask, what are the performance indicators? The performance indicators is a specialized recruitment programme instituted. I ask a question. What is that specialized recruitment programme to be instituted? Tell us what it is. Is it that they are going to set up, okay, “We are going to reduce O Level from Grade II to Grade III so that they would have interviews and meritocracy, people with Grade II and Grade III, they will just kick them aside because they may be Indo-Trinidadians?

Will they say they will accept Grade III because the person passed the interview? That is why they do not want to implement the Equal Opportunity Act. That is why they are making all those kinds of excuses, Mr. Speaker. A specialized recruitment programme instituted. Responsible Agency, College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, when will they do it? Is it 2004?

Target date, 2004. We must expose them. We must not only expose them in Trinidad and Tobago, but we must take this to international agencies. Not only the politicians. We call upon the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), we call upon the NGOs and all right-thinking people of Trinidad and Tobago to deal with this serious issue. At every level of society, this discussion must take place, because we must brutalize them, and push them back into a corner where you, Mr. Speaker, being a conveyancer and would have studied trust and equity for them to say equity does not mean equality!

Put the pieces together. Put it back again when he said, “This time I am not going to forget my people”, and he tried to come and lie—sorry—apologize, by saying, “When I say my people, I mean everybody in Trinidad and Tobago”, but when he sits in the Cabinet and sits as Minister of Finance and produces a document like this, in which he speaks about that group and then identifies the group in the official document, one really sees what a traitor and a stranger to the truth that Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East is. [*Desk thumping*]

What a shameless man he is to sit as Prime Minister of this country and to preside on the presentation of such a document. He went to the convention yesterday and one would have thought that decency would have demanded that he would have said to the convention, “They raised in another place something about Afro this. I want to say that I do not know anything about that, but in any event, I feel that that is a part of the PNM psyche and part of their thinking, and I want to apologize to this nation today. I want to assure this nation that there will be equity and equality at the same time.”

Equity means fairness. How could they then have equity without equality? Unless they go back to the earlier part of the proceedings in this document to say, Mr. Speaker, that when he really said “I am going to see about my people,” he meant what he meant on page 38/93. PNM! Afro-Trinidadians!

Establishing, monitoring and spreading racism. Why did he have to mention Afro-Trinidadians? Why did he not say all men between the ages of 17 and 24? Why did he refuse to say that? Even so, the women, the Member for Tobago East, a “genderist” or whatever, how could this Prime Minister—[*Interruption*] Yes she is a “genderist”, or whatever. How could this Prime Minister speak about Afro-males when she as a lady, and a good lady, even discriminates against African females, and women at large?

They sit there and talk about women, about equality, and they sat there and would not raise a word on behalf of all the women in Trinidad and Tobago. So, we are saying, Mr. Speaker, that the time has come when the PNM has exposed itself to the national community, to the regional community and to the international community, and we promise them one thing.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Enill withdrew it!

**Mr. S. Panday:** One would have thought that if, indeed, like the Member for Tobago East who is a good person would have said, if the people have fallen through the crack, no problem there. Rehabilitate them. Make sure they reach up to standard.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** Why is that a problem if you put them there?

**Mr. S. Panday:** And the help they must get them is to bring them up to standard. Nobody said no to that.

**Mr. Ramnath:** A kind of stupid people!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Mr. Ramnath:** You must send them to school and teach them. Do not blame UNC for that!

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Couva South and Member for Tobago East, please.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, we on this side will be left with no alternative now that having seen the racist position of the PNM as evidenced by the documentation of that Government, everything that the PNM does, one views it with that at the back of one's mind, until the PNM comes forward and says, "We have abandoned that dangerous course." We give them an opportunity today to let them say to this honourable House and to say to this national community, we have abandoned that racial course. Then, Mr. Speaker, we would ask them, please put it into action. We will monitor them.

Mr. Speaker, look at the CEPEP programmes. Look at the kind of people getting work in the CEPEP programmes. Indians are excluded and we are frank now! We say they did it because of race. This now has put all that we have seen in the past, everything we had seen in the past, and we were suspicious about you all, today with their own document, empowering the people, charting a course to 2020, they put it in black and white. The URP, same thing. It seems to me that the Prime Minister is so warped and is so engulfed in racism that he did not even thought—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Think!

**Mr. S. Panday:** I pay for my clothes, Mr. Speaker. I do not ask for a designer and take the people's clothes for a month and carry it back and say it did not fit me. Let us move on.

**Hon. Members:** What stupidity are you talking?

**Mr. Ramnath:** You work for your clothes.

**Mr. S. Panday:** What we are saying, when you look at the URP it is the same thing. Instead of trying to understand the document which they laid in this honourable House, instead of analyzing the document, he went to the PNM convention and said, “I am spending more money on URP and more money on CEPEP”, and we are saying—

**Mr. Speaker:** I think you have met the argument. Whilst the Member for Tobago East did go off and widened the debate, I think have sufficiently met her argument and you need to move on.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, I hope it is not paining the chair also. But, I bow to your ruling.

**Mr. Speaker:** You are not attacking the Chair by any chance?

**Mr. S. Panday:** No! Not at all. I would never attack the Chair, Sir. When I watched your face as the debate progressed I saw a certain amount of consternation.

**Mr. Speaker:** You are probably misinterpreting it.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Yes—[*Interruption*] She is irrelevant. I have dealt with her effectively. I am happy to hear you say, Mr. Speaker, that I have dealt with her effectively. Although they may gripe and groan about it, the Chair has said that I have dealt with her.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, honourable Member, you cannot bring the Chair into the debate. I never said anything like that. You cannot bring the Chair into the debate.

**Mr. Panday:** You said I have met her. I have met her, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying is that we will be going to international agencies to deal with this issue to ensure that this country holds together. The UNC has a duty to perform, and that is to bring the people together while the PNM drives them apart, asunder.

Mr. Speaker, she spoke about also, the—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Who is she?

**Mr. S. Panday:** I humbly apologize, my dear respected lady.

**Mr. Ramnath:** “What wrong with calling her ‘she’?”

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member also—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Mr. S. Panday:** You heard that one? What is wrong with calling Gillian Lucky she? I want you to hear that! What is wrong with that?

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, it is quite clear in Standing Order 36(7), Members shall be referred to by the names of the electoral areas for which they have been elected. That is one of the favourite points of the Member for Tabaquite. Please, let us refer to Members by the electoral district which they represent.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, I ask for protection for the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre from that Member for Laventille East/Morvant, because the honourable Member is a Member of this House and Members should not be casting those kinds of aspersions. When I told him that cocaine fried his brain, the Chair stopped me, and I bowed to the Chair.

Mr. Speaker, I want to inform them now, serve notice, every time I stand in this House to speak, I will make reference to this. The honourable Member opened the debate. What we have seen here is that taxes have been increased and gasoline price. My information is that there was no need to increase the price of gasoline, especially the unleaded gasoline.

There was a conspiracy between Petrotrin and NP to get a price increase and, having regard to the size of the budget and having regard to the projected oil prices, I humbly submit that there was no need to raise this gasoline, because when one looks at the other order where they speak about:

“2. The Second Schedule to the Value Added Tax Act is amended:

(a) by deleting item 5 and substituting the following item:

‘5. Preparations for agricultural use included peat moss, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides and fungicides.’;”

What is happening is that we are speaking, when one looks at the agricultural sector now, it would appear that they have given some sort of reprieve from VAT on the use of pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides, but at the same time, the price of fuel, energy, has gone up, so in truth and in fact, what they have done is little or nothing for the agricultural sector. So, when they tell you in the beginning they are raising the price of gasoline and what not, one must view that against this little thing they said, they are removing Section V from the second schedule.

Going back on the issue of the gasoline, the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) which appears to be a PNM party, jumped on the bandwagon the moment they spoke about doing away with the leaded gasoline and bringing all gases unleaded and said, “Yes that is a good thing.” The question we ask is why

is it that long before they did not carry this argument? They are just following the PNM. Further, what have they done? The EMA jumping up on this bandwagon, unleaded, unleaded. What has the EMA done in its practice and service to the community, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Whenever one calls them and asks them to deal with problems they always say they do not have staff, they do not have this, they do not have that. So far, the EMA has done precious little for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What they are doing, they are trying to identify certain well operators, and they, together with Petrotrin and other interests are pressuring the small well producers.

For example, in the constituencies of Princes Town and Naparima where there are old wells and these leases have been given out to these persons and these persons cannot use the same wells because the wells probably are mechanically bad, they tend to drill wells in the close proximity of those wells and see what they could extract from the subterranean reservoirs.

The EMA, Mr. Speaker, is giving no end of trouble to those people. One wonders if that is not a plan and a design by the EMA, being a party group of the PNM, to give people pressure. What has happened, in those areas where there were wells, the wells were drilled already, therefore nothing, no damage would be done to the environment, because it is an old well, they are going to drill on an old well site. What the EMA wants is the small man to have an environmental impact assessment, or something like that, preventing those people from making a living. Although the area has already been drilled, although drilling has caused no problem to the environment, yet the EMA says, "Before you could drill, you need to have an environmental impact assessment," or something like that.

We need, Mr. Speaker, to look at these issues, but coming back to the issue of the preparation formulated for agricultural use, including fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides, I have said before that that adds little or nothing to the people in the area, but they add moss and peat. Farmers in Barrackpore, in La Savan, what do they know about moss and peat? I wonder why they included moss and peat? I am certain they will explain why they included moss and peat.

Mr. Speaker, the question is, when one looks at this Social and Economic Policy, when one looks at the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), when one looks at the budget, one would see that this Government is really paying lip service to agriculture, and this question here of removing fertilizers and insecticides, herbicides and fungicide is really a ruse, a mamaguayism to agriculture. What have they done for agriculture? They have done little or

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nothing for agriculture. Imagine in this social and economic framework, in the Budget they said they are going to deal with agricultural access roads. Give them a few cents in the VAT, but when one looks, it says that there are about 2000 miles of agricultural access roads in this country which have been in a dilapidated condition and need to be rehabilitated.

They want to develop agriculture. There are so many roads to be developed. When one looks at the Social and Economic Policy Framework of 2004, at page 78, they boast about infrastructure development and programme, and it says:

“— will include the rehabilitation and maintenance of agricultural access roads as well as water management...”

Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that in only reducing this, this is insufficient. What they should have done is go further and really deal with agriculture, and this here is really mamaguyism to the people in the agricultural industry.

Mr. Speaker, they want to give the people in agriculture the impression they are helping them. They want to give the people in agriculture the impression that they so care for agriculture when, in truth and in fact, they do not care a foot about the agriculture. It continues:

“In addition, 40 kilometres of rural access roads will be developed in Trinidad.”

Mr. Speaker, 2,000 kilometers of access roads and they want to say they are assisting agriculture by removing VAT on herbicide and weedicide, and the area where they must really put their money where their mouth is—that is to develop access to the agriculture—look what they do: 40 kilometres. That is about 25 miles of road. How could they say, when they give the impression by this document here that when they reduce VAT, they make these items zero rated and give the impression that they are assisting agriculture, how could we take them seriously when they are only going to have 25 miles of road in this whole country, Trinidad and Tobago, in the year 2004? I ask the question, is this sufficient, Mr. Speaker? Is this zero rating of this item five, because this section, the Second Schedule, is really zero rating, things which carry VAT, so that they would be exempt from VAT.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, is that a part of the Order here?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Which section is that?

**Mr. S. Panday:** The Legal Supplement, 149.

**Mr. Speaker:** No. This is why I asked you if it is part of the Order. I think you need to confine yourself to the Order.

**Mr. S. Panday:** As you please, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying is, the raising of the gasoline will put greater problems on the people, and not only that they have to pay higher prices for the gasoline, they do not even have roads to drive their vehicles. So, what happens is that they are not only being punished. I speak on behalf of the poor people, the agriculturists in Ortoire/Mayaro, that those poor people, not only would they bear the burden of a higher taxation, but there is no infrastructure for those persons.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I want to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to make this very brief intervention.

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Up until my colleague from Princes Town entered the debate, it was not my intention to make a contribution today, but I think it is important for me to make this short intervention so as to put certain things in perspective and hopefully, that they would not go careening over a cliff of misconception.

Mr. Speaker, the main component of my colleague's presentation this evening has to do with this amazing discovery in that social sector document which makes reference to the identification of the special problem and Government's intention to treat with the problems of Afro-Trinidadian males ages 17—24.

**Mr. Singh:** For my understanding, is it Afro-Trinidadian or Afro-males on the whole, because my understanding of the document is it is not confined to Afro-Trinidadians?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question is, but maybe in my presentation it will become clear. The reason I said it is amazing is because those persons who saw it and are putting the kinds of construction on it as my colleague from Princes Town is putting, I think it would be rather unfortunate that it becomes the basis on which we view our treatment of what is, in effect, special problems.

I want to go back to the issue. In Trinidad and Tobago, we have not, as a practice, identified groups in this way. In fact, it was the first time in my record that we have identified a particular group and observed that the problem is largely associated with one ethnic group against the other. Usually, we would speak a bit more globally, but our technicians, many of them are American trained.

It is quite normal in the environment in which they are trained in the United States to observe, collect data, make presentations and identify problems where the ethnic consideration or the people in the United States are Caucasian, Afro-American, Latino and, therefore, it is not a problem for technicians looking at problems in Trinidad and Tobago to see things in that context, but it is not common to have it referred in Government documents like that because that has not been our background. But that does not mean that our colleague should put the worst possible construction on it and in histrionics talking about the Government being racist and it is proof of all their findings, and so on. [*Desk thumping*].

You know, the American system is such that—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I really want to talk to you, so could I get some protection. The reason I say it is amazing, those of us who looked at the document when it was prepared, did not see this devil that would create this conflagration, but if it so offends those on the other side and if we find it offensive, then the Government would not fuel that offence but, by the same token, if they are talking about taking us to the United Nations and wherever to account for some crime we have committed, we plead not guilty. [*Desk thumping*] Because you see, a few weeks ago—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Would you not agree that the reason focus is paid on racial groups in America is because the Hispanics and the Afro-Americans are indeed small minorities compared to the wide population and, therefore, have been the victims of a lot of government policy? But in Trinidad and Tobago, where we have almost equal numbers, that introducing something like that in a public document would be rather offensive?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I do not know that I am agreeing with your contribution but maybe when I am finished making my contribution you would understand what I was trying to say.

Mr. Speaker, only a few weeks ago there was an election in California, and one of the propositions in that election, to be voted upon by the electorate then, was whether, in fact, they should eliminate the practice of Government making any reference whatsoever to a person's ethnicity, race etc. because the national database identifies the people as Caucasian, Latino, Afro, and so on.

Persons now are taking the same position that my colleague from Princes Town is taking, that there is, in fact, a suspicion that the State would use this information in a way that is racist and, therefore, if the state is denied that information, the state would be forced to treat each person equally. That is the

reason why the proposition was voted upon where people were saying government should not identify one by virtue of one's ethnic background for national statistics. Only a few weeks ago.

I did not see in the American Congress or in the American House of Representatives that Members of either side of the floor were getting up and saying that what they have in America is a racist government hell-bent on creating racial action against these people, but here in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a reference to a particular problem which I will come to in a moment, as identified, and that problem has somehow fallen as rain in the garden of those who want to convince the country that the Government is racist and its intentions are racist.

Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. Government is always having to treat with, first, to identify special situations, to identify special problems, to identify causes, identify solutions, as it treats with separate sectors of the community. In this case, the problem in that document is a problem that the technicians have identified as largely being associated with a particular group of people, and I will come back to that.

It is not uncommon that the Government identified orphans and treat them in a certain way, if they require special attention; the Government identified children who are differently able and treated them in a certain way; the Government identified teenaged pregnancies as a problem and single mothers who are heads of households and sometimes has special programmes to treat with their particular problem. Not that we are advocating that that is a way of life and should be encouraged, but it is a problem to be dealt with and, therefore, the Government identifies the problem, identifies the persons involved and from time to time there are special programmes for that.

The Government identified farmers and, in certain cases, special programmes are outlined for those people. Fishermen get special programmes. Talk about Tobago, here is a geographical consideration. The people of Tobago seem to have special needs and special problems, therefore, when the Government says "We are going to treat with a particular group", in this case, the particular problem happens to be observed to be largely confined to a group of people who are identified in this case as the Afro-males, largely the Afro-youth.

**Mr. Ramnath:** But that is statistically incorrect. There are problems with all groups in the society.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I am not saying no. We have problems with all groups. Mr. Speaker, there are problems that apply to the urban community which may

not have the same occurrence in the rural community. There are certain problems that will end up as urban problems and require solutions which are not applicable to the rural consideration and vice versa.

Mr. Speaker, we would be burying our heads in the sand if in this country we do not acknowledge the underperformance of the urban Afro-male in Trinidad and Tobago. That is a fact. All the data collection has shown, and the quicker we come to grips with that and begin to treat with it, the better for the quality of life of all of us in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

A significant number of problems in Trinidad and Tobago can be related directly, first to the breakdown of family life in the African community in Trinidad and Tobago and, as a result of the fact that the bulk of that population lives in the East-West Corridor and the problems are more intense in the urban districts in the East-West Corridor and those problems are known to the social workers and they are known to Government. Insofar as the Government identifies those problems, if those on the other side do not want to identify those problems, the Government has a duty to identify those problems and to treat with them.

At primary school level, at secondary school level, at university level, the Afro-Trinidadian male is an underperformer in the Trinidad and Tobago community and the Government is aware of that. And the Government cannot be aware of that and not see it as a problem to be dealt with. If it is a problem to be dealt with, then solutions of one kind or another will have to apply to that problem. If we identify the problem and in this case we say it is the Afro-youth that is at risk, why should my colleagues on the other side be behaving as though we have declared war on those who are of another ethnic group, and this is proof of Government's intention of the worst crime? Why do they have to put the worst possible construction on it?

To lift you up does not mean I have to pull him down. [*Desk thumping*] It is possible to lift you up and allow him to climb as well. What they are saying, which is what I rise here today to reject categorically, is that any programme of this Government to assist the Afro-Trinidadian male will be at the expense of any other person in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not necessary to pull down one group to build up another group. [*Desk thumping*] That is the fallacy of the argument.

Mr. Speaker, in education, if you take time to look at the statistics, if you take time to talk to the social workers, the fact would be demonstrated that the Afro-Trinidadian male is an underperformer in the national community of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The question is—

**Mr. Sharma:** Thank you to the PNM. That is the statistics.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** He could say that. The bottom line is the Government acknowledges that that is a problem that has to be dealt with. It has to be dealt with, otherwise the effect of not dealing with it would be there for all of us across the country, because if there is a body of people who have aspirations of the good life, like everybody else, but they do not have the means or the mechanism to enter as productive citizens, they would become a problem for the rest of the country. If all they are left to do is to impregnate the young Afro-Trinidadian female creating another generation of underperformance, they enter into a cycle of perpetual poverty and destruction and the Government has to deal with that. [*Desk thumping*]

So if the Government, in its development programme, identified and in fact, is as specific to say as we have not been saying before that we identify a problem in the Afro-male community and we will deal with that, what is the problem with talking about the Afro-male?

We have gone ahead, as a result of treating with our country's finances and economics, we have taken action in Central Trinidad with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited. Arising out of those actions is a section of the population which is largely Indo-Trinidadian who would require special attention from the State. Suppose we say that the programmes for retraining at Caroni (1975) Limited, if the statistics show that there are a number of Indo-Trinidadian males who are now out of the sugar industry and require training and support, if any reference is made to them as by their ethnicity, it would be offensive. What Members are saying on the other side is that they do not—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Apologize and done!

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** For what!

**Mr. Ramnath:** Enill apologized.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. Ramnath:** You are talking stupidity!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I am simply trying to ask my colleague—

**Mr. Sharma:** Would you give way?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I gave way to my colleague from Couva South.

**Mr. Sharma:** You asked a question.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I am not prepared to give way to you. You are provoking me. If my colleague from Couva South can identify for me exactly what the offence is, I would be very happy to apologize. Until the offence is identified—I am serious, because I am saying if the Government has done something which is found to be justifiably offensive to our colleagues in the national community, we have a duty to apologize, but I am asking him. You are calling on me to apologize, I am trying to explain to you how the problem is identified, what the nature is, if you can show me where the wrongdoing is, I will apologize. I give way. I give way to my colleague.

**Mr. Ramnath:** I am saying, Mr. Speaker, to my honourable friend that his ministerial colleague in another place got up and categorically withdrew that aspect of what was written, what was quoted with respect to the identification of Afro-Trinidadian males and said it was the printer's devil at work. I am asking now the Minister of Planning and Development whether he disagrees with the position taken by a Cabinet colleague?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I am not in the other place. I am not talking about what somebody else said. The document was presented here. The content of the document is the subject of debate. I am responding to the content. I gave my colleague the opportunity not to tell me what somebody else said or did. I asked him to tell me exactly what is the offence [*Desk thumping*] and if I think an apology is warranted, I would give one.

What I am saying here in this short contribution is that under normal circumstances we would not refer to a problem in that way. It being referred in that way and is found to have been taken in the worst possible construction by our colleagues on the other side, we would not press the point, but to come and say we have committed an offence and you found the holy grail of PNM racism is absolute nonsense! It is hogwash! [*Desk thumping*]

When they say they are going to carry us to the international community over that statement, the point I was making, take us to Washington international community and you will meet all the officers there who deal with the American system where it is commonplace to identify problems in that very said manner. I do not know. They seem so happy to say “Yes, in Trinidad and Tobago, racism prevails” and I reject that, Mr. Speaker. It is not so. This Government has no racist agenda. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government of which I am a part, the PNM Government, has no racist agenda, and the reason they have not been able to raise their political fortunes is because they have hitched their wagon to talking about racism and they are not finding very many followers, and if what they are saying was true, when they blow their trumpet like the Pied Piper they would have thousands running behind them, but the people of this country know otherwise. They have not been able to convince people that what they are saying is true. [*Desk thumping*]

It is one thing to say you have an objection to the way it is presented. It is one thing to say it should not be presented that way because it may lead to disquiet and suspicion, but to come and say it is proof of racism, nonsense! I, as an Afro-Trinidadian and a member of the Government, as a member of the community, I would say not enough is being said about the shortcomings of this nature in the Afro-Trinidadian population. Not enough people are being told about what the real problem is in that particular community and there needs to be some serious public dialogue over it because there are problems in there. [*Desk thumping*]

It seems as if every time you hear about a problem in Trinidad and Tobago, the problem is in the indo community because the indo spokespersons behave as though somebody has an agenda against them. Mr. Speaker, that is not true at all. We have just celebrated Divali in this country.

**Mr. Sharma:** How much money you got?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** It is not about money. It is about living together in harmony and respecting each other. It is not our money. It is not about how much money I gave them and how much money you thief. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Member for Oropouche and Member for Princes Town, certainly—Fyzabad, sorry—the Member is on his feet and you cannot sit in your seats and crosstalk like that at all.

**Mr. S. Panday:** When they do it, it is okay.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member for Princes Town, please, maybe you should come back up here.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, no, he cannot take it, because what he would like to prevail is his skewed and falsified argument aimed at creating discord. If that is allowed to prevail, he could take that, but I am saying that the Afro-Trinidadian community has issues which need to be ventilated, and if this matter serves to begin the ventilation, then so be it. [*Desk thumping*]

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[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

*Monday, October 27, 2003*

A few weeks ago I went to Laventille and I was talking to a gathering of Laventille residents about the crime in the community. I said to them directly, "The Government can do certain things for you outside your home. You have a responsibility to treat with what goes on inside your home and some of you are encouraging criminal conduct in your community." I got a standing ovation. But from Rienza Complex I got a criticism, seeking again to create discord, "Rowley went to Laventille and attacked Laventille people."

I was not aware I attacked Laventille people. I was telling them about the problem that they are living in, and there needs to be more of that in this country. It is not a question of who is in the minority and a large minority and small minority. These are issues of national importance. It is the same thing with urban unemployment. It is the same thing to do with unemployment in general in the country, and that is why every time they get up and attack programmes that are targeted programmes and say it is not equity, if they cannot differentiate between equity and equality, then why are they in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago?

If I have \$1 million and you have one dollar and we have something to share and they give me \$10 and give you the same \$10, that is equality, because we get the equal amount, but in terms of achieving an ability to purchase, giving the millionaire \$10 and giving the man with one dollar \$10, that is not equity. It is equality, but not equity, because the man with a dollar would say "I have a greater claim because I have a greater need." All I am asking my friends on the other side is to not put the worst construction on something that they might disagree with.

If what they want to say is that they do not appreciate problems being identified along ethnic lines because then it may lead to developments of whatever it is, quotas or affirmative action and things like that, let us have an intellectual debate on that, but do not get up on your high horse and start to prance about the Government having a racist agenda and this is proof of that and the other. It diminishes all of us.

I am saying, do not keep selling the Indian community short, because they are not as stupid as you think. They live here amongst us and they know what is going down. This Parliament is only a part of it. The politics is only a part of it. There are many people who in their day-to-day lives pay no attention to the politics of the country, but they pay attention to the social order and social things of country.

The politicians are becoming largely irrelevant to these people. Because if every time they get up to speak, every single issue is about a person's racial

construction, then sooner or later, even those they are appealing to would get bored with it. Therefore, all I am asking those on the other side is do not misinterpret what is there; do not pretend as though we do not have a problem with the Afro-Trinidadian males. We have a problem, and if they do not want to acknowledge that problem, those of us in the Government have a duty to acknowledge it and we will treat with it.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Did you conduct a study to determine whether the 17—24 group of which you speak that requires special attention is peculiar to one race in the country? Have you studied the other races in the country to come up with this need to establish this action that is contemplated?

Secondly, you asked what is offensive. Is COSTAATT to adjust its intake policy to reflect this concern? Is COSTAATT going to change its priorities in terms of admission? Although all citizens are qualified, are you now going to create a priority list based on race? That is what I am saying is offensive. Would you care to elaborate?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** The answer is no. It is not about creating an admission list based on race. It is an agency which could become part of the mechanism which the Government uses to treat with the problem. Because if, take the case of the Laventille Rum Bond which is now being converted into a training centre. When that programme was launched recently, a major local spokesperson attacked the programme saying that it was a demonstration of racism on the part of the Government, because we were going to build this thing in Laventille when we could have built it in Central Trinidad where it was more acceptable to the national community.

**3.30 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, that is missing the point completely. We are using the Rum Bond in Laventille because there is a population in and around Laventille for which there is a need to create opportunity for training.

**Mr. Ramnath:** But is it open to everybody?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Of course it is! Because of the acknowledgement that in this particular geographical area there is a greater need and a larger number of persons, hence the location.

**Mr. Ramnath:** But this document does not say so!

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** If the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) is required to extend its reaches to that

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particular group that is acknowledged to be under-performing, it does not mean that COSTAATT will be closing its door to other people. If we had taken the same argument that you have now taken four years ago, we would have been in this Parliament assailing this country with your argument. When you built the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT) in Couva, we did not accuse you of racism. [*Crosstalk*]

Hold on! When you built TTIT in Couva, not one PNM Member of Parliament came to this Parliament and said it was racism. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, the programmes were largely unknown to the wider national community; but what was worse, while I am saying here that whatever COSTAATT will do for the Afro-Trinidadian male of 17 to 24 years will not be at the expense of others, when you built TTIT you downgraded the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute. [*Desk thumping*]

When you came into office you met 2,500 students at John Donaldson; you downgraded that number to 800 and you built TTIT in Couva. We did not come here and accuse you of racism; we did not try to burn down the country; we did not try to create racial discord. We said that we were going out there to win the election and run the country with equity and fairness, and we have done that. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we are “haar” and you are “thaar”. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Speak to the converted!

**Mr. Ramsaran:** That is why they call you the Rottweiler.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** We are not prepared to sit here and be accused of racism, day in and day out, when the facts speak for themselves, that if there are any racists in this Parliament, they are on the other side. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Let any one of them say that when they came into office they did not meet the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute with a population of students upwards of 2,000. By the time they were finished with it, it was down to 350. In the interim, while they downgraded John Donaldson, which was serving the East/West Corridor and the Afro-males 17 to 24 years, they built a brand new institute in Couva. When I saw the graduation list from that institute, it was about 85 per cent Indo-Trinidadian. [*Desk thumping*] I did not burn down the country; I did not quarrel; I did not accuse anybody. [*Crosstalk*] You do not have to pull down one group to build up another group. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Ramsaran:** [*Words expunged*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** You do not do have to do that, and the PNM is not doing that; we have a target.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member for Chaguanas, you cannot sit in your seat and shout across to the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Words expunged*] Really and truly, I find it very offensive; it is offensive, and all this race talk in this House is becoming a disgrace, not only to the Chair, but also to the national community. [*Interruption*] I am addressing Members of Parliament!

**Mr. Ramnath:** I notice that you are addressing the Member for Chaguanas.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member is the one who sat there and said—[*Words expunged*] I am addressing the Members of this entire House! It is high time that we stop this race talk; it is not doing you any good and it is not doing the country any good!

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I enunciate the Government's policy, I am trying to put my colleagues on the other side at ease. This Government has no policy to advance one group beyond the other. [*Desk thumping*] Our policy is to create increased opportunities in tertiary education for all our citizens. [*Desk thumping*] When we said that COSTAATT will target a particular problem and that we will expand the college, it is not at the expense of A to feed B. When we say that the University of the West Indies, a regional institution, cannot treat with our expectation to expand our tertiary intake to the level that we aspire within Vision 2020, we did not complain about who did what at John Donaldson and TTIT. We said that we were going to build a new university of Trinidad and Tobago for the sons and daughters of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the same way that there were those who felt that at Independence an independent country with a PMM government would be to the detriment of a racial group, and our independence has been something which we now hold with pride, I am sure that in the not too distant future, when there is a fully operational university of Trinidad and Tobago, with a full intake of sons and daughters from all across the country, from all ethnic divides and geographical locations, then they will say, "Yes, you have kept your promise to the people of Trinidad and Tobago."

**Mr. Ramnath:** Try hard; try hard!

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** We are about developing all our people, and that is why our target is the way it is. We are targeting increased opportunity at the

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primary and secondary schools, tertiary level, the Hospitality Training Institute at Chaguaramas, the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology in Couva, the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and the campus in Tobago. Where is the racism in that? [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** Female heads of households?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Female heads of households is a category of people; we identified them as a problem and we have solutions to assist. Because you see an opportunity here, you see the word “Afro”, you see a problem identified with a particular group of people, rather than empathize with the problem, you seek gas to throw on fire. [*Crosstalk*] I agree; I agree.

When we come to this Parliament to do Government Business, we are not Indian, African, Chinese and Syrian; we are the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] If you have found that methodology, that formulation, to be unacceptable, then say so.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is an attack on the Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** The Prime Minister is not responsible for that document.

**Mr. S. Panday:** You put it in! [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** You could say what you want; you could keep on pursuing your line of argument. My own advice to you is that when you look over your shoulder, you would see less and less people behind you, because there are more people in this country who have sense. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Do not worry about that.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to waste any more time on this matter, because I agree with you; there is too much race talk in this Parliament and in this country. [*Desk thumping*] If we focus on the real problems of this country, all that “dotish” talk and “dotishness” will not be around, and we will be able to focus on the problems; we will have solutions; we will go forward as a people and our country will become the paradise that it has the potential to become. [*Desk thumping*]

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am instructing the Hansard reporter and the press that the reference by the Member for Chaguamas to the Member for Diego Martin West be struck off the record and that it not be printed in the media.

**Mr. Ganga Singh** (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, I got the distinct impression that his argument supporting the policy position of the Government in that document, really brought to mind the editorial in yesterday's *Newsday* newspaper which read: "With its pants down". The hon. Member attempted to justify, in this country, the approach by the Government to target a particular group, in a society that is diverse, in a society that is multiracial. He is targeting a particular group.

One would have thought that the hon. Member would have dealt with the whole issue of male underachievement in the society; but the Government is seeking to deal with Afro-male underachievement in the society; that is what we find offensive. [*Crosstalk*] The issue is not one of Afro-male underachievement, but rather male underachievement in the society. So if you seek to use the resources of the State to provide a particular grouping with those kinds of resources, then you are discriminating against a significant proportion of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** They have no statistics to back it up!

**Mr. G. Singh:** One would have thought that a proper Minister of Planning and Development would have said, "Look, the technocrats have done a study," and he would have made that study available to us publicly, as parliamentarians, so that we could have had an informed approach to this issue, and would have brought together all the plans you have in place to deal with this issue of male underachievement in this country. Instead, we had a defence of something that is highly discriminatory and prejudicial and, really, betrays the Constitution and the national anthem of this country.

When he seeks to couch it in the context of the head of single parent homes, female heads of households, there is no commonality with respect to that kind of approach. It is clear that the female heads of households make no distinction with respect to ethnicity. [*Crosstalk*] A female head of household, single parent, there is no distinction. There is not necessarily that kind of approach, but when you have an approach that favours one particular ethnic group, then you have a problem.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read into the record the editorial in the *Newsday* newspaper of Sunday, October 26, 2003, entitled:

"With its pants down

The Government was caught with its pants down in the Senate on Thursday and its subsequent attempts to cover up the embarrassment not only failed to

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achieve the desired result but actually created more confusion. The exposure was made by Opposition Senator Wade Mark who interrupted the Budget contribution of Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education Danny Montano, asking him to clarify an item in the Budget document ‘Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004.’

The UNC senator read from the document’s policy objective for the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts (COSTAATT) which, under Principal Strategies and Measures, reads: ‘Establish targeted recruitment programmes for male Trinidadians aged 17—24, especially Afro-Trinidadian males.’

In calling on the Minister to clarify this stated policy objective, Senator Mark wanted to know whether it was a typographical error or a deliberate attempt by the PNM government to discriminate. ‘Is this a Cudjoe quota society?’ he asked.

To begin with, we must say that we are quite alarmed that, in planning for the establishment of COSTAATT, which is to form the nucleus of the country’s new university, the Government should see the need to have such racially biased recruitment programmes.”

Not one UNC Senator said that, Mr. Speaker. It was the editorial rider in Sunday’s *Newsday* newspaper. They said:

“...in planning for the establishment of COSTAATT, which is to form the nucleus of the country’s new university, the Government should see the need to have such racially biased recruitment programmes.”

The article continues:

“We believe that, in a multi-ethnic society such as ours, where every creed and race should find an equal place, such programmes will inevitably be seen as inequitable, discriminatory and provocative and will only lead to an aggravation of social tensions which are already a serious cause for concern.”  
[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** I thank the Member for giving way. Could you tell me from where you are reading?

**Mr. G. Singh:** I am reading from the *Newsday* newspaper of Sunday, October 26, 2003.

**Dr. Rowley:** I just want to ask you: Is that the newspaper that is funded by drug dealers and written by—[*Crosstalk*] I am just asking.

**Mr. G. Singh:** I will respond. I will not be distracted, because I am dealing with a very sensitive issue that can give rise to an increase in communal tensions

in this country; therefore, we must take into consideration what the people within the editorial staff are saying. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, the article continues:

“Such a policy, in fact, will only provide further ammunition for those bent on fomenting racial strife in our country. In any case, we see it as totally unnecessary in a society such as ourselves where educational opportunities are open and available to all from the earliest stages and where progress and success depend on personal effort and application.

In our view, all that is required as far as tertiary education is concerned is to ensure that the procedures for entry are manifestly fair, that they operate without bias or prejudice, that the set criteria are applied equitably to all applicants.

Secondly, we are quite surprised by the Minister’s response to Senator Mark’s demand. Mr. Montano actually defended the policy by saying: ‘That is where we have a major social problem. It’s not affirmative action but a social action to deal with a social problem. Any segment of this society that needs special attention will get it. There is nothing strange or sinister about it.’

Very much the argument raised by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West.

The editorial writer goes on to say:

“If that is so, then will the Government explain to the country exactly what is the nature of this ‘major social problem’ it sees among Afro-Trinidad males that would require COSTAATT to have such a special recruitment programme?

But later along came Senator Conrad Enill, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, not to offer any explanations but to create more confusion by declaring that the policy expressed in the Government’s Social and Economic Policy Framework did not in fact reflect Government’s policy and now they wanted to correct it.

Virtually contradicting his ministerial colleague, Senator Conrad Enill said ‘all the programmes that we have are for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago,’ and, therefore, they would want to delete the part about ‘Afro Trinidadian males.’

Senator Enill has sought to pull up the Government’s pants but many, we are sure, will still wonder about what the slip has revealed.”

It is, therefore, very clear that in a society as ours, when you sit as a government, it is not to discriminate against any section of your population; this is an attempt, by targeting this particular grouping in a manner that seeks to deprive others in the recruitment process.

Mr. Speaker, COSTAATT, currently under Dr. Hoyte, who is in charge of recruitment, has gone to three particular areas in Trinidad. It has gone to the schools in Arima and Laventille and started the recruitment process already; so what Sen. Enill said has already been implemented as part of the COSTAATT recruitment process, in order to take care of this policy position. It is doing that recruitment without any regard to admission qualifications. So we have a state-funded organization utilizing taxpayers' money.

When we pay tax in this country, Mr. Speaker, we do not differentiate. A taxpayer is not somebody who is Indian, African, Chinese, white or mixed up; a taxpayer is a taxpayer, and, therefore, when the child of that taxpayer applies for admission to COSTAATT, because of the affirmative action programme, there is less chance of that child getting in. It is weighted in such a way that the Afro-Trinidadian male has an inherent bias in the admission to COSTAATT. That is wrong in policy; it is wrong in principle. That kind of racial bias is taking place. I know you do not want us to talk about it, but that is the reality. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** I told Members to stop referring to one another as racist. Let me further state that in future I would take it as a breach of Standing Order 36(4), because I do think it is offensive. Please continue.

**Mr. G. Singh:** When what is taking place is in our face, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West wants us to deny that reality. If there is a statistical basis for dealing with male underachievement in the society, I would agree that there need to be measures, but those measures must not be like sleight of hand, must not be within the body of a document that has to be revealed in the Parliament of this country. We must debate that issue, present a proper paper upon the issue, but sleight of hand—*[Crosstalk]*—they want to practise the racism in this country, and then stay quiet about it. *[Crosstalk]*

**Hon. Member:** Put it in a book!

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please! You cannot sit there and—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Ramnath:** He is terrorizing me.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member speaks of the technocrats being trained in the American system, and, therefore, they look at things through ethnic lenses; that is his justification for saying that.

**Dr. Rowley:** I did not say that.

**Mr. G. Singh:** I am interpreting what you said. You said that because the technocrats were trained in America, they went through the document with a certain perspective, and were accustomed to looking at things through an ethnic lens. That is fundamentally flawed in a small society like ours. The American system has no applicability, but Cudjoe is their new ideologue. The College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts is demonstrating that it is proceeding on a quota system, on affirmative action, because that is part of the Cudjoe ideology.

I raised this matter at the last Provisional Collection of Taxes Order debate. I talked about this whole culture of entitlement and preference. If you proceed on the basis that certain persons have a preference and an entitlement to state resources, then you are going down the road to creating anarchy in this society. You cannot allow government policy to take that approach.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin West also spoke about the rural/urban dichotomy and about the underperformance of the urban African male. Where is the statistical basis for that? Where is the report that suggests that? What do you have that you are not making available to this Parliament? Is it talk on the street? Where is the empirical basis that would inform your policy prescription? We ought to be provided the benefit of that, so we can make an informed decision and contribution, but the hon. Member merely arrives at these conclusions.

In dealing with this issue of male underachievement in the society—and I am using the words “male underachievement”, because when you look at the cohort in all the tertiary level areas, whether in the private or public sector, you are seeing male underachievement. Male underachievement has no ethnic bias; it is across the board, but as a government, you are not dealing with that; you are singling out one ethnic group for treatment. That is wrong in principle, because, in fact, you are now institutionalizing racism at the tertiary education level.

When we are dealing with this issue of male underachievement, we have to focus on the pre-school, primary and secondary levels. You do not seek to water down the admission requirements at the tertiary level and expect to get that level of male achievement. You have to deal with the symptoms that exist at the primary and secondary school levels.

The hon. Member is saying, “Look, when we lay emphasis as Government policy on this particular Afro-Trinidadian male in the 17—25 age group, we are not dealing with them at the expense of other racial groups”. Mr. Speaker, there are limited places in COSTAATT. We started COSTAATT. Therefore, if you have a

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quota system policy of ensuring the admission of Afro-Trinidadian males as a priority, it must come at the expense of other persons, including women, and other ethnic groups, because you have that bias. It is a bias that discriminates against women and all other ethnic groups. You cannot tell me that this is going to take place, and other groups will not be affected. That kind of statement from the Minister of Planning and Development cannot withstand empirical scrutiny.

The Minister ought to tell us now what is the intake into COSTAATT and the ethnic distribution of that intake. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Members:** What about TTIT?

**Mr. G. Singh:** All the areas. He ought to tell us, because of the policy of the Government for the affirmative action that is taking place, the impact of that in the intake of COSTAATT. The Member shied away from that.

The hon. Member raised the issue of TTIT. The matriculation requirements for TTIT are very clear. If anyone on that side could say that the students getting into TTIT have not fulfilled the minimum requirement for admission, in the context of matriculation and educational requirements, then you can talk about TTIT in the same context as this policy position, but until that time, you cannot speak about that. If on the basis of meritocracy people have been admitted to the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology, you cannot say that is the approach; you cannot equate it. [*Crosstalk*] Everybody has access to that.

The fact that it was physically located in an abandoned building which was redeveloped by virtue of private sector involvement, when you attack TTIT, you are really attacking the private sector in this country. The Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology is funded, to a large extent, by private sector moneys; so the private sector is part of the governing body of TTIT. To get into the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology, meritocracy is important; merit and the quality of grades that you have; now you want to make that kind of parity unacceptable. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** The location has to do with Pt. Lisas and the southern industrial belt.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Clearly, this policy intends to create admission criteria in which ethnicity, meaning African male, once you have that criteria then it is weighted in your favour, within the 17—25 age category. The Constitution guarantees us, as a fundamental right, equality of opportunity in this society. If this Government is discriminating against people or for people, on the basis of

ethnicity, then that particular measure is unconstitutional. How can you do that as a government?

The hon. Member was out on a limb trying to justify that position. The Member for Diego Martin West was the person careening over that cliff. Once you start this approach, what about the ethnic minority groups in the society like persons who came from the Carib and Arawak background, Chinese, Portuguese? So you have embarked on a policy position of the Government. They are changing the paradigm of how we make policy, so they are making policy on the basis of ethnicity. Then, when you talk about it, they say that we are crying wolf; we are crying race.

Mr. Speaker, this is being done, not in a context of where this Government has been an angel with respect to dealing with other ethnic groups; this is in the context of a background with this Government that has dealt with other ethnic groups. In all the statutory authorities they have removed people. I remember that when the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central sat on this chair, on this side, he raised the issue of recruitment into the Coast Guard and could not justify it.

**Mr. Valley:** I did!

**Mr. G. Singh:** No, you did not. You could not justify it, but when we raised the issue, you made all kinds of allegations. Stay quiet about race! We will not allow this issue to be swept under the carpet. This is not an issue to be swept under the carpet. The Member for Tobago East raised the issue of racism. She said that all she hears from this side is race.

**Mr. Ramnath:** In her maiden contribution.

**Mr. G. Singh:** In her maiden contribution, but I know she has her own problem in dealing with Tobago. It tells you how raw the nerve is in this country. On the last occasion, I told the hon. Member for San Fernando East that he should read the article by George John, a man who has traversed several administrations, and who spoke about the rising communal tensions in this society. Matters like these: COSTAATT, where recruitment is taking place on the basis of ethnicity, preferential treatment, creating an entitlement, are going to further exacerbate the communal tensions in the society. This does none of us good.

**Mr. Ramnath:** They did a “ting” and got caught.

**Mr. G. Singh:** All this arose out of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, which seeks to impose on the gambling and betting institutions an increase

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in taxation. Last year there was a 200 per cent increase; this year there is an 800 per cent increase. So it appears to me that the policy of the Government in this area is punitive and oppressive; I indicated that on the last day. It further carries out that kind of approach. What is your objective in all this?

Mr. Speaker, in the *Business Express* of October 15, 2003, in an article by David Brewster: "Chips down for casino owners" it states:

"Casino owners have been dropped to the canvas again following Government's whopping increase in taxation announced by Prime Minister Patrick Manning in his National Budget unveiled Oct. 6.

And they are likely to stay down for the full count, knocked out, as a result of what they described as a 'crushing blow', an increase of up to 800 per cent in taxation on the struggling local gaming industry.

The blow was a follow up to last year's hike when a staggering 200 per cent increase was slapped on the gambling houses.

Hardly had they recovered when Manning delivered his shocker, revealing that taxes on slot machines would jump from \$2,000 to \$10,000 and taxes on poker tables from \$8,000 to \$20,000.

Other tables and devices, except pool tables, would now fetch a fee of \$10,000."

I want a bit of clarification. I hope that the Member for Diego Martin Central, in his winding up, would tell us whether the \$2,000 per annum for every pool table is applicable to the pool tables some people have in their homes as their own personal recreation. I am not sure whether or not it falls within that ambit. [Interruption]

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, is it correct to say that casinos in this country are banned by law?

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East has the services of an hon. Attorney General, therefore, that question ought to be directed to her. How long she may be in office again is a matter for him to decide, but, certainly, the incoming John Jeremy will be able to answer him.

My answer to him is that it is clear there is no legislation providing for casino operations in this country. However, the legislation provides for private members clubs. Under the guise of private members clubs, there has evolved a whole industry that is, effectively, a casino industry in this country. [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Imbert:** Under the UNC!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Mr. G. Singh:** Earlier on, the Member talked about taking a blind eye approach; it would be blind for you not to recognize the reality; blind for you not to recognize that the private members clubs have evolved in a certain way.

Mr. Speaker, I continue to read from the article:

“The increase was widely interpreted by owners as an obvious move by Government to wipe the gambling industry out of existence in one fell swoop.”

I heard the hon. Member for San Fernando East talking about three fell swoops; three strikes and you are out; I understand the baseball example. It is exactly that kind of signal. Last year you increased it; this year you increased it. I recall reading Sen. Enil saying that next year they also plan to increase it, because gambling is not consistent with the Government’s Vision 2020. That is what he said.

Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of the hon. Prime Minister an approach where you crystallize your personal preferences into public policy, not unlike what is happening with the Afro-Trinidadian male in the 17—25 age group. What do they do in the first world societies? They take a much more liberal approach to these things and ensure that the consumer has the opportunity for choice.

On the last occasion, I brought to the attention of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the Sir Alan Budd report on gambling and betting in Britain. They went into a detailed White Paper of the emergence of gambling and betting as leisure activities in the society. Not unlike our own legislation, they were moving forward into the future and dealing with issues of Internet gambling and so forth. This whole compendium of a report, a White Paper, indicated that the approach they were taking was okay. They understand the issues of the day dealing with the danger of gambling and the moral argument with respect to gambling, but they felt that the individual must have that choice to make, and that it was not the role of the government to be paternalistic to the extent where you exclude people from making choices as to how they should enjoy their evenings.

**Mr. Manning:** I really thank the hon. Member for giving way again. Hon. Member, to complete your contribution as a proper academic examination of the issue, could you tell us the legal framework against which that report has been conceived?

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, this is a White Paper entitled: The Sir Alan Budd Review Committee on Gambling and Betting. The legal framework is not unlike the one we have in our law. They suggested that you need to move further; you need to set up a gaming commission and the kind of legal architecture that would regulate and monitor the gambling taking place.

I want to deal with the moral issue, because when Sen. Enill said that it was inconsistent with their Vision 2020, it raised a moral issue. This is what is said at 3.22 of the White Paper:

“The moral argument

- 3.22 We have received submissions stating that gambling should be restricted (or banned completely) because it is morally wrong. The Rothschild Commission provided a valuable summary of the views it had received from various religious authorities but noted that none of those who gave their views urged that the law or public policy should be determined by their religious beliefs. The moral objections to gambling include the idea that it represents an opportunity to gain at the expense of others and to gain a reward without commensurate efforts.
- 3.23 It is difficult to judge how far current regulations are based on a moral disapproval of gambling but it is hard to escape from the sense that gambling, even if harmless, is best an unworthy activity.”

If the Government were consistent in dealing with gambling— They have taken an approach to tax the industry out of existence.

An *Express* newspaper article dealt with the whole issue of how many people are employed in this industry. I read from the *Business Express*:

“The work force in the average casino includes from waitresses, ground floor workers, tellers, entertainers, round-the-clock security officers, cashiers to accountants.

‘If we...can’t make it, a lot of people would be on the breadline. I hope the government could find jobs for at least half of them and remember they are all paid above the minimum wage,’ one official said.

But the consensus is that the industry is on its last legs, on the verge of losing a grim battle for survival. The 2,500 plus workers employed by the 12 local operating casinos soon would be in the land of oblivion.

‘It is obvious that the Prime Minister abhors gambling. He believes it is a dirty business and should not be tolerated,’ said a member from Opal Casino on Maraval Road, who insisted that his name be not revealed.

A top member of Xante Club on Ariapita Avenue added it was that government obviously have no knowledge or idea about the gaming industry.”

Mr. Speaker, this Government, in seeking to tax the gambling and betting operators out of existence, is being hypocritical because, at the same time, the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB) have entered into an agreement with GTECH to have video lottery terminals at over four locations throughout Trinidad. Do you understand the hypocrisy? On the one hand you are against gambling, but on the other you are promoting it as a state monopoly.

This is what Mr. Brian de Montrichard said:

“He lashed out at Government’s involvement in the state-run Play Whe, Lotto, Cash Pot, Lottery and Pick Two games, referring to them as ‘gambling games’ and accused the Government of practising ‘double standard’.

‘Not every body goes to church and many who do go are not really of God. As a matter of fact, I believe that the nearer the church...the further from God’.

He said that the many casinos indulge in clean fun and entertainment, a place for a man to relax after a hard day’s work, to ease some of his tension, and play a game of chance.

‘Most of our customers are really professionals—doctors, lawyers, politicians...hardly the hard working average man,’”

I do not gamble. [*Crosstalk*]

This is what George Laquis Jr. had to say:

“And in a recent interview George Laquis Jr, president of the Private Members Club Association, opined that members of the gaming industry were being discriminated against by the Government.

Laquis said last year’s sharp increase had put the ‘industry in jeopardy’.

He predicted many of these clubs would go out of business since they catered for a small section of the population with a certain type of disposable income. He said their market was only a local one without any tourist input so it would be impossible to survive at such a huge increase.

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He said the casinos that stay open would now have a smaller operation in terms of staff and equipment.

He pointed out that the clubs had high overhead costs, paying their staff well and having complementary food and drink.

Laquis asked if it was the intention of Government to close down the industry, then why were GTEC, the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB) and the Betting Levy Board (BLB) engaged in a deal to open four entertainment centres equipped with slot machines and off-track betting.

Laquis said that following last year's budget, the association had appealed to Government to reconsider their decisions.

'We outlined several proposals and went to them for help, but got nothing. They obviously have their own agenda'...

Laquis denied there were anything sinister or any underworld dealings in local casinos.

He said the outlets really cater to a small segment of the market, for the man with some disposable income, and not the man in the street."

So you have a situation where the Government is applying a very punitive and oppressive tax on a series of games that fall under this gaming and betting area. At the same time, a state institution, the National Lotteries Control Board, is engaged with GTECH in creating those very gambling outlets in malls and four areas in Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, what do you have here? You have the state entrenching the monopoly of its institution and attacking the private sector. Mr. Laquis said that they are being discriminated against. The question that arises is: Will the devices that the NCLB is utilizing attract the taxes as outlined in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order? Will NCLB be allowed to engage with GTECH and provide these four outlets with slot machines and video lottery terminals that will allow children to play in these malls? That alone dissipates the moral argument. They will have access to it.

**Mr. Ramnath:** What does the born-again Prime Minister have to say about that?

**Mr. G. Singh:** What is the response to that? Does the National Lotteries Control Board have legal jurisdiction to act in this matter? I noticed in Saturday's newspaper a citizen of this country claiming that he did not get the opportunity to

provide software to NCLB; he had the software, but the GTECH monopoly precluded him from approaching them.

**Mr. Ramnath:** I think you should fire that board.

**Mr. G. Singh:** You have a board that is, obviously, linked to certain members of the fraternity. You have a situation where these video lottery terminals will be used throughout the country. My understanding is that there are some 1,500 video lottery terminals in this country already. [*Crosstalk*] You know nothing of it?

**Mr. Manning:** The Minister of Finance knows nothing about it.

**Mr. G. Singh:** I am of the view that the Act does not allow the NLCB to engage in that activity. The Prime Minister assures me, therefore, they do not. The churches took out a full-page ad that said: "Mr. Prime Minister do not expand these opportunities of gambling; the state should not engage in that."

**Mr. Ramnath:** Make sure Reverend Paul is not one of them.

**Mr. G. Singh:** When the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central piloted the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, he talked about the whole question of them operating with certain illegal input; I think he mentioned money laundering, but if that is happening in the current industry, then it points to the crying need for legal architecture to govern that area.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central in his presentation talked about them mushrooming all over the country, notwithstanding the 200 per cent increase. What it tells you, from an economic perspective, is that there is a heightened demand for this area of entertainment and, therefore, there is the need for some kind of regulatory and monitoring mechanism. [*Crosstalk*] There is the need now for you now to bring the law and put it as part of your approach to deal with the legislation.

**Mr. Manning:** In other words, you are recommending a policy change and, therefore, a change in the law?

**Mr. G. Singh:** I am recommending a policy change to deal with the reality of the situation. The law is required to countenance that activity. The law requires that we have to deal with the reality today. If there is a deficiency or an omission in the law, then you need to deal with that. You are the Government of the day.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Let me ask him a question: There is the reality today that people drive under the

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influence of alcohol, is the hon. Member suggesting that we now change the law to recognize that reality and legitimize it?

**Mr. G. Singh:** The hon. Member knows well that because of alcohol consumption you have a series of accidents, so there is carnage on the road. It was the UNC's position, and I think it is this Government's position, to utilize the Breathalyzer in order to deal with the issue of alcohol consumption and driving in this country.

**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. [Mr. K. Ramnath]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. G. Singh:** I thank hon. Members for extending my time. [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is a quadratic equation.

**Mr. G. Singh:** In any society that has a certain value system, there is need for us to address the issues of the day. If the hon. Prime Minister is indicating that he will be bringing the Breathalyzer into law, and that would be part of the approach to deal with the whole question of carnage on the roads, we have indicated that we are supportive of the legislation.

The hon. Member must understand that in any activity in which there is a quantum leap taking place, if you seek to prohibit that activity, with the demand being as great as the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central indicated, it will go underground. My friend from Diego Martin West likes to use the American example, because of Cudjoe, of course. When there was the era of prohibition in America, did that stem the consumption of alcohol? [Crosstalk] No, not at all. What you had were the Seagram and the Kennedy families. In fact, up to today, the Kennedy clan still own the franchise for Dewars Scotch. [Crosstalk] You know that it is a good scotch.

Significant consumption of alcohol took place in the period of prohibition. Therefore, if you seek, punitively and oppressively, to go after gambling, what is going to happen? They are going to be removed from the formal economy and will go underground. What used to happen is that people would come together in their homes, because the equipment was there already. In fact, this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order gives recognition of the reality that I am talking about:

every Baccarat Table, Black Jack Table, Caribbean Stud Poker Table, Dice Table, Poker Table, Pool Table, Roulette Table, Rum 32 Table, Sip San Table, Slot Machine and every other device. So there is the recognition, by virtue of the law, that these things exist.

If you seek to take them outside the formal economy and send them underground, you are not going to get the benefit of the taxes which you have imposed. Therefore, your policy measure is destined for failure, if you do not take that into consideration, because there would be non-compliance rather than compliance. In fact, you would no longer have the employment of these waiters, waitresses, barmen, tellers and accountants, the over 2,500 people that they speak of who are employed in these 12 private members clubs.

Mr. Speaker, with 2020 vision, I do not think that the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the Minister of Finance, really understands what is happening. What is going to happen to Internet gambling? This piece of legislation seeks to deal with, physically, the tables and slot machines. Internet gambling is a reality, and they will run it from a little station anywhere. They would put down their server and operate it; they would take an approach outside the existing law. It points to the area that is necessary to deal with this issue realistically.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea, and will be resumed at 5.05 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.07 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, prior to the tea break, I was making the point that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003 deals with the physical entities of certain types of tables and slot machines, but it does not deal with the area of Internet gambling. When you look, you recognize that there is a current legal regime dealing with this area of gaming. However, as I have indicated, the current legislation is inadequate and really inappropriate to deal with what has evolved as an industry and, perhaps, continued growth, and the Government, in an attempt to discourage it, has provided very punitive taxation measures. I was making the point that when you take that approach people go underground and there is still the proliferation of this type of activity.

In the Caribbean islands, whether it is Antigua, St. Lucia, Barbados, St. Maarten, Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic, you have that level of gambling activity taking place and perhaps the Government ought to look at the kind of legal regime in those countries.

**Mr. Manning:** What is it in the Bahamas?

**Mr. G. Singh:** That is a matter for your technocrats to deal with. But there is gambling activity; there is casino gambling linked to tourism taking place in the Bahamas and therefore they must look at that in the context of what is emerging in the society and in the context of the leisure activity.

I was pointing out the hypocrisy of the Government, really, in dealing with that. On the one hand, there is punitive taxation; on the other hand, there is permission for the National Lotteries Control Board to engage in widespread activity. I read from an article in the *Saturday Express* of October 25, at page 15 written by Prior Beharry, entitled “Gambling operators put off by new gaming machines”. It is quoting George Laquis Jr., President of the Association of Private Members’ Clubs. He says:

“If the Government wanted to clamp down on illegal activities at private members’ clubs, he said, it could appoint a body to monitor and regulate the activities of these clubs.

Laquis explained that his association comprised private members’ clubs, as distinct from casinos which did not operate on a membership basis.

On the announcement that the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB) and GTECH were entering into an agreement which would see video lottery terminals (VLTs) featuring traditional casino-type games in facilities at Gulf City, MovieTowne, Chaguanas and San Fernando, Laquis asked: ‘Would they operate as we do as private members’ clubs or allow anybody within the legal age to walk off the street and gamble?’

He also wanted to know whether these VLTs would be taxed under the same regime as private members’ clubs were being taxed.

John Wallis, managing director of the Sunny Group of Companies, is complaining that a subsidiary of his company, Ingerhall Ltd—which produces software similar to what would be used in the VLTs—was not given a chance by the NLCB to put forward a proposal for the new systems.

He said his locally-owned company operated a number of on-line gambling facilities and had the expertise and the support systems to operate the VLTs.

But, Devant Maharaj, marketing and public relations officer of the NLCB, said the NLCB had a contractual arrangement with GTECH which made it unnecessary to invite tenders for the VLTs.”

So you understand, Mr. Speaker, on the one hand it is clear that the Government has taken a philosophical position that this is unacceptable; that it intends to discourage this, but on the other hand, a State institution, run by the State with one of their close party activists at head of it, Mr. Louis Lee Sing—head of NLCB—is engaging in activities at the malls.

**Mr. Manning:** But is it true?

**Mr. G. Singh:** Unless I have heard otherwise. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member for San Fernando East could tell me it is not so, then that is fine.

**Mr. Manning:** It is not so.

**Mr. G. Singh:** If it is not so, fine. Time alone will tell. The jury is out on that issue. If as head of the Government he is saying it is not so, then I take his word: It is not so.

**Mr. Manning:** The Prime Minister knows of no such thing.

**Mr. G. Singh:** You see, you do not know everything that is happening within the Government.

**Mr. Manning:** Then we will stop it.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Okay, very well. The Prime Minister says he will stop it. But this is what the state of play in that sector is. So the Prime Minister gives an undertaking that he would stop it, but the point I want to make, in areas like MovieTowne—I went to MovieTowne this weekend with my family—there are a lot of young people there and if you are going to put video terminals there, which would give rise to gambling, it means therefore that a lot of young people are going to be exposed to that and therefore the moral argument comes in—inappropriate for young people.

If you go to Gulf City also—Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to bring you into the debate, but I know that prior to your moving to Port of Spain, you would have frequented Gulf City and you would have seen the number of young persons frequenting an area like that. Therefore if you place video lottery terminals there and people can just walk in, the chances exist that very young persons will be exposed, and then there is the whole question raised by my colleague from Barataria/San Juan, of addictive behaviour emerging amongst the very young.

So in the context of the prohibition that is taking place, we are saying that there is need for the legal regime to be updated to deal with the realities of the environment. What we had attempted to do this afternoon was that we had

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planned to confine our debate really to deal with the issue of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order and the whole issue of gambling. My colleague dealt with the area of the petroleum taxes and the impact of that on the whole question of transportation. In my own constituency the PH drivers and the taxi drivers have started to increase their fares because they are linking that to the gasoline, kerosene and diesel increases.

That would have an inflationary spiral, because when you have limited income and you have the increase in taxi fares—many of us can recall as students, your travel fare was a very fixed sum and, therefore, it impacted upon how you could afford to send your children to school, and all the other associated things.

One certainly has to look at the whole question of the minimum wage in the context of what would emerge in the society as inflationary expenditure because of increased transportation cost, goods and taxi fares in the country. It is clear to us on this side that there seems to be a pattern of behaviour emerging from the other side and the Member for Diego Martin West pointed to that kind of direction.

When I had ministerial responsibility, persons who worked closely with me would tell you that in every measure that we tried to fashion, there was that inherent equality. When the Member for Tobago East talked about Dr. Williams speaking about there is no Mother India, no Mother Africa, only Mother Trinidad and Tobago, those are resonant chords in me. But the fact of the matter is that Mother Trinidad and Tobago cannot now, in 2003, discriminate against her sons and daughters to the extent where you only take one segment of the population and seek to assert that section at the expense of others, denying that equality of opportunity. That cannot be part of public policy and I am certain Dr. Williams would have turned in his grave with respect to that kind of policy formulation.

Further, when the hon. Member for Diego Martin West speaks of the urban/rural dichotomy, we know that in this country, because of historical patterns and the movement of people, the rural/urban dichotomy is reflective of the two major ethnic groups with one located in rural Trinidad and the other in urban Trinidad.

**Mr. Manning:** It goes beyond that.

**Mr. G. Singh:** So that when you seek to fashion measures on the basis of rural/urban dichotomy and you recognize that that dichotomy is reflective in ethnic groupings in the country and you seek to assert the right of the urban at the expense of the rural, once more it crystallizes and practises—

**Hon. Member:** Who is doing that?

**Mr. G. Singh:** It is a racist policy! Mr. Speaker, I am of the view that some Minister must take responsibility for that policy position. I am saying that Minister, whoever that Minister is, should resign, because in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial society, that policy is unacceptable, especially in the context where there is no empirical basis for formulating that policy, but just on hearsay.

We have a situation where a Cabinet Member, the Member for Diego Martin West, said he is the author of that policy.

**Dr. Rowley:** No, no. I said fire me.

**Mr. G. Singh:** If you are the author of the policy then you should resign; you should not wait on the Prime Minister to fire you. You ought to take responsibility then for heightening communal tensions in this country, because I will tell you, yesterday I went around the place and everyone I met was talking about this issue. I had responsibility for a short while for higher education and—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, people were concerned whether this is going to be an emerging pattern of behaviour, and this pattern is not removed from the context of what is happening outside. Petrotrin, which the hon. Member for San Fernando East called “Petrosingh” when we were in government, now my colleague who is intimately connected with Petrotrin as an employee, says it is becoming “Petromanning”. When you look at what is happening—I can speak about what happened in WASA, with the wholesale removal of people of calibre. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Order!

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of the record, I would just like to advise that the reference just made by the hon. Member for Caroni East, in fact, was my reporting to this Parliament on how a particular company is being perceived on the outside—what people are saying about it. I expressed no personal view on the matter.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, I understand what the hon. Member is saying because, similarly, I am reporting to this House the perception that up to yesterday my constituents and others were telling me, and the reality in the context of what is happening all around: In the Industrial Court, in WASA, in other areas, and now I was told that the recruitment policy of COSTAATT under Dr. Hoyte—whereas prior you went through an interview process to become a lecturer at COSTAATT, now what is happening is that people have been hand-chosen and placed as adjunct lecturers without the necessary qualification in

particular areas. The recruitment approach under Dr. Hoyte is taking place in Arima, Laventille and in other areas.

If we are embarked on the approach that Minister Enill said, “No, that is a typographical error”; Minister Montano said, “Yes, it is so”, and then Minister Rowley said “Yes, it is so” and that he has taken paternity for this policy document, I say, with great respect to the Member for Diego Martin West, if that is so, then he ought to resign for entrenching and instituting racism in the policy positions of this Government.

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, just to assist my colleague—I thank him for giving way—in my contribution this afternoon I said no such thing about taking paternity of, or being responsible for, that text. I spoke to the issue raised in the text. The Member is putting words in my mouth. If he wants to call for my resignation, that is fine, but do not say so on the basis of something I did not say.

**Mr. G. Singh:** You know, Mr. Speaker, success has a thousand fathers; failure is an orphan. So now there is the attempt to disown paternity.

**Dr. Rowley:** What failure?

**Mr. G. Singh:** As Minister of Planning and Development, the Member has the responsibility to vet all the planning documents that come to Cabinet. That is his responsibility. If he now disowns paternity on the issue, I have no problem with that, but some Minister took responsibility. Is it Danny Montano? Is it Minister Enill? Whoever it is, clearly somebody must own up and take paternity for this policy measure which is really a racist policy measure.

**Dr. Rowley:** I would resign.

**Mr. G. Singh:** It is a matter for you. I do not want to get involved with you and the Prime Minister.

So it is clear that when this matter, being exposed as it is because Minister Enill stated in *Saturday Express* of October 25: “No special COSTAATT treatment for Afro males”, he has now been contradicted. It is my understanding that Minister Enill is the principal author of the budget; he has been working on the budget, and he, the author of the budget, says, “No, it is not so.” The Member for Diego Martin West says, “No, it is so”. The Minister of Science and Technology and Tertiary Education says, “Yes, it is so”. What I want to be very clear in my mind is: This is a society founded upon the rule of law and in the rule of law the Constitution of our country guarantees equality of treatment. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Member for Caroni East has asked for protection and rightly so. Please let him continue with his contribution.

**Mr. G. Singh:** We talk about this issue all the time because it is important for this society. It is important that we put an end to what can be emerging communal tensions. We all love this country and if people are going to jump upon issues and we have to respond as politicians, it requires us to put a damper on what might emerge. Therefore, talking about it is healthy. You see, this is a society in which people like to deny reality. If this is the reality that is taking place, why are we sweeping the issue under the carpet? We must acknowledge the reality.

This is a society in which abortion is taking place on a daily basis but we fail to come up with a policy measure to deal with that reality. This is a society in which the Member for Tobago East—you know, the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about young Africans males impregnating young women and that we must deal with that, and one would think that the Member for Tobago East would deal with the issue of incest. That is the silent shame in Tobago.

These are all issues that we have to deal with openly, empirically, statistically. We cannot deal with them by remaining quiet. So when there is racism that is up in your face; that is blatant racism; that is institutionalized public policy on racism, we have to deal with it, because if we do not deal with it as a society, then we would be sowing the wind and we would reap the whirlwind. [*Crosstalk*]

So what does the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central want to suggest? That I stay quiet? In the face of what is emerging, where you have one Minister saying one thing and two saying otherwise, I want clarification and that is the role of the Parliament today, to seek that clarification. We are not dealing with this issue emotively, we are dealing with it very clinically. Is there a statistical report from which you have crafted this policy measure on an empirical basis? If that report is available—and yes, I am happy to hear that—make that report available to the public of Trinidad and Tobago. Circulate it to Members of Parliament. Let us get the benefit of what informed their thinking.

This Provisional Collection of Taxes Order really attempts to deal with a small area of the law. It demonstrates the prohibitive approach of the Government. It has a clear position on gambling and, therefore, it has a punitive, oppressive and prohibitive approach. That is a matter for the Government of the day, but I want to agree with the Sir Alan Budd Report which says it is not for the policy makers to impose their personal views on policy; it is for the society to make that choice.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds** (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, I really thought that the exposition on the issue by the Member for Diego Martin West would have, at least, slowed down the wild, emotive onslaught that was coming from our friends on the other side. I listened to the Member for Princes Town and he quoted from the strategy document and he used the word “especially”. In fact, that word went before “Afro-males”. All I would like to add to this debate, at least on that point, is that the word “especially” has a colour and it has meaning. I would like, with your leave, to quote from page 39 of the document *Social & Economic Policy Framework, 2004*:

“COSTAATT will also concentrate on broadening access to higher education for previously under-served groups as well as on diversifying programme offerings to address new training needs. To fulfill its mandate, a number of critical inputs are required, including the upgrade of facilities at existing campuses, the establishment of a Wide Area Network and the implementation of software systems for college administration.”

With your leave, I just want to find the particular paragraph that my friend quoted earlier today. I quote now from page 38/93. Under “Principal Strategies & Measures” it states:

“Establish targeted recruitment programmes for male Trinidadians aged 17-24, especially Afro-Trinidadian males.”

All I want to add to this aspect of the debate is that the word “especially” is not an exclusionary term, which reinforces the points that were made earlier.

**Mr. Singh:** Would the Member for Laventille East/Morvant not say that it is a term of preference?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Certainly not. What it says here, it actually implies that all comers are welcome and all would participate; all would have access. The word “especially” does not exclude any group, and that is all I would like to add. But I know that their perverted minds would not permit them to accept that simple logic. They want to find something and at all cost, they will find it. So go ahead and find it.

**Mr. S. Panday:** It is there in the document!

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, that is as much as I would like to say on that particular matter. If I had any doubt whatsoever that mental instability was hereditary, the Member for Princes Town convinced me today that it was. I saw him today rant and rave and froth and he shared that in common with someone we know very well.

The other thing that characterized his contribution today was that the venom and the bile that came from his contribution could compete with the venom of a dangerous snake anywhere in this world. I saw him today, face contorted, trying to impress this House and the national community that there is racism and discrimination in this society.

The Member for Caroni East, in his contribution, was pointing out that there was some kind of discrimination elsewhere and I noted that he was not talking about racial discrimination and this is the area I want to confine my comments to in this debate, because we are dealing with the Motion and I want quote that. Let me come back to it.

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

### **5.35 p.m.**

Those words, “appropriation of public funds” take me to the question of the appropriation that had to do with the Unemployment Relief Programme and the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). I find it unnecessary henceforth, to justify my contribution in that regard. I am dealing up front with an appropriation of public funds which is what this Motion is all about.

In addition to that, the Members for Princes Town and Caroni East have broadened the debate and we are duty bound to respond where we have to. I need not trouble myself with justifying as I proceed, some of the comments I would like to make. I can assure you that they would be within the two terms I have just established.

The Unemployment Relief Programme, as it is now known, did not begin this year. It began a long time ago in the 1960s, I am informed. It ran through the years that the UNC was in government. Of course, it took different manifestations and names. At one time it was the crash programme, Special Works, LID and today, it is the Unemployment Relief Programme. It is a short-term relief

programme as the name implies. It is intended for persons who would be so engaged in between jobs. The idea is that you would be seeking long-term sustainable employment which is an individual responsibility and the State would have provided this mechanism to assist in between jobs when and where necessary.

The reality is that some persons have remained in that programme for many years. People have told me that they have been engaged in that programme for 30 years which clearly, is at variance with what the initial intention would have been. That is to their detriment. The State does not impose on an individual where or how he or she should work. That is a matter of individual choice. If an individual spends 25 or 30 years in that programme, that is a matter for him or her. Laventille, the constituency that I partly represent is not blessed with any natural resources. Unlike other parts of the country, we are not with a fishing industry because we do not have a sea front. We do not have large open expanses of land to facilitate any agricultural projects. We do not have any large spaces for any industrial complexes like Point Lisas. The Unemployment Relief Programme in its current or previous manifestations impacted more heavily on that part of our geography than other parts.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not think any Member on this side raised the URP to any great degree. You are widening the debate. I caution you to stick to a response from a contribution opposite and bear in mind the Order in front of you.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I am most grateful for your guidance.

Money has been allocated to continue to operate that programme. I heard our friend on the other side and others comment that there was discrimination in that programme. While there may be, if you want to call it discrimination, it is certainly not discrimination on any racial ground. It is about trying to meet the circumstances of a particular constituency or area in Trinidad and Tobago. To my mind that is very good sense for the reasons I have highlighted.

We try to encourage the citizens of Laventille and Morvant to participate fully in all that Trinidad and Tobago has to offer. We encourage them to get involved in different areas of craftsmanship; to become tailors, welders, joiners; to go to university to acquire higher education and, generally, to improve themselves. The reality is that we live in a world where some of our young people are beginning to find that earning a livelihood in this regard is very slow and too long-term. Something about our world today suggests to young people that it has to be a

quick fix solution, given what they are seeing on television. I think the Member for Caroni East made the point about corrupting minds. He was speaking about Internet gambling. In my honest view, the television and cable channels assist in no small measure in corrupting the minds of some of the children of this country and taking to them a kind of culture that we did not create in Trinidad and Tobago, or intend for our young citizens. We have to be very careful about those things.

The very people who make pronouncements about crime in Laventille and some of the people who write and speak about the matter are not taking issues like that into account. Some of them benefit from it. We are sending all kinds of signals to our young people and it is something we need to take account of.

For the 22 months, the Government has been raising money according to its budget statement and we have come to this House with the Provision Collection of Taxes Order to increase the revenue. As this House knows, government raises revenues in order to fund important projects or projects altogether. The revenue of this Government has been funding URP projects for the last 22 months since we returned to government. In my constituency, I am very proud to report—I had my views about URP—that I have seen a tremendous amount of work achieved by virtue of URP operations over the last 22 months. We simply took the position that we would confine URP activity to construction work, so at the end of the day there would be tangible benefits that we can see from the allocations of revenue that we collected last and what we intend to collect this year to sustain and expand this programme, for the benefit of the people in Laventille.

This means having a focus and resolve to get work done. Unfortunately, another reality is that there are those in our society who believe that they do not have to work to earn an income. It is good enough to come on a job site. That is enough to get their names on the pay sheet. That is unfair not only to the Government and this Parliament that passes laws and motions in order to facilitate good governance, but also to Trinidad and Tobago. We cannot expect to drive this country to the proud vision of 2020 that we all share. When I say “all”, I mean “all”, even my friends on the other side. While they speak with double tongues and hypocritically, they in their hearts and minds see the wisdom of Vision 2020 and secretly, must support it. We cannot expect to drive this country to Vision 2020, if we are operating on four out of eight cylinders. We need to have every citizen of this country focused and working productively towards the achievement of developed status within the next two decades.

CEPEP has attracted much attention from my Friends. Somebody mentioned it today as well. Permit me to simply say that again, from my observation in my constituency and around the country, Trinidad and Tobago is more presentable to the eyes. The place is considerably cleaner since the introduction of CEPEP. That is a fact. There are many individuals who benefit from that programme. There are about 120 contractors. Each of them employs about 40 persons. Each of those 40 persons has families with about three to five members. A tremendous number of citizens are benefiting from that programme, as we as a society benefit from the cleanliness that they have brought about as a result of their activities.

The idea of CEPEP is to create entrepreneurs and I have seen that at work. When we come to Parliament today, to cause this House to approve laws so that we can extract taxes from those who must pay them; to fund CEPEP and continue that good work, you must agree with me, Mr. Speaker, that it is well worth our while in Parliament today. I have seen with these eyes, the philosophy of CEPEP at work. In my constituency, there is a particular contractor who has been operating like every other for the last 22 months. He has established what he calls, handy men and tidy girls. This little company has been around Trinidad and Tobago seeking other contracts other than the State's support it is getting. I want to put their name proudly on record in this Parliament. It is Tonka Bean Limited. A few days ago, he showed me some contractual documents—they clean offices and houses—for at least 14 houses around Trinidad and Tobago in the run up to Divali. I know that people would clean their houses for Divali and Christmas, but they were contracted to do such cleaning. I have seen the spirit of entrepreneurship in that particular contractor at work.

We are now thinking about formulating a training component to the programme in environmental consciousness and management. The employees of Tonka Bean Limited get together three times a week from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. where they engage in all kinds of positive learning experiences such as money management, business management and various life skills. In this sense, we the politicians are behind. The people are way ahead. What we are talking about doing, some of them have been doing a long time ago. We are here and we will support and encourage that.

I realize that as we come here today to raise money to do the good that we must do as a government for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the ways in which we deal with crime—which is a problem in this society and we accept that—is to keep the criminals and potential criminals productive outside of the crime stream. We create work opportunities in order to achieve that. We tell

them that URP and CEPEP are not places to sit around and do nothing, but opportunities with some state support to get going as entrepreneurs to get on their legs and as time goes by, there would be no dependence on the State.

During the budget debate, the Member for St. Augustine mentioned crimes of the State. He was talking about people who are dependent on state resources for their sustenance and livelihood. As we take this important step to permit the Government to raise taxes to do what it has to do for the benefit of us, I recognize what that Member was saying at that time. He was making reference to Caroni. It is taxes like these that were eventually expended to the tune of about \$7 billion over the last 10 years in the Caroni effort. I do not want to stay on that very long but the Government from my observation, knowledge and understanding is not intent on creating clients of the State. The taxes we raise here are designed to accumulate money to encourage our citizens to go and grow to become independent as we move this country towards higher living standards in the years ahead.

At the end of the day, the \$22 billion budget that we passed recently requires the passage of today's legislation in order to fund it. Some of the taxes that we debate to implement would form a necessary part of that \$22 billion budget. I did not speak in the budget debate so I take this opportunity to express my full support for the measures that were outlined therein. It is quite obvious that the \$22 billion budget is important and that is fine, but money is not the only issue. As we raise taxes, as parliamentarians, we have to communicate with our constituents and the people of the country, that money is necessary but not sufficient. I am simply making the point that we cannot become a soulless nation with a lot of money or a big budget. Some of the contributions I heard today, take us on the road to soullessness. I ask my friends on the other side to bear that firmly in mind.

I read an article in yesterday's *Newsday* where one columnist, David Abdullah, was demonstrating a very horrible situation in this country. I think that it was in St. James, if I recall accurately. A citizen of this country fell ill and lay on the streets for about three hours. When he enquired it was three hours since the man was on the street and it appears as though no one else took the time to assist that citizen. He called the EHS and they came promptly to assist the citizen. We have to be careful not to become soulless. We need more humility, gentility and certainly more cooperation.

We came to debate the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. We heard from the Member for Princes Town, to some extent from the Member for Couva South

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and the Member for Caroni East, a lot of bile, rancour and hostility. We could do without that Mr. Speaker, they even drew you to your legs to call for order, good sense and to put aside all the hostility and ugly language of race. We need to settle down to do the business of this country. We are a blessed nation. We have much resources; skilled and talented people and we do not have some of the troubles that other societies have. Only today I was looking at the television and over 600 houses were lost to wild fires in California. We have escaped some of those things and for that we must be very thankful. We need to continue to educate our citizens and we need the support of the other side to pass this legislation so that we can raise the necessary taxes.

One of the measures in this Order is to legitimate the increase of gas prices for those who use it. In some way we are affected by it. The Member for Caroni East made reference to it today. The Member for Princes Town pointed out that in Laventille West, the people blocked the road and protested against the drivers who raised the fares disproportionately, in the people's view. We understand that and the position is simple. From an environmental standpoint, we realize that we have to take certain actions to make the lives of all citizens better. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance explained that it was with environmental concerns in mind.

In my constituency, this is of grave importance to us. A section of my constituency on the Beetham lives between three major roadways: the Eastern Main Road, the Priority Bus Route and the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway or so called Beetham Highway. They are busy with traffic 24 hours a day, in particular, maxi taxi traffic which uses diesel fuel. Anything that could be done to minimize the pollutants and hazards of that kind of arrangement on the citizens of this country and in this particular case, in relation to my constituents, I would be very happy. We cannot accept and what other citizens must also accept is that it would be improper to use a marginal increase in the price of gas to impose on citizens any overly burdensome increases in fares. I was trying to make the point that we need to be more cooperative and humane. Money alone would not make a happy society; there is more to be done.

I lend my support to the Order as it presents itself. I do so against the background of the knowledge that as we marginally increase the price of gas and as was highlighted by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, we have much resource. In his contribution he outlined that the resource is \$9.18 billion barrels of oil equivalent in this country. When he highlighted that my friends on the other side said that we were boasting and we behaved as though we put it

there, that was not the point. It was simply acknowledging that we are blessed with those resources and giving an assurance that the Government would manage them quite properly for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to ensure that I confine myself to the terms of the debate before us. Before I conclude, I must say to my friend from Princes Town that we need to be more responsible in what we say and do. As was said earlier in this debate by one person on this side, our friends on the other side take every opportunity to raise confusion and chaos in Trinidad and Tobago. In the most irresponsible of ways, they are trying to distract the citizens of this country from their productive healthy pursuits and to engage their minds in issues of race and other divisive elements and activities. That is wrong. One thing I would like my friends on the other side to take today, is that whatever we say and do, we say it and do it, in a way and ways that would uplift the people of Trinidad and Tobago, rather than divide them and create further confusion and chaos. With that in mind, thank you for the opportunity to speak in this debate.

Thank you.

**Mr. Manohar Ramsaran** (*Chaguanas*): Mr. Speaker, I want to enter this debate to put a few things on the record. When I look at the Order before us I cannot help but to see some sort of discrimination. I say this with honesty. If it could be explained later that it is no discrimination, so be it. If you look at page 817 it mentions that the Order may be cited as a petroleum production levy and the subsidy gross margin Order 2003. The gross margin in respect of the petroleum products sold by private companies which are listed under (a) and state companies listed in (b). Part (b) is the United Independent Petroleum Marketing Company Limited.

Here we see the difference. Unleaded premium gasoline, gross margin, TT cents per litre in Trinidad and Tobago, 8 cents, as opposed to \$15 under part (b), 7 cents as opposed to 12 cents. When the Minister is winding up I would like him to explain this. When this company was launched in Trinidad and Tobago, it was to deal with the question of the distribution of petroleum products and other people were brought in.

We heard the Member for Laventille East/Morvant when he talked about 2020 Vision and every citizen should be focused. I want to talk about this. As I stand here this evening, I believe that this country is becoming more and more divided. He used the word "divisive". I want to echo that this evening. When we look at what is happening in this country, if we do not act now and quickly, we are not

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heading for a first world country, but worse than that if 2020 comes tomorrow. We have to be careful of perception and reality out there. We heard so much about the social policy framework. I do not want to say more. We heard that the Member for Diego Martin West enjoys playing golf and maybe, he does not take the time to read the documents emanating from his ministry. If he claims paternity for that established targeted recruitment programme for male Trinidadians, I accept that.

In addition to what I said before, these statements cannot go down well in Trinidad and Tobago. We talk about national unity and forging Trinidad and Tobago. We talk about Trinidad and Tobago as a paradise. When we make the statements in a plural country like ours where the two major races are almost equal and you try to give one special treatment, this is a problem. We have to be very careful about these statements. I have been making this point all along. I have been in this Parliament over the last year asking for some equity in the distribution of the nation's resources. Some people say in the other time it was so, but according to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, it is a time of plenty. We see money floating around in this country. Money alone cannot solve our problems. Do not throw money at all the problems.

The Member for Diego Martin West said that the Afro-Trinidadian males in the 17-24 age group are under-performing. In what ways are they under-performing? Tell us in what ways. Could you tell us in what ways? Is it in their sexual prowess that they are not performing? Is it in education? We want to know. Under-performing is a huge term. You cannot come to Parliament and say that you would do this because they are under-performing. Had I been an Afro-Trinidadian in the 17-24 age group, I would have felt accused of something. Are they telling the people that they are under-performing in the area of obeying the law? Where are they under-performing? I take offence to this. Had they said it in the reverse that the Indo-Trinidadian was under-performing, I would have been angry.

The Member for Diego Martin West got up here and glibly accepted paternity. I hope that the Prime Minister would have something to say about this. We read the newspapers and heard parts of the debate. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Minister Conrad Enill, said in the other place that he withdrew that. He made it quiet clear. I remember two Members of the UNC asked him if he was sure that he would remove this and he said yes. Today again, with arrogance, the Member for Diego Martin West claims paternity. When you talk about Vision 2020 and taking our country forward, we have to be careful about what we say.

I made the point that there is no programme in URP in Chaguanas and central areas. Nothing happened despite promises made by the hon. Prime Minister and the Member for Arouca North who is not here and would not speak the truth. CEPEP was the same problem. I went through the various social programmes in this country. When you number them it is over \$10 billion in social programmes. I have a problem with that as the former minister who was responsible for social development. When you go across the globe following work that was done in that period, suddenly, there is a big change of back to the welfare state. This is a serious problem in this country where people are under-performing. I am glad that it is the 17—24 age group. You would see where these children were over the last five years. They were the ones who failed the Common Entrance Examination and were on the streets.

We cannot continue to give handouts. I want to warn this Government. Let us organize our programmes in such a way that the people would get out of poverty by the dint of hard work. Do not throw \$200 million in URP and another \$200 million in CEPEP. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant admitted that people have been working in URP for 15 years. This cannot work. When you have to develop a country you have to think carefully. You have to understand the question of education and getting people to learn something productive. Trinidad and Tobago is a small place and we cannot continue to throw millions of dollars at problems every year. This would never solve problems. I am calling on good sense to prevail.

We are talking about collection of taxes. We want an even distribution. Maybe, with your political team in office, you would give your side priority. Let us look at the unemployment figures in the country. Now there are 120,000 ex workers from Caroni (1975) Limited on the breadline. This includes not only the 9,000 that were sent home, but also from the offshoot industries including rum shops. That whole cadre of people would be now displaced.

I want to look at something that happened over the weekend. Maybe, the mouth of the hon. Prime Minister is taking us.

#### Man quizzed in central killing

A man is assisting Chaguanas police in their investigations into the stabbing death of Christopher Pierre on Saturday morning. Pierre of New Settlement, Caroni Savannah Road Chaguanas is believed to have been attacked by a gang of men while on his way home. His body was discovered by a resident near McFill Street, New Settlement around 7.00 a.m. on Saturday.

The gang allegedly attacked several other residents in the area. Sergeant Housen of the CID Chaguanas is continuing investigations.

This is something that we have been warning against. The Prime Minister said that he would fix the hot spots with URP and CEPEP. Are the people in Chaguanas now deciding to have hot spots so they too could share in URP and CEPEP? The trend is dangerous. To win political power you cannot only do things to win votes.

As I say that something echoes in my mind with the disabled. Because they are too small in number to determine who wins an election, they are left out. They are given a measly \$50 increase. The cost of living of the disabled is higher than the normal human being. I know it. I have spoken and worked with them. They are treated with disdain and the Charter of the Disabled is saying that because their number is so small and they cannot determine an election, they are treated like that. That underlines the Prime Minister, his Cabinet and how they are dealing with things just to win elections. We are here and you are there and you could hear them boast.

**Mr. Valley:** Who started that?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** It is more than that. Do you see when they pay attention? They are not paying attention to what is happening. The country is being destroyed just to remain in office. That is something we should never tolerate. I could talk about it hours on end.

If you go through these documents you would see the handout programmes. Maybe to support the party of the day or to be a candidate at elections, huge sums of money are being spent. In self-help which has been a success story in assisting the poor man in certain parts of Trinidad and Tobago, in time of plenty, this year's budget allocated \$2million, the lowest ever. The year of inception to self-help had more than \$2 million. What is this saying to the Members of Parliament who live in the rural communities and have to deal with problems? This bothers me. The other developmental programmes that would create good roads are given a shoestring budget.

I looked at the allocation for the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Thank God I am no longer minister of sport because you cannot help anybody do things properly—maybe, one or two projects and that is it. Most of the youth programmes are not in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. YAPA is with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the other programme is with the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs. It is just

handouts. I am bothered—and terribly—about the way our people are being treated in this country. If we do not take stock instead of Vision 2020 for a developed nation, people would see. I call on the Prime Minister for his good sense. More money for URP. I have no problem with that but let us use this money equally in Trinidad and Tobago. I will applaud it! Do not discriminate against people.

I would inform the hon. Prime Minister that people have been waiting for a year in our constituencies. I know what happened to them and they are waiting. Next year, with the sugar industry in jeopardy people would want something to do. We would ensure that people who are unemployed would go in their numbers to the URP offices. If they are arrested in looking for jobs, so be it. We cannot allow this madness to continue. In Trinidad and Tobago when you collect taxes, you collect taxes from everybody. If you do it by the borough or regional corporations, there is almost equity in paying taxes. Despite the fact that people in San Fernando and central might pay more taxes, they are given the least resources. I do not have the facts. I am not saying there are statistics to prove what I am saying, but by just having a look. We have industries in these areas that pay heavy taxes and the money is not coming back. This causes social problems. I am putting it on the record once more. The last time I spoke about it I was deemed a racist. That is alright. I did not say that I was a racist, I was described as a racist. Nobody took the trouble to read my contribution to understand why the Prime Minister said that I was a racist. It made the headlines. I accept that for the time being.

When I talk about central I do not talk about one ethnic origin, because in central we have a mix of people of Trinidad and Tobago. If you look at the people who were arrested with me, you would see that out of the eight of us there were two Afro Trinidadians who were part of the walk. They feel some attention should be paid to our areas in dealing with the problems that we face. That is all I am asking for. If we could get that guarantee that there is fair play in this country, maybe, we would cooperate with the Government to achieve the 2020 Vision. I am a Trinidadian and I am proud to be one. How could we be proud?

The Board of Inland Revenue is looking for a new chairman. The first two names on the seniority list, Mr. Basdeo and Mr. Maraj, have been vetoed, I am told by the hon. Prime Minister.

**Mr. Manning:** Guess why?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** They have been vetoed because “they name” Basdeo and Maraj.

**Mr. Manning:** That is all you would see.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** You told me to guess so I guessed.

They have been vetoed. In the Customs and Excise Division the first two were vetoed and the third person on the list has been appointed to act as comptroller. You see the signals you are sending. You want to carry this country to a 2020 Vision. We want to send the message to the people.

Seventy-five police officers were employed in the first batch as they want to increase the service by 1,000. There was one East Indian. Understand me clearly. Had this been done in the reverse, the Member for Diego Martin Central would tell you, there would have been some suspicion and noise. Had this been East Indian here he would have been hitting the roof, had he been in Opposition. I am saying that these are perceptions.

I congratulate the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro for being chairman of the party. [*Interruption*] That does not bother me at all. If you know me better, you would know it would not bother me. Maybe, what I am saying is not true and it is perception. Let us tell the nation. We heard this and we are acting on it. We would have some discipline in the party because it is in government. When you are in government you have a responsibility to the people to deal with the problems of the country. The perception out there is getting worse daily. People are losing confidence in the Government of the day. When the paternity of this folly is reported tomorrow or during the week in some newspaper, this would divide the country. Whether we like it or not, it will; whether you say I am a racist or not, it will. We deal with people who are suspicious of governments from way back when. I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister would accept my explanation. This happened under the British when they divided and ruled us. This did not happen today. We have inherited this and we continue to make it worse daily. We are in a position to stop this now.

Tell me if this is perception. The senior doctors have been leaving this country. Who are the doctors leaving and where are they going? [*Interruption*] You do some research and you will find them. While we score political points and maybe fatten our supporters and do it to the peril of this country, we would suffer. This morning we heard it in the cricket election. You could get that feeling that something was wrong. There is some corruption. The whole country is based on suspicion. We have this undermining of all our institutions. If you do not do things that would appease our people we would find ourselves in more and more trouble.

**Dr. Rowley:** I thank my colleague very sincerely for giving way. Having raised the matter of the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board (TTCB) election, would you agree that is a model of democracy we should pursue, or is it that self-interest has prevailed in that election, much to our disgust?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** That is a fair question. I said it publicly on I 95, so there is no problem saying it here, when there was this row with Chaitramsingh from Guyana and Willie Rodriguez from Trinidad and Tobago. What happened there should never happen in Trinidad and Tobago. I was expecting it to happen. I said that in Trinidad and Tobago we should have fair elections. I am convinced that the election was planned in such a way that the incumbent could not lose. I think that is cliquism. I put that on the record.

**Dr. Rowley:** Seeing what we have seen, would you agree that the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board needs a new constitution that is more democratic?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** This is very interesting. I accept what you are saying, Member for Diego Martin West. We have to change with the times. I think that cricket is suffering because of this closed-door policy. I know too that you have suffered at the hands of your colleague for San Fernando East in election a couple years ago with the same system. We need constitution changes in many areas.

Our country is on a course of suspicion. We have to face that reality. I understand that there would be a huge Divali celebration, the biggest, in Trinidad and Tobago on November 01. I want to tell the Prime Minister that November 01, is All Saints Day and, more importantly, as a Hindu, Divali is not really properly celebrated two or three days after Divali. It is taking the Hindus of this country for a "pappyshow". I was speaking with some high ranking officials of the Hindu religion and they are very unhappy about this celebration taking place eight days after Divali. This again, is the insensitivity of our leaders. Would you celebrate Christmas on January 01? I want to warn the hon. Prime Minister that he is celebrating Divali outside of the period that is put aside for it. We are now into Ramadhan. We live in a country with diverse religions.

**Mr. Manning:** I would celebrate Eid also.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I am not saying these things to criticize the Prime Minister but to put him on the right track. You need advisors who can advise you properly.

Recently I have been on the other side of the law. That is another issue.

**Mr. Speaker:** Today, I have given all Members a lot of leeway. You are a seasoned Member and I think you need to come back to the Order before us.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** You look at the cost of living in Trinidad and Tobago. Tobago is higher than Trinidad. I make a call to the hon. Prime Minister to seriously think about withdrawing the increase in gasoline prices. I say this with all honesty. It is not a budget to say that you have to grapple to balance it. A surplus is foretold by the hon. Minister. I am told by the hon. Prime Minister that the oil price remained \$28 or \$29. I do not see the indecent haste at this time to increase the cost of gasoline. Whatever percentage gasoline is increased by, the cost of living would increase by the same amount. You know that as well as I do. I do not think we need to do that to the poorer class in our society.

Sometimes we think that because we are in a safe job; we are driven and do not have to go to the gas station, we forget the people behind us. When we are in power we have to understand that we should not only think about ourselves but also think about the people whom we left behind. I call on the hon. Minister to get up. Maybe he does not have that bigness of heart. If he did a survey since the budget he would know about the increase in prices in almost every sphere, including chicken. The price of chicken would go up once more. I do not think that it is prudent in a time of plenty when the dollar is high as is expected and we are enjoying money from different sources. We have no problem to balance the budget.

On behalf of the poorer people in our society, I call on that. In time of plenty let us think about the less fortunate in our society as was raised by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. The disabled people in this country have been crying daily. Every day when you go through the newspaper, you would see disabled people making requests and the aged looking for care. We are so very insensitive. When we were in government in 2000/2001, the Cabinet of the day approved the purchase of four specially fitted buses for the disabled. Up to today, that has not come to fruition. Why? Is it because the people cannot vote for you? Why is this so?

We read about seven children being abandoned by their families. In March 2001, the UNC appointed a Children's Authority under the chairmanship of Diana Mahabir-Wyatt. With all the money flowing and the taxes being collected, this issue has not been resolved. When children get into trouble they want to blame somebody else. Let us forget all the differences. You are in charge of the country and have the money available. Let us deal with these problems.

The Member for Arima brought a matter on the adjournment for an indoor sports arena in Arima. This was in 2000. I answered and I promised and money was put in that year's budget but to this day in Arima in spite of a time of plenty

and collecting taxes, that has not yet been started. What kind of government are we enjoying?

They talk about we are having the country on edge; we are saying things to get people nervous and riled up. It is the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago that I could remember—and I have been a student of politics since 1961—a prime minister daily, for the last four or five weeks promises a Cabinet reshuffle. Even your Cabinet Ministers are not sure whether to go or come. It was in today's newspaper again.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, let me appeal to you to come back to the Order before us. You are straying a bit.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, with due respect to you, I am not challenging your ruling. Governance is not a simple thing. We collect taxes to run the affairs of the country. If a prime minister could have the country on edge, you do not know who is going to Cuba; who is going to South Africa; who is going to England and who is going to be the new Attorney General. Make a statement. You could say there is no reshuffle and end that. These things would lead a country to the edge.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please come back. You are way out.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** When they make statements in Parliament and accuse the Opposition of various things we on this side must reply. Forget the politics. We have a country to run. If you continue to discriminate—I could go on about the people who have been fired and sent home. You have heard it so many times but you do not seem to care. You always justify it with some flimsy. I said that two people were vetoed and you said make a guess why. You are the Prime Minister of this country. I am in Opposition now. People talk and write to us. How could we govern a country like this?

I remember the Member for Diego Martin West said that he got something in his mailbox and read it out here with all pomp and glory. There are people who would sit quietly and all that the leader does must be accepted. This is a country that we are running. When there is discrimination, talk about it. Tobago is discriminated against.

**6.35 p.m.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, please, I must insist that you come back to the Order!

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, I was coming back—

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I was coming to the distribution of money to—

**Mr. Speaker:** Well, come to it immediately.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Sometimes I have to play around before I come back. Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is, let us stop this discrimination now. I was about to raise the issue of local government when I was sidetracked. We heard a lot of talk about empowering our people and so on. When you look at the PSIP and the money that we are collecting today, what we have collected elsewhere, and you look at the allocations of the local government, it is a disgrace. *[Interruption]* The fact is that they are now powerless.

Today, the roads are being paved in the borough of Chaguanas. *[Interruption]* Exactly! The list of roads that were sent to the Minister has been changed, willy-nilly. What is happening? They are talking about power to the local government authorities in communities and about devolution of power but, Mr. Speaker, that is only “ol’ talk”!

We must stop talking about dividing our country. I want the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant to keep—where he started this evening—making a very sober speech. I think we really have to come back to building Trinidad and Tobago. One bit of advice, Mr. Prime Minister. You might not take us on because it is coming from a Member of the Opposition but you must have the trust of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If you do not get that trust you cannot go forward and what we have here is mistrust with the allocation of resources. People pay taxes and they expect that they would get their fair share in return.

I am just making this submission so that when we come to this honourable Chamber and we debate our bills, the people in Trinidad and Tobago will have the confidence that something is happening on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat that the Minister of the Finance and the Prime Minister withdraw the increase of the price of gasoline, immediately, as I foretell that this will cause a serious increase in the cost of living in this country. Mark my words, Mr. Speaker, by the end of the year the figures would show that.

Mr. Speaker, my last point is, let us distribute our resources fairly across Trinidad and Tobago. I am not threatening, but I am saying, as a Member of Parliament on this side, we are going to look at every expenditure where moneys are being spent; we are going to look at how moneys are being spent; we are going to ask our constituents to understand what is happening and to take

whatever actions they think necessary. I think the time has come that we must not discriminate against anybody in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, it is not very often that I get a real migraine in this House but I got one today, especially after listening to the last speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am from Couva and I just do not know about this race thing. I just do not know it! I have now been in this House for some 17 years. I remember when I entered the Parliament one of the early things my political leader said to us was that race is a very sensitive issue; it is an emotional issue and to stay away from it. If there were any race issue the political leader would deal with it. I make the point to say that leadership, by example, is what matters. The Opposition Leader has built his career on that issue, so now you have every Tom, Dick and Harry just parading that issue as though they are ignorant of the consequences. [*Desk thumping*]

When you listen to the last speaker, he is speaking from both sides of his mouth at the same time. He criticizes the social programmes that we have put in, but at the same time he is saying to remove the gasoline price increase. Mr. Speaker, remember it is not an increase in gasoline prices, it is the removal of the subsidy. The Government is saying that we can use those funds more effectively by targeting them in social areas. That is what we are doing. The Member does not even see the conflict or he does not even take the blame. The other day I saw an article which said: “Always consider the ‘me (m e)’ in the blame”. He does not understand.

He was the Minister of Social Services from 1996. The 17—24-year olds that he is talking about at present were 11-year-olds and 16-year-olds at that time. If today we have to put targeted programmes for those young people, “he better had” take some of the blame. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] Understand that! We did not have that problem when we left Government in 1995. We had a number of three-year plans and at no time did we have to target Afro-males. No time!

Mr. Speaker, when you look at what is said in this document you wonder what the hullabaloo is about. Right through the Social and Economic Police Framework 2004 the policy descriptions are outlined. Then there are outlined the objectives and action plans. There is the policy objective to promote improved student recruitment, retention and graduation rates. That is the objective that we

are attempting to achieve. We are saying there are two initiatives that we are going to use to do that. I will read the second one first:

“Establish mentoring programmes for male students to improve retention and achievement rates.”

Performance Indicators: Record of retention and achievement rates as a result of the programme.” The one to which they take objection is:

“Establish targeted recruitment programmes for male Trinidadians aged 17-24,…”

Tobagonians could complain now “eh” because they said for:

“male Trinidadians aged 17-24,…”

Understand that! That is the first part of the thing. There is recognition that there is a problem among male Trinidadians, aged 17-24. Those are the people that my friend for Chaguanas ignored when they were 11—16 years old, Mr. Speaker. “Tobagonians ain’t complaining.” Then they said: “...especially Afro-Trinidadian males.”

Mr. Speaker, there is an errata. We have said if that annoys you for whatever reason, we will take it out. [*Interruption*] There is an errata! The Minister in the Ministry of Finance from the other place made that point. We are saying, quite simply, that we want to stay away from this race issue. We are not on that, Mr. Speaker! [*Interruption*] The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has said quite clearly that this year the whole emphasis of our social programmes will be to have national treatment and national spread. We want to kill this race issue once and for all. That is the only leg they have to stand on, Mr. Speaker. They have no programmes, no vision, nothing! [*Desk thumping*] The only horse they want to ride is the “race” horse. But we are going to take that bridge from under them and leave them exposed, as they ought to be, Mr. Speaker. All the programmes will have national treatment come fiscal 2004.

I want to ask my colleagues to leave that race issue alone. It is 1.3 million people and we just cannot go forward if we keep harping on that issue. I cannot help but think that, in fact, it is a case of guilty conscience. It was from day one of last year January/February that they started complaining. We were in government just two months. It is a case of guilty conscience. When I went down to Brechin Castle and I saw the TTIT, which I knew nothing about for six years, or when I remember how Diego Martin was treated for those six years, I know it was a case of guilty conscience. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell them: We are not going to

treat you the way you treated us! We are not going to do that! We love this country! I shall say no more on that.

Mr. Speaker, we, in Trinidad, are too happy and my colleague, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, made that point— Imagine we have a Provisional Collection of Taxes Order; this is what is in the Order: Increasing gaming taxes. The other thing in the Order is clarifying how you are going to get VAT refunds. We are increasing the limit that oil companies could pay to the Subsidy Fund from 3 per cent to 4 per cent. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, in the old days—somebody said it this morning, I think, it was the Member for Couva South who made the point—everybody used to be fearful for the budget and what is coming in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. We are too happy and because we are happy we are finding time to talk stupidity. So today, we are spending a “whole heaping” time talking about race.

Let me talk a bit about a serious issue that is the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Let me put in context the whole issue of members’ club. First of all, what is the law in Trinidad and Tobago? Casinos are outlawed. Under the Registration of Clubs Act, which defines the members’ club, it says very clearly:

“members’ club’ means a club not constituted for the acquisition of gain, the members of which contribute to the funds out of which the expenses of conducting the club are paid and are jointly entitled to all the property and funds of the club;”

Note that; it is not for profit. So that members’ clubs do not pay corporation tax. They do not even expect them to make a profit. What is the reality? What has happened over time? The fact is that these members’ clubs are in a sense quasi-public places. It is the UNC that recognized that, Mr. Speaker. All this talk here, it was them who recognized that. In 1997, that is when they first imposed taxes on members’ clubs and they increased the tax in 1999. All the talk and long tears they are crying here this evening, Mr. Speaker, in 1999, they increased the taxes. This is not the first time it is being done.

Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to do is very simple. There is a realization, as the Member for Caroni East said, you do not want to drive all of them out of business but you need some type of realization. You have a choice; either you go, like the other islands in the Caribbean, and say listen, we are going to have casinos and gaming regulations and so on. Or, say on the other hand, we are going to allow some of you—you like it; do your thing. If you are making a profit you must pay your taxes, but keep it to a manageable limit. That is the choice one has to make.

The Government has decided that slot machines that are now all over the place; that is not for us, we want to get rid of them; we do not mind a few members' clubs that is if they keep it as members' clubs. But even so, there seems to be a need for a review of the legislation concerning the members' club; that seems clear. So this is not the end of it. The Minister of Finance has signaled quite clearly that next year there might be a further increase. We need to look exactly where we are going with these members' clubs.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Member for Couva South that I am very much interested in this pipeline to Piarco because it fits in with the Government's policy, to position Piarco as an alternate hub, into South America, alternate to Miami. Of course, you are right, I think, if we can do it—and I have asked some people to look at it. They tell me it would cost some \$50 million. If you have information please give it to me because I want to push that. I think that in the longer term we are going to be much better off because it is going to encourage flights to stop here to be refueled and so on and that is part of the plan. I am very much interested in getting further information on it.

Mr. Speaker, there are differences in margin between National Petroleum (NP), state companies and Unipet. I think the Member for Chaguanas wanted to know also, if one considers that in addition simply to retailing gasoline, NP also have to do certain things for the state—they have to keep supplies; supplies that the private sector investors are not burdened with. Therefore that private sector investor cannot expect to have the same margin as the state company that has a responsibility over and above simply selling gas. That is simply it, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

The Member for Couva South also mentioned InnCogen. I know he was not here at that time, and I thought he would have refrained from talking about InnCogen, given the dark days. The Member for Caroni East is smiling. I want to ask him, quite simply, where are the four plants? Do not interfere with that at all. At present they have gone bankrupt and the only asset they can hold on to is this plant in Trinidad that they are trying to flog right now, but we are firm. It is here, we are interested in it, but we are taking it without the take or pay contract. That is what it is.

There was an issue also with respect to the incentive in the budget for sports and culture. I think the Member for Barataria/San Juan raised the issue of that allocation having risen from \$450,000 to \$1 million. He said that there was no legislation. Let me assure him that provisions would be in the Finance Act. It is not a tax-raising measure, therefore it cannot be in the Provisional Collection of

Taxes Order, it has to be in the Finance Bill and that is where it is going to be, as was the \$450,000 last year.

Member for Chaguanas, let me just say also that in addition to the budgetary provisions under sports, there is this provision—and one expects that the private sector would come forward and provide funding for sports and culture. *[Interruption]* Let me just finish with the point, please. Remember, in moving the limit from \$450,000 to \$1 million, it is a 150 per cent deduction and therefore the Government is participating also via the tax loss.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Thank you very much for giving way, hon. Minister. If I remember correctly, this money is used for promotional events. I still have a problem with events because it is supposed to be wider than that if you really want to have participation. It is events; I remember correctly.

**Hon. K. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I am not aware that it is simply events. *[Interruption]* Well, if that is so, we will look at it, but the intention is for sponsorship for culture, sports, what have you.

The last issue is the Video Lottery Terminal and as the Minister of Finance has said, again, the Government is not aware of any occurrence in that regard. We will, therefore, take steps to investigate and to understand clearly what is happening. The intent is not to widen the gambling net in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I have dealt with the more significant points raised by the Members on the other side. Perhaps I would simply say one word on issue of equity and equality, but my friend from Diego Martin have dealt with that already. Quite simply, what we want to do is to deal with each one in an equitable manner.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is an excuse.

**Hon. K. Valley:** It is not an excuse, it is a reality, and it is why we have to target certain groups; each, according to their means, and according to their needs—basic fundamental, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003 be confirmed.

**EXCISE DUTY (PETROLEUM PRODUCTS) ORDER**

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

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

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

*And whereas* the Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order, 2003, was made under subsection (2) of section 13 of the Excise Duty (General Provisions) Act, and first published in the *Gazette* on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2003:

*And whereas* it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

*Be it Resolved:*

That the Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order, 2003 be confirmed.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

“Resolved:

That the Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order, 2003 be confirmed.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, in accordance with an earlier order in the House, the House now stands adjourned to Friday, October 31, 2003 at 1.30 p.m.

**Mr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, would the Leader of Government Business indicate what we would be doing? I know he said it to me informally, but perhaps—

**Hon. K. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we would be following the Order Paper. On the Order Paper there is Integrity in Public Life (Period of

*Adjournment*

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Furnishing of Information) Regulations, then there is the Professions Related to Medicine Rules, and the third item we expect to do on Friday would be the Bill to amend the Firearms Act.

I should also say that the intent is to send the Integrity in Public Life (Period of Furnishing of Information) Regulations to a Joint Select Committee for consideration. As you know it came from the Integrity Commission and the feeling is that the Parliament ought to have a view on it so that we can have agreement.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.02 p.m.*