

*Leave of Absence**Friday, January 14, 2005***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, January 14, 2005*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from sittings of the House: the Member for Couva North (Mr. B. Panday) for the period January 10 to January 31, 2005; the Member for Arima (Hon. Penelope Beckles) for the period January 05 to January 17, 2005; the Member of Parliament for Arouca North (Hon. Jarrette Narine) for the period January 11 to January 15, 2005; the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph (Mr. G. Yetming) for the period January 13 to January 17, 2005; the Member of Parliament for Nariva (Mr. H. Partap) for the period January 03 to February 05, 2005, the Member of Parliament for Naparima (Mr. N. Baksh) for the period January 12 to February 14, 2005 and the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad (Mr. C. Sharma) from today's sitting.

The leave of absence which the hon. Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the San Fernando Carnegie Free Library for the period January 01, 1998 to September 09, 1998. [*The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Government Employees' Provident Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
3. Post Caroni (1975) Limited—A Comprehensive and Integrated Development Plan. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Second Report 2004/2005 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on Proposals for the Variation of the 2004 Appropriation.

Definite Urgent Matter (Leave)

Friday, January 14, 2005

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Ministry of National Security
(Inability to deal with Crime)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing the following matter as a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely: The colossal failure of the Ministry of National Security and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to stem the tide of the unabated and horrific crime wave that has engulfed this nation.

The matter is definite since it refers to the specific and shocking murder rate of over one human life per day for the first two weeks of the new year 2005 which has led to heightened insecurity, trauma and agony of all the citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The matter is urgent since the killings and kidnappings are perpetrated with impunity and with no regard and respect for human life and property, and an apparent contempt for the security forces which have left all citizens under siege and in mortal fear of violent, criminal elements.

The matter is of public importance since it points in a direction to the complete collapse of the security infrastructure, the incompetence of the political leadership, the failure of several previously heralded crime plans, the ineffectiveness of four Ministers of National Security and the National Security Council over the past three years.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the leave which the hon. Member for Oropouche seeks is denied and I suggest that he look at Standing Order 11 (2) and (3).

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (2004) BILL

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum of the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2004 [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Adoption)**

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

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Second Report of the 2004/2005 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on Proposals for the Variation of the 2004 Appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, it is our intention to proceed with this Motion and the debate of the Bill at the same time.

Assent indicated.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Monday, January 10, 2005. It was very brief and the committee agreed to a number of proposals with respect to the closing of accounts for fiscal year 2004. Copies of the report of this meeting of the Finance Committee along with the responses to questions raised have been circulated to all Members.

The proposals which were unanimously approved by the Finance Committee were a variation of the 2004 appropriation and the write-off of losses that were approved by Cabinet in the fiscal year 2004. The Variation of Appropriation 2004 in the sum of \$80,389,615 relates to four Heads of Expenditure as follows:

an increase in Head 15—Tobago House of Assembly, \$13,814,514;

Head 18—Ministry of Finance, \$10 million;

Head 36—Ministry of Housing, \$56,575,101;

a decrease in Head 26—Ministry of Education, \$80,389,615.

Mr. Speaker, transfers to these three Heads were due to the following:

Head 15—Tobago House of Assembly, under the Health Sector Reform Programme, the Ministry of Health incurred expenditure on behalf of the Tobago House of Assembly related to the design and construction of the new Scarborough Hospital. The increased allocation in the sum of \$13,814,514 is required to supplement the development programme allocation of the Tobago House of Assembly in order to bring to account the transaction under the correct Head of Expenditure, which is Head 15—Tobago House of Assembly.

Head 17—Ministry of Finance. On September 07, 2004 Hurricane Ivan inflicted severe and widespread damages to the infrastructure, buildings and food crops in the neighbouring island of Grenada. In order to assist in restorative and reconstruction works, Cabinet agreed to provide financial assistance to the island in the sum of \$10 million.

In the 2004 appropriation, there was no allocation to meet this expenditure; consequently, under section 115 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the said sum was advanced from the Contingency Fund. This variation in

appropriation is now sought in order to replace the sums advanced from the Contingency Fund.

This honourable House is asked to note that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago had provided significant assistance to Grenada by way of building materials, foodstuff, military and rehabilitative support. The private sector has also made tremendous contributions towards the relief effort. Overall, the response from Trinidad and Tobago was overwhelming.

Head 36—Ministry of Housing, the transfer of—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You indicated that \$30 million would be expended towards disaster relief; \$10 million to Grenada, \$10 million to Jamaica, \$4 million to St. Vincent, \$3 million to the Bahamas and \$3 million to Cuba, a total of \$30 million.

Today we are closing the books for 2004 with only \$10 million. My question is: Were any moneys expended to these other islands which the Prime Minister indicated moneys would be spent?

Secondly, what is the limit of the Contingency Fund? There is a ceiling to which one can expend moneys, what is that ceiling?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: With respect to the \$30 million, payments were in fact made to everybody. The \$10 million was in addition to that which was required for the additional amount, but the technical people will tell me that in a while and I will answer you.

The other payments were made in this fiscal year, only the \$10 million was paid in the last fiscal year.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The allocations for 2005 under the fund for the Caricom Disaster Relief is \$30 million which is in the estimates, and you want \$10 million which has already been expended in 2004 so we are talking about \$40 million and not \$30 million.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: The spending as it related to what the Prime Minister said—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: So no moneys were sent to Jamaica and the other islands in fiscal 2004?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: No, the payments were made in fiscal 2005.

Head 36—Ministry of Housing, the transfer of \$56,575,101 is required to bring to account expenditure incurred by the National Housing Authority in excess of the approved appropriation over the period 2002 to August 2004.

Funds were allocated to facilitate the rehabilitation programme of the authority which involved refurbishment of rental apartments. After utilization of the approved funding,

the National Housing Authority (NHA) continued with the programme as there was a dire need to treat with serious safety issues such as faulty electrical wiring, rusted railings and defective plumbing that affected tenants.

The additional expenditure was met by utilizing revenue that the authority collected and which should have been deposited into the Consolidated Fund. The Ministry of Housing's revenue records need to be regularized by bringing into account the expenditure by NHA. This process is a non-cash transaction which requires the preparation of documents for accounting purposes.

Mr. Speaker, a saving of \$80,389,615 was identified under Head 26—Ministry of Education because of the following:

1. A number of posts on the ministry's establishment remained vacant during 2004.
2. The positions of head of department and deans in primary and secondary schools were not filled as new job specifications were not completed.
3. With respect to settlement of arrears to public servants, there are still a number of outstanding applications with respect to retirees and legal personal representatives of deceased teachers.
4. The tendering procedures with respect to primary schools computerization programme initiated in the last quarter of fiscal 2004 resulted in funds being unutilized for that particular period.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to write-off and losses. The Finance Committee also agreed to the write-off of the sum of \$346,391.31 representing overpayment of salaries, travelling and upkeep allowances and employee fraud spanning the years 1984 to 2003. The Cabinet approved the write-offs of these losses in fiscal 2004, details of which were supplied to hon. Members.

Transfer of funds between subheads of the same head of expenditure: In fiscal 2004, the hon. Minister of Finance approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$624,540,482 between subheads under the same head of expenditure. It should be noted that these transfers were approved based on requests made by the Minister of respective ministries. It should also be noted that these transfers be requested to reflect changed circumstances in ministries and departments and a consequential reordering of the priorities, and as a consequence of this, there was no increase in the total appropriation.

A statement showing the transfers approved by the Minister of Finance and explanations for some of the more significant transfers were attached as Appendices I and II of the Agenda of the Meeting of the Finance Committee which was provided to all hon. Members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members are also asked to note that the Government in its mid-year review had revised the revenue projection for fiscal 2004 to \$20,448.7 million, an expenditure of \$20,011.6 million resulting in an anticipated surplus of \$437.1 million. This position was communicated to Parliament at the time of the presentation of the 2005 Budget on October 08, 2004.

Based on the ministry's data on the actual fiscal out-turn for 2004, total revenue was \$20,868.3 million and overall expenditure was \$20,622.3 million resulting in an overall fiscal surplus of \$246.0 million after all the allocations to the Revenue Stabilization Fund on a previous occasion.

Mr. Speaker, this is an exercise that is required for us to bring the books of 2004 to a close, and these are the matters required in order to complete this exercise so we can close the accounts and get the Auditor General to do the work that is required, so that we can report to the Parliament on the activities of the Government as it relates to revenue and expenditure actually utilized for the period 2004.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Before you close, hon. Minister, would you be so kind to share with this Parliament the decision of the Cabinet with respect to helping out LIAT? It is related because we are giving this money for the Caricom Disaster Relief and we would be very grateful if you can share with us the decision that was made yesterday with respect to LIAT.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Mr. Speaker, I will deal with that in winding up because I am sure that there will be other matters; but Minister Valley, I think, spent some time at length yesterday dealing with that matter and I am sure that a colleague Minister will deal with that in the manner in which it deserves to be dealt because I think there is a background which should be communicated, and not only the decision.

Mr. Speaker, having regard to those few comments, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Winston Dookeran (St. Augustine): Mr. Speaker, this is the first piece of legislation dealing with finance that we are considering in the year 2005. This year is expected to be a year of major expenditure; not only are we going to spend the largest sums of money in the history of Trinidad and Tobago during this year, but we anticipate perhaps to have even more economic activity taking place in this nation.

The Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill for 2004 with which we are dealing today is in fact a relatively simple piece of legislation. As the Minister pointed out, \$80-odd million will be varied from the Ministry of Education to be used for the Tobago House of Assembly, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Housing.

We are talking about the financial out-turn for 2004, and the Minister in his closing remarks made reference to the total expenditure and revenue for that year. I would like to

put this in some context and deal with the issue that has been raised earlier by the Member for Siparia and of which we have been promised a full explanation, namely, the establishment of the Caribbean oil facility and the funding of the bailout plan for LIAT. These matters deal with public expenditure and are matters that have attracted a great deal of public attention.

This is especially so in light of the new or rather an old trend of the Government to announce major expenditure plans for every single problem we have in the country. We are well aware that money will not solve the problem, but the Parliament is the appropriate forum at which these public policy concerns should be raised and the Government should be held accountable for the announcements which they so frequently make on matters of money.

What is critical is the impact of this expenditure in solving the problems for which they have been identified. Will some of these expenditures require more expenditure tomorrow, or will the expenditure in fact improve the well-being of the society? These are very fundamental public policy concerns when we deal with the expenditure policy of Government.

2.00 p.m.

The first real test of good fiscal performance, therefore, is to analyze these announcements in the context of the impact on the well-being of the society, and it is in this context I want to raise some issues that have been on the national agenda for some time: the Caricom oil facility and the LIAT bailout plan.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—Standing Orders 69 and 70.

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 69(2)—if I may just read it for the benefit of Members—states:

“On the debate on the motion ‘That the Report of the Finance Committee be adopted’, Members may raise points as to specific details of Heads of Expenditure in the report but may not raise any matters of general principle.”

Standing Order 70 which deals with the Bill, talks about, inter alia:

“...the debate on the second reading of the said Bill shall be strictly confined to the matter for which additional expenditures is required:”

That is the relevant part. I would just, for the benefit of the Member, ask you to confine your contribution within the terms of these Standing Orders. *[Interruption]*

Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, I am raising this issue in the context of establishing the framework within which expenditure is taking place in this country and I think the

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, January 14, 2005

most legitimate place to raise that is in the Parliament of this land [*Desk thumping*] on a Finance Bill.

Mr. Valley: Please, let me help the Member. First of all, it is not a Finance Bill. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am on my feet, please! [*Crosstalk*] Please, hon. Members—order! Order!

Please continue with your contribution.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not know what is the hesitancy that the Government has expressed here today in raising matters of public expenditure in this land. Are we going to be restricted to dealing with dotting the “i’s” and leaving the substance unattended?

As you indicated to me, I can proceed. The Minister, in his contribution, talked about the total revenue for 2004. He said it was in the order of \$20,868.3 million, and the expenditure of \$20,622.3 million, leaving a surplus of \$246. So we cannot talk about the expenditure of items without looking at the overall picture. I was about to make reference to a comment on the issues that I have outlined that I would like to raise here in this Parliament, which has been raised by an editorial on the *Trinidad Guardian* on January 11, 2005. The headline of this editorial says: “Watch that godfather syndrome, Mr. PM”. It states:

“The population should begin to pay more careful attention to the way in which the Government has been dishing out money off (sic) late.”

This is a matter of public concern. The groaning of the Minister—

Mr. Valley: Because you are irrelevant.

Mr. W. Dookeran: This is highly relevant. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! Hon. Members, this is a new year; this is my first occupation of this Chair for the new year, so, please, let us cool our tempers a bit. I am allowing the Member to proceed. If I find he is straying too much, then I will bring him to book.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, the Member has the freedom to bring a Private Members’ Motion. [*Crosstalk*] Bring a Motion if you want! Nobody is afraid of him bringing anything! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, I continue from that editorial which concludes, and I quote:

“Mr. Manning’s decision to . . . choose the ‘money-is-no-problem’ path is financially reckless, politically dangerous and demonstrates a disregard for the country’s recent history.”

This is an opinion in the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper dealing with the issue of the bailout plan for LIAT, which is spending \$120 million of public funds.

On January 13, the *Express* editorial raised the issue: “Piecemeal approach to ailing airlines”. It states:

“Time is running out for a turnaround at Liat.”

It states further:

“How much longer will governments—particularly Trinidad and Tobago’s—continue to invest funds in continuing bids to save Liat without any public indication of a meaningful strategy to effect the desired turnaround?”

It concludes:

“Whatever the plan is, the track record in the Caribbean regarding the operation of airlines—namely BWIA, Air Jamaica and Liat—is a dismal one which has led to the loss of millions of dollars and the question that must be faced squarely, both by the governments and people of the region, is how possible is it to create a successful regional industry by tinkering individually with each loss-making airline.”

That is the fundamental issue. Is public expenditure a response to a regional airline policy, or is it based on the whims and fancies of the Government without a context in which such policies are to be discharged? That, precisely, is what the editorials of the two newspapers have been questioning.

We have been told that the moneys that will be spent on the bailout plan will be derived from the Caricom oil facility, that is, the moneys that have been allocated to the Caricom oil facility will be used in the Liat bailout plan. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I need your protection. He is trying to derail me. I do not know why he does not want this matter to be raised. Is this Parliament going to deal with issues of substance, or is it going to be confined by rules of irrelevance?

Mr. Speaker: While we do have these rules, I wish Members would confine themselves to operating within the Standing Orders, but a certain leeway would be given. I mean, one of the things in Parliament is that Members must have their say, but in doing so, do not stray too much from the Standing Orders. In other words, if it is an aside, okay, but do not make that—I am not saying that you are making that, but try to stick as far as possible to the confines of the Standing Orders; and it does say in terms of what has to be done. I will give Members a certain latitude, but just, Members, please, do not abuse it.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, my relevance is based on the fact that we are dealing with public expenditure and I am dealing with a particular item of

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, January 14, 2005

public expenditure. The item of public expenditure deals with the public revenue support for Caricom. I want to raise in this Parliament of this land the question of the public revenue support for Caricom that has been promoted by the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Prime Minister, in speaking to the Caribbean Community on November 08, 2004—it is recent; it is relevant; it deals with public finance—talked about the public revenue support for Caricom. He identified a number of such supports and I want to list them so that the Parliament would be aware:

Caricom Secretariat support, \$19.380 million.

Foreign exchange borrowings from the Trinidad and Tobago's foreign exchange market which he identified here as amounting to US \$500 million.

Then he talks about the Caricom Trade Support Programme, a programme which:

“seeks to support and strengthen the Region's private sector, by providing assistance to firms, so as to enable them to improve their competitiveness and export capability...The facility of \$100M TT contemplates interest free loans to non-TT companies.”

That is the third item: Caricom Secretariat; foreign exchange borrowings; Caricom Trade Support Programme; oil facility—and I want to, for the record, indicate exactly what the Prime Minister said:

“As all are aware, a major difficulty facing our Region in recent times has been the rising cost of crude oil and petroleum products...we move today to formally announce the establishment by the government of Trinidad and Tobago of a special facility to assist CARICOM Member States. The facility is designed to provide relief in the face of persistently high crude oil prices, and to cushion the harsh impact of such prices on the lives of the people of our Region. We have done this by way of establishing a fund through accruals based on a particular formula, which is a function of the purchase by CARICOM countries of products from Petrotrin.”

This was a formal announcement made at the Caricom Community meeting. But we, in this country, do not know what precisely is this formula. In what way is this fund going to be operated through purchases by Caricom countries of products from Petrotrin? There should be a public announcement in this Parliament by the Government on the formula that has been envisaged for the operation of the Caricom oil facility. If I cannot raise it in Parliament, what is the point of being here?

Mr. Valley: You could raise it but not under this matter.

Mr. W. Dookeran: It states further:

“As such, Trinidad and Tobago established, effective from 1st July, 2004, a grant facility capitalized at a maximum of TT \$25M per month. By the end of October last, just a few days ago, TT \$100M will have already accrued. Over one year, which is the period for which this facility will operate in the first instance, with the option for its renewal thereafter, this facility will realize an accumulation of TT \$300M.”

The announcement goes on to say:

“CARICOM Member States can now draw down on these funds, which we have stipulated must be used, however, for poverty eradication.

The facility is to be administered by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and disbursements to Member States are to be determined by the Heads of State in collaboration with the said Bank.”

This is a major facility, and there are a few questions that I would like to ask about this facility in the context of public expenditure.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have allowed you a certain latitude, but, again, I must appeal to you to look in terms of the heads of expenditure and, perhaps, you may want to confine your contribution—or if you can relate what you are talking about, the oil facility, in relation to the heads of expenditure.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, the issue of the Caricom facility to support Grenada was raised and this is an extension of that. So it is in that context I see the relevance. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about public revenue support for Caricom. The Minister raised the issue of public revenue support for Grenada. The oil facility is to be used for poverty eradication and it is a grant facility. Have provisions been made in the estimates for this facility?

The fifth area of support deals with the pipeline. This amounts to US \$527 million. How would it be financed? What is its commercial viability? There is a second pipeline, either of the order of US \$161 million or US \$90 million. You see, Mr. Speaker, we are talking about substantial funds that have been announced for expenditure in the context of the Caricom Support Programme. How is this Caricom oil facility going to be used? This is where the LIAT plan comes in and we do not know exactly what is happening here, and I am raising this issue to get clarification from the Government.

Mr. Valley: Bring it as a Motion on the Adjournment.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, what has been the story of LIAT in terms of the use of this facility? It was way back in February 21, 2004, that Prime Minister Gonsalves talked about Liat needing millions of dollars to fly.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, January 14, 2005

“St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, disclosed that LIAT needs EC \$17 million to keep it airborne until it can be merged with national carrier BWIA on July 1.

Recalling that discussions for that nexus have been ongoing since 2002, Gonsalves admitted that regional governments were ‘behind time’ on the proposed merger and the new deadline for the merger was July 1. He stated that the nexus should have occurred last month.

‘Certain synergies between BWIA and LIAT ought to be actualised and efforts will be made very shortly to have those actualised in the short term,’ the Vincentian PM said.”

What is the shareholding of LIAT? The Government of Antigua and Barbuda owns 20.3 per cent, Barbados, 24.4 per cent, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 17.6 per cent and BWIA 13 per cent. Private shareholders, local banks, LIAT employees and the private sector control the remaining shares. I ask the question—because in the newspapers there have been some discussions about the Trinidad and Tobago shareholding, whether it is distinct from the BWIA shareholding. We do not know. According to the information before us, it does not appear that it is a distinct shareholding. I should like the Minister of Finance to respond to the Trinidad and Tobago shareholding in LIAT.

There is also a lot of talk about a BWIA and LIAT merger.

Mr. Speaker: With due deference to you, hon. Member, I think you are, in fact, going overboard. Please confine yourself to what is before us and within the ambit of the Standing Orders.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, under Head 43, Ministry of Works and Transport, at the meeting of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives, held on Monday, January 10 at 1.30 p.m., there is a sub-item, “to advise on the transition arrangements for the regional airline and the implications for BWIA”. [*Desk thumping*]

So this is the document which we are debating in conjunction with the Finance Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. W. Dookeran: In fact, every item of expenditure is listed in this document:

“To advise on the transition arrangements for the regional airline and the implications for BWIA.

BWIA and Liat to discuss merger.

Senior Executives of both BWIA and Liat held a second meeting last week at the Normandy Hotel to discuss a proposed merger of the two airlines.”

I ask the question: What is the status of those discussions? We were told, and in accordance with newspaper reports, that there would be a merger between BWIA and LIAT

and there is a restructuring plan for LIAT that was agreed to by the Heads of Government. And when we are dealing with disbursement of funds it is to do it in some context of a regional air policy; it is to determine what is the air policy of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the fundamental question I am raising. Are these expenditures being done *vaille que vaille*, or are they being done in the context of some kind of comprehensive plan for the airline rationalization in the Caribbean?

Then we are told of the \$120 million bailout plan:

“The bailout plan was approved at a three-hour meeting in Barbados yesterday...”

But what is the bailout plan? There is nowhere in any public document outlining of the bailout plan, except some conditions that were outlined on Tuesday, January 11, 2005 in the *Newsday*. I want to put these conditions in the record:

“LIAT (1974) Ltd. must make available to the Caricom Oil Facility Fund, all accounting records related to the use of the restructuring finance.

TT will retain its existing shareholding in LIAT as distinct from that of BWIA.”

a question that I have raised before. It goes on:

“A protocol is hereby established and will be reduced to writing, where LIAT shareholder governments which are owed landing fees and other charges will be requested to restrain their Airport Authorities from taking actions against LIAT (1974) Ltd.”

Is this, in fact, correct, and is this happening? It goes on:

“Antigua and Barbuda will provide immediately to LIAT (1974) Ltd. the sum of EC \$5.7M, which is outstanding from previous commitments to LIAT.

LIAT will continue with the restructuring process as agreed at the last Prime Ministerial meeting held in July 2004.

Shareholder governments will meet as necessary to ensure that the restructuring process is properly managed.

Further reports must be submitted by the management of LIAT for review.

LIAT will work with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), with regard to the provision by the CDB of development financing and technical assistance for LIAT.”

I raise this because these do not amount to financial conditionalities. These are simply bureaucratic procedures that have been outlined, and I wonder if this is all there is in the bailout plan.

What are the elements of that bailout plan? We are spending \$120 million, albeit through the Caricom oil facility which was earmarked for poverty eradication, for the

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, January 14, 2005

purposes of a bailout plan for LIAT, without an air transport policy in place and without the necessary safeguards for financial conditionalities to be applied. That, in essence, is the public policy aspect of this debate.

Could the Government assure us that there is, in fact, a regional air transport policy in place within which this expenditure can be located? Secondly, even if we were to have this expenditure, what are the financial conditionalities that are imposed to ensure that there would not be the need for further expenditure in the not-too-distant future? Where are the economics behind the bailout plan? Or are we simply, as the editorial said, dishing out money as if it is in style now?

We are aware that there is need to give support to Caricom initiatives for the purposes of building a Single Market and Economy, but this must be done in a purposeful manner. There are two issues—the air transport policy framework within which it is being done. We talked about the merger between BWIA and LIAT. We do not know about the issue of privatization and, secondly, the issue of the financial conditionalities that must be imposed. It is the purpose of the Opposition in this Parliament to scrutinize public expenditure, to ensure that public expenditure is done for the benefit of the country, not to be fooled by the announcements of the Government, where the country is no wiser as to the context in which this expenditure is taking place.

We see Prime Minister Gonsalves really leading the show. He seems to have more say in public expenditure in Trinidad and Tobago than the Parliament has. [*Desk thumping*] Prime Minister Gonsalves has more say on these matters than we in this Parliament could ever have. He explained that the EC \$50 million (TT \$120M) had been proposed by a Canadian auditing firm and:

“If we get the money within the next ten days, and I am sure we will get it by then, the process of restructuring will begin and within six months we will see the commencement of a turn-around of the airline.”

That was Prime Minister Gonsalves telling us that he needs the money in 10 days and he is sure he is going to get it. This was reported on January 09, 2005 in the *Sunday Express*.

Where is the evidence of that turnaround of the airline? LIAT has had a troubled history. It has had, over the years, to resort to many bailout plans. It has not been able to live up to the expectations of previous support and here is the Trinidad and Tobago Government going in a blind way to support LIAT without knowing the restructuring plan. This population is far more enquiring than the Government would expect. The days of being fooled by mere announcements are now over. The population wants to know the substance; it wants to know the air transport policy framework; it wants to know the financial conditionalities that are imposed; the details of the restructuring plan; how the commencement of the turnaround would take place in six months.

What evidence do we have that that will be so? Will we not be faced, perhaps, in the next six months with another bailout plan? Have the Heads of Government agreed to this proposal? We are told that the agreement is imminent. Have they agreed to forego the use of the oil facility for the purposes of poverty eradication to support a very obscure bailout plan for LIAT? Minister Valley is quoted as saying that the future of LIAT was a “worthwhile purpose”. These are the words that they used to support major public expenditure policy, that “this country did not have any objection to the proposal”. Obviously, this country is proposing that we spend \$120 million.

Listen to what Mr. Gonsalves says about conditions which we are talking about.

“Gonsalves said one of the conditions of the bailout was that Liat’s management would have to account for all the donated funds used in the restructuring process.”

That is a condition. That is an ordinary accounting function that has elevated to the level of financial conditionalities. It states further:

“He said the money was needed urgently...”

What about the previous plan?

“and while the management had been able to keep some of the airline’s creditors at bay, it had also had to meet mounting maintenance and operating costs.”

Gonsalves said the ‘privatization’ of Liat in 1995/1996 did not lead to a proper capitalisation of the airline, but rather it inherited more debt.”

What is the confidence that we have as a Parliament that we are, in fact, agreeing to allocate funds for a bailout plan to restructure LIAT that will, in fact, make sense? That is the question I am asking. We, in the Opposition, do not have the data. That is why I am raising it in the Parliament on the Finance Bill and the matter that has been pointed out, reference to which has been made in the Finance Report.

Listen to what Prime Minister Gonsalves says:

“ ‘Objectively speaking, the company did not have a chance...

He said by March 2001, Liat was struggling to stay afloat...”

This has been a longstanding problem, from March 2001 and prior to that.

He said staff which had been reduced to 650 was still too large. Is it correct to request that the Caribbean Development Bank do a technical analysis on the restructuring programme for LIAT before the Heads of Government were to agree on it? Or is this a politically inspired move without any technical back-up?

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, January 14, 2005

Mr. Speaker, it has raised a number of questions. In the Caribbean Net News there is an article which states:

“Antigua-Barbuda committed to keeping LIAT flying”

The Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Baldwin Spencer, said:

“In October last year, the Antigua and Barbuda Government, through an Act of Parliament, agreed to inject 5.7 million dollars into the cash strapped airline through a loan of \$17 million from the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.”

We have never heard of that.

“Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines will also benefit from the loan facility.”

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. W. Dookeran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank Members.

I want to repeat what the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Mr. Baldwin Spencer said:

“...the Antigua and Barbuda Government, through an Act of Parliament, agreed to inject 5.7 million dollars into the cash strapped airline through a loan of \$17 million from the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.”

When was this loan granted? I am calling for transparency in matters of public financing in Caricom. The first time I heard of it was when I saw this here. It continues:

“Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines will also benefit from this loan facility.”

When I talked earlier about the public revenue support for Caricom I was not aware of this new facility, but this is also indicated here as another loan facility. So what is the Government doing? When it comes to support to Caricom, is it using the fact that we must support Caricom to do a lot of things without technical analysis? You see, what happens is that there is a general feeling that Trinidad and Tobago’s economic destiny is predicated on Caricom’s economics. That is true, and no one is against that, and no one is against supporting things that make sense that would improve our well-being, but to have that whole list of support to which I have referred, some of which we are aware of and some of which we are not aware of in this Parliament, being done on the basis of pure politics, pure deals between Prime Ministers without a technical analysis as to the value and the cost benefit of these proposals, is, in fact, a dereliction of duty when it comes to public management in this country.

Public expenditure must create benefits. This Parliament ought to get some answers on a number of questions. The first broad question is: What are the benefits of this support to Trinidad and Tobago? In what way do we really see the benefits? Secondly, what are the conditions that we apply to these facilities in order to make them work? We have had so many oil facilities. You will recollect during the previous PNM period, there was an oil facility that ended up bankrupt. Trinidad and Tobago was on the losing end of that facility; had to bail out Guyana; had to bail out Jamaica, by the creation of an oil facility in the 1970s because there was no firm management or conditionalities of that facility to ensure that it worked.

Are we doing the same thing here again? Is this a repeat, according to the *Trinidad Guardian*, of history in dealing with an oil facility? What is the transparency in public policy on these matters? As a Member of this Parliament, I call on the Government today to lay in this Parliament a full statement on all its affairs with Caricom and financial affairs which it has been conducting, [*Desk thumping*] so that there will be an informed discussion on the benefits of our Caricom Support Programme to Trinidad and Tobago.

I am very careful in saying that there is need to give support, but that does not mean you give any kind of support, anytime, anywhere, because of political purposes among friends. We need to have greater transparency. I made reference to what appeared in the newspapers. It may be quite wrong. Mere announcements are not enough. There is need for explanation and we must address a number of concerns of the population. One concern which is related is a Category 2 status that Trinidad and Tobago has in the FAA and the need to have legislation—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think you are, in fact, now going way out on a limb. I am again appealing to you to come back to the confines of the Motion and the Bill before us. As I said, I am prepared to give a little leeway, but you are, in fact, now straying outside of the ambit in which I am prepared to allow you to go.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, I will abide by your ruling, but I want to point out that if you are talking about an air transport policy, you have got to talk about the Category 2 or Category 1 status and the legislation that is required in order to make that happen.

Mr. Speaker: I agree with you but we are not talking about an air transport policy today.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Well, I do not know; I have always wondered about the utility of this Parliament.

Mr. Ramnath: This is not a relevant institution—totally irrelevant—

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Parliament is a place in which you should raise matters of public concern whenever there are matters. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: There is a structured way. There must be rules.

Mr. W. Dookeran: In conclusion, I ask the following questions:

What are the details of the bailout plan that has been announced for the restructuring of LIAT?

Will the shareholding of LIAT change as a result of this bailout plan? We do not know. [*Interruption*] I am asking if that is so, because you are putting in a lot of money. Are you putting it in equity? Are you putting it in loans, or is it a grant? In what way are you putting the money?

Is the merger between BWIA and LIAT a viable option?

On what technical basis is money to be disbursed from the oil facility? What is the policy with respect to the oil facility? Is it expected that it would grow indefinitely beyond one year? It was suggested it was one year in the first instance.

Have there been any disbursements from this facility for poverty eradication? It has been operating now for some months.

Does the Single Market and Economy envisage a “state owned and operated” regional carrier? Is this one of the conditionalities that is required in order to facilitate the Single Market and Economy?

Is this carrier going to be a constant burden on the treasuries of the Caribbean governments?

Does Trinidad and Tobago’s share of this burden equate to the economic benefits that this country will derive from that burden?

These are some questions that I have raised, questions which will enhance public policy debate in this country; which will put this issue squarely in an information-based framework. I raise this in the context of the fact that we are dealing with the meeting of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives in which we are making appropriate transfers.

I conclude by calling on the Government to do two things: to become transparent in terms of the details of the bailout plan for LIAT and, secondly, to outline in this House its air transport policy for the region so that we can assess more appropriately whether or not these expenditures would bring any benefits or simply lead to more expenditures later on.

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

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I think it was Thomas Hobbes who said—

Mr. Ramnath: That is irrelevant. What does Hobbes have to do with this debate?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. K. Valley: I think it was Thomas Hobbes who said that life outside society would be nasty, brutish and short; in other words, jungle life. He was making the point that there must be rules; there must be structures and that given structures, there can be some order. I have started that way because, perhaps, as the Leader of this House for quite some time, I have a responsibility to counsel Members. My colleague raised the point that under Standing Order 69(2) one is constrained—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—Standing Order 69. This has absolutely no relevance to the Heads under the Appropriation Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Valley is only two minutes into his presentation. Please continue.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, let me put on the record once more, Standing Order 69(2):

“On the debate on the motion ‘That the Report of...’

Mr. Singh: Talk about the LIAT bailout!

Hon. K. Valley: You do not think we will come to that? We are coming to that.

“the debate on the motion that the report of the Finance Committee be adopted’, Members may raise points as to specific details of Heads of Expenditure in the report but may not raise any matters of general principle.”

Mr. Speaker, the Heads of Expenditure on which we are ruling this evening are Head 15, Tobago House of Assembly, which is receiving some \$13.8 million; Head 18, Ministry of Finance which is receiving \$10 million; Head 36 which is receiving \$56,575,101 and Head 26 from which \$80,389,615 is coming. Those are the Heads.

In addition, at Finance Committee, for noting by Finance Committee, certain transfers were provided for Members, simply for information because those are transfers within a Head and, therefore, the Parliament does not have to rule on that and it is in that area that my friend from Tabaquite spotted a little one-liner, and the Member for St. Augustine who, of course, did not even have to look at these things, attempted to hold on to it. I am making that point because I think the issue raised by the Member for St. Augustine is an important issue which this House ought to debate in full, and I want to advise the Member that he is free to bring a Private Members’ Motion and as Leader of this House I am going to give it priority to have it debated. We can do it the last Friday of this month. That is their Friday; the fourth Friday of every month. So that is one avenue available to the Member. If he felt that it could not wait that long, he could have filed a Motion on the Adjournment before Wednesday where, this evening, he would have got his time to raise the issue.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: But it was only yesterday—

Hon. K. Valley: It was not yesterday; it was since Saturday. Cabinet made no decision as yet, if you want to know. There has been no submission. [*Crosstalk*] They read and they do not even understand.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, January 14, 2005

I am making the point that the Member has an excellent issue, but there are also Standing Orders, which ought to guide his behaviour, especially because we see him somewhat as a senior Member of this House and we hold him in a certain esteem because of his former position at the Central Bank. We expect from him a certain order.

Dr. Khan: The Member for Diego Martin Central has just indicated that if you wanted to file a Motion on the Adjournment it must be done before Wednesday. I am just asking for clarification of the House, because he said the Standing Orders must be adhered to.

Mr. Speaker: You, yourself, would know that as a former Deputy Speaker you have three clear days to file a Motion. But, again, the House regulates itself, so by agreement the House could decide what it wants to do.

Dr. Khan: Member for Diego Martin Central, could Wednesday be the deadline for filing the Motions on the Adjournment, rather than Monday?

Hon. K. Valley: I said before Wednesday, which means you could file it by Tuesday.

Mr. Singh: I want to advise the Member, according to the Standing Orders now, you have to file by Monday at 4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Please. Two Members cannot be on their feet at the same time.

Mr. Singh: You have to file Motions on the Adjournment by 4.00 p.m. on Monday afternoon. That is what is applicable now.

Hon. K. Valley: That is clearly not in the Standing Orders. That might be the practice; that might be the ruling of the Speaker. Well, I am guided by rulings of Speakers. I have always been, you know that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please! Order! I think we are being sidetracked from the debate. Continue with your contribution.

Hon. K. Valley: I am not a Speaker; I do not give rulings, all I am merely saying, according to the Standing Orders, that the Member has an excellent issue and I am advising him that that is an issue that warrants debate. He should put it as a Private Members' Motion, which qualifies in 12 days and we are going to give it priority because it is an important issue. Or, if he wants and he feels he cannot wait, he could have used the Motion on the Adjournment. Having said that, these are some of the responses I would have given to the Member if he was not irrelevant.

We would deal first with the oil facility. First of all, let me say that the oil facility was established by Cabinet Minute No. 2625 of September 16, 2004. There is a rule that the Cabinet Minute is confidential so I shall not deal with the Minute. I shall deal with the note. I am basing it on previous rulings, Mr. Speaker.

I would put the note into the Hansard record. If the Member was not irrelevant, this is what I would do.

“Establishment of a Facility for Providing Relief to Caricom States”

It says:

“The matter for the consideration of Cabinet is the establishment of a grant facility to provide relief to Caricom States in respect of the persistently high prices of crude oil on the international market. This facility is to be administered by the Caribbean Development Bank.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has indicated an intention to establish a facility to provide some relief to member countries of Caricom which are experiencing economic hardship because of recent substantial price increases in crude oil and petroleum products.”

3.00 p.m.

“Cabinet was informed vide minute No. 1983 ... that the Standing Committee on Energy (SCE) at the thirty-fourth meeting of its second session on June 07, 2004 agreed that a Committee should be established to formulate a joint proposal between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela for providing relief to CARICOM Countries. The Committee comprised:”

We do not need to go into the list.

“The team presented its report at the thirty-fifth meeting of the second session of the Standing Committee on Energy held on June 28, 2004. The SCE requested that the Committee clarify several areas of its presentation and report back to the SCE at its next scheduled meeting. The Committee presented its revised proposals at the thirty-seventh meeting...”

The proposed facility is structured as a grant fund available for draw down by member states of CARICOM. The fund is to be administered by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) under general guidelines to be determined by the Heads of Government of the CARICOM States in collaboration with the CDB.

The facility will apply when the monthly average price of Dated Brent crude oil exceeds US \$30 per barrel, which is equivalent to the maximum of the target price range for the OPEC basket of crudes.”

The Member wanted to know the formula. If he were relevant this is what I would be telling him.

“The Basic Terms of the Facility are as follows:

Effective Date

The effective date of the facility is July 1, 2004.

Applicability: The facility will continue in effect for a period of one year subject to annual renewal.

The size of the facility is limited to TT \$300 million (US \$47.6 million) maximum in any one-year period.

Deposits to the Facility

Deposits will be made to the facility for every month where the average price of Dated Brent crude oil for the month exceeds \$30 per barrel. The amount to be deposited into the facility for every such month will be determined in accordance with the following formula:”

Get your pen and paper:

“ $D = V \times P$ Where:

D = Amount to be deposited in US Dollars into the facility in the particular month;

V = Value in US Dollars of petroleum products purchased from Petrotrin in the particular month;

P = Fixed percentage Factor of 6%.

- a. Total deposit in any month into the facility must not exceed TT\$25 million (US \$3.968 million);
- b. Appendix I, attached illustrates application of the formula.

Cabinet is advised that with respect to the Deposit Procedure, Petrotrin will submit to the Ministry of Finance (MOF) by 15th day of each month:

- i. the average price of Dated Brent crude for the previous month; and
- ii. the total value of Petrotrin’s petroleum product sales to CARICOM states for the relevant month.

When the average Dated Brent crude oil price for the particular month exceeds US\$30 per barrel, the MOF will deposit into the facility, six percent (6%) of the total value of Petrotrin’s sales to CARICOM for that month.

“At the thirty-seventh meeting of the second session of the Standing Committee on Energy (SCE) held on July 19, 2004, the proposal outlined in the preceding paragraphs was presented and discussed. At that same meeting the Standing Committee agreed to recommend to Cabinet the proposal that was made in respect of the establishment of a facility, to provide assistance to Caricom States.”

That is the basis.

In a nutshell, an attempt is being made to indemnify Caricom States for oil prices in excess of US \$30 a barrel. That is the effect so that, first of all, one notes that line. We are saying that, look, if Caricom States are paying up to \$30 a barrel, they are not getting anything. It is only to the extent that oil prices are high, above \$30 a barrel, will we put something into the fund for the benefit of Caricom States. The other point Members must note is that we cannot return the excess to the individual States respectively, in other words, in accordance with their purchases. In today's age that would be called subsidies and all types of things. We said that this will go into a fund managed by the CDB. The rules and guidelines will be determined by the Heads. In a nutshell, it would be for poverty, social and economic development of the region.

Mr. Dookeran: The 6 per cent that you talked about, does that amount to US \$25 million a month? Are provisions made in the Appropriation Bill for that?

Hon. K. Valley: We had a nice committee on energy. Bright boys develop their formula. I do not know what is 6 per cent. I assumed that they did excellent work.

I will deal with the second issue. This is the Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for The Financial Year 2005. At page 274, under Item Head 40, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, under 009 Transfers, Item 08, Petroleum Relief to Caricom States, you will see the estimates for 2005, \$300 million. Cabinet took a decision to put the money into a facility. That is one aspect, the Caricom Oil Facility.

Let us talk a little about LIAT. I will start with the responsibility of privatizing LIAT in 1994/1995. At that time, some of us will remember that there was another airline, I think they called it *Carib Express*—some of the Governments in the Caribbean had. Some people are now asking about air transport policy. I have been working with these airlines since about 1981 or 1982. The concept of the privatization of LIAT was to set up a hub and spoke arrangement with BWIA and LIAT with BWIA making the long haul to New York, Miami and London and LIAT doing the islands, going to Venezuela and Belem in Brazil. Belem is two and a half hours out of Piarco. If a Brazilian in Belem wants to go to the United States, that person has to go south, to Sao Paulo or Rio and then to come up north. People hear, but they do not understand. For some time we have been talking about positioning Piarco as an alternate hub to Miami, into and out of South America. They tell me about air transport plan. Fine words! We live it!

We wrote the book and we know where we want to go. Obstacles do not detain us. We know that the road upward is never smooth. That is why we are

here. If there are no problems they do not need me. I am a problem solver. We know that as we go upward we will meet obstacles. Our task is to overcome those obstacles and that is what we will do. The vision still remains to position Piarco as an alternate hub to Miami into and out of South America. That is the concept. There is BWee doing the long routes and LIAT are doing the short haul.

One can argue we do not need LIAT; BWee can do it with some small planes. That is an option. In the real world there are constraints, political at times. If there is LIAT in Antigua providing a certain number of jobs, the Antiguan government will not easily agree to put it to bed to allow BWee which is in another country to service the routes. We have to face reality. We have to work within the constraints that we have until we can relax them. “Ent?” Basic. You work within given constraints until such time that you can remove or relax them.

The Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines seems to be facing the wrath of those on the other side for statements he has made. He is the Prime Minister in Caricom with the lead responsibility for air transport and in that capacity, he deals with the LIAT issue. He said that the privatization of LIAT went off course. It went off course after we left government, like so many other things. When I hear the Member for St. Augustine asking about Category 2 status, I say, “What nerve!” When we left government in 1995, we had Category 1 status. When we came back in 2002, we met the airline with Category 2 status. We have been fighting to get the airline back to Category 1 status. He is now asking about category 2 status. What nerve! In the case of BWee and LIAT—I do not know if “screwed up” is parliamentary—they left them alone. They had a minister of finance who in his later years was running the ministry from his home. He was not taking it on. Anyhow, let me not go there. There was no management and leadership with these things. We come back now and there is a problem. We are not afraid and we will deal with it. That is why they put us here and moved them from here. We have no problem and we will deal with it.

Let me make the point that I have been making in public. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has at all times resisted all efforts to give LIAT money directly, even if we have to hide behind the fact that the Government owns merely 1 per cent of the shareholding of LIAT. At the same time, the Government is conscious of the fact that for the non oil sector of our economy, Caricom is our main market. We are conscious of the fact also that LIAT is critical infrastructure for the Eastern Caribbean. The Member for Siparia will say *Caribbean Star*. One must have a knowledge of what monopolies do. They should ask the NCC about how they had to get their hands from the lion’s mouth. Monopolies are not easy.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Is it not true that the Prime Minister of Antigua welcomed *Caribbean Star*?

Hon. K. Valley: I cannot speak for the Prime Minister of Antigua. I cannot even speak for my wife. I am talking about Trinidad and Tobago's interest. I do not know what Antigua did. I made the point that monopolies are not easy. If BWee were to move its operations to Antigua, I am sure that the Prime Minister of Antigua would welcome it. I feel certain that if we were to move BWee's headquarters to Antigua, the Prime Minister of Antigua would be supportive of BWIA.

Let me get back to where I was going. The Government has not given LIAT any money directly. At all times we have resisted providing money to LIAT directly. We have provided loans to shareholder governments of LIAT. We have a history. The Member for St. Augustine spoke about the money we loaned Caribbean governments in the '70s and '80s. The last time around it was my responsibility to collect those funds. We collected every cent other than from Guyana. We were making good headway with Guyana, but we were overtaken in 1995, and when the new government came in, it started forgiving, forgiving and forgetting and all of it went by.

Mr. Singh: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. The debt forgiveness of Guyana was part of a whole multilateral international setting. For you to say that Trinidad and Tobago was singularly doing that, is misleading the House.

Hon. K. Valley: Trinidad and Tobago had a choice and they decided to say, "Okay."

Mr. Ramnath: What is your problem with Guyana?

Hon. K. Valley: I have no problem with Guyana. Do you see where they go, Mr. Speaker? I made the point that we lent money to a number of Caricom countries and we got it back from everybody other than Guyana, and he says that I have a problem with Guyana. It looks like I like Guyana because they did not give me back my money. The next time that I am going to Guyana I will carry you to show you the good time I have when I go there. I love it. Minister Rohi is my good friend. If you go with me, I will try to see if you could have a good time, too.

Like BWee, LIAT has problems; not only like BWee, but also like airlines in the United States and all about the place. The issue is not BWee or LIAT, but the airline industry. Since the liberalization of air transport started by the United States during the period of Reagan, we have been facing this problem. Airlines are coming with very cheap fares and that is having an effect on the cost of travel, which is good for the customer. Ordinarily, in any normal market there would be a shake-out and those who can stay will stay. The reality of the airline industry is that in this day of globalization, most governments will see an airlift as a critical public utility. The same way that in the old paradigm one saw public transport as critical infrastructure, in this new paradigm of globalization and liberalization, most governments see air transport as critical infrastructure. The United States will allow some airlines to go under; they will not allow American Airlines to go under. If you are working for

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, January 14, 2005

any state or any part of a US company or a large organization—even CitiCorps in Trinidad, when their people are travelling, they must travel with American Airlines. We talk about free trade, but certain industries are critical and would need a certain level of protection.

As we speak of CSME, one sees an article on today's *Express* on page 11.

Mr. Speaker: I wish to remind you, as I have reminded the Member opposite, of Standing Order Nos. 69 and 70. I think that you have answered him sufficiently on air transport. You may be pre-empting that debate you promised him. If you would like to come back—

Hon. K. Valley: I am saying what I would have said if he were relevant.

I thought that although he was irrelevant, it was critical that the Government put the facts on the table, lest anyone were to assume that we are afraid to engage. We are not afraid to engage. I still hope because I have more to say. I could write the motion for him if he wishes. I hope that he would put a motion on the Order Paper so that we will deal with this issue to the fullest.

On page 11 of today's *Express*, I recommend that the hon. Member read Mr. Morrison's article, "CSME, The Way To Go", making the case that as we speak about CSME, we must know the importance of air transport. That is why we have been buying services from BWee on an arm's length basis. I emphasize that. We set up our South-South Route Development Committee. They came up with their plans and are negotiating with BWIA to buy services on an arm's length basis, so that BWee can fly to Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. It makes no sense having markets without the ability to get there.

LIAT and LIAT funding: Sometime last year, LIAT came to the shareholders' meeting, at which the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and Minister of Finance was invited and I went along with him to Barbados. They wanted funding of \$17 million on the first occasion. They were in difficulty. They made a case and we will not lend directly. We would provide funding to shareholder governments and if they wish to put it into LIAT that is their business. I was making the point that, that was against the background of our being able to get back our money the last time. Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica and Barbados paid us. The only one that did not pay us was Guyana because the last government wrote it off. Against that backdrop, we felt comfortable lending money to the governments and we did so. The shareholder governments wanted \$17 million.

You read it out. Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent—Grenada and St. Kitts are also shareholder governments but they do not take any part in those negotiations. Barbados said that they did not want any money from Trinidad and Tobago. That was just after the fish issue. Prime Minister Arthur said that he would find his \$5.7 million. Antigua had money for LIAT and they came after and asked us to lend them. We lent it to them. That was \$17 million. Money cannot come out from the Consolidated Fund without parliamentary approval. I

found the \$300 million for you; you look for the \$17 million. I assure you that it is there. They came last year July with their restructuring plan and to restructure they had to release some staff.

They asked us for some more money and we laid some conditions. They did not meet those conditions and we could not assist them. In that context, they came up with the proposal to attempt to access the oil facility. Their argument is that “the conditions you placed on us are onerous. It is a chicken and egg situation. We cannot meet your condition without money. We have to restructure. We have 650 employees too many and we have to cut down and do some other things. If you do not give us the money we will not be able to do it.”

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Dookeran: Are you suggesting that the restructuring plan put forward by LIAT could not stand the test of viability? Was that the first plan and they then came up with a second plan?

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with the same restructuring plan. I want to let the Member know—because of something he said—that the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) is a fundamental part of all these negotiations. As a matter of fact, the President of the CDB came back with us on the plane on Saturday evening.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Is that the plane that almost—

Hon. K. Valley: I was sleeping so I do not know what happened. As I said, he came back on the plane with us. *[Interruption]* But I am not finished and you are not listening. Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that the CDB was working with LIAT, looking over the whole restructuring plan and, since I no longer consider myself a technician but a politician today, I rely on the technicians.

Mr. Speaker, they came up with the proposal as to whether they could access the funding from the oil facility. Note the two conditions in the oil facility: a guideline by the heads and, it is managed by the CDB. The CDB was there when the proposal was made. We have not transferred the funds to the CDB as yet. We said that the heads have to agree. We are not going to give any money and the heads do not agree and then they say that cannot come from the fund. We have to get the heads to agree so that whatever Note we send to Cabinet the two conditions would be met: the heads and the CDB would have agreed. Mr. Speaker, that is the condition under which the Fund was established. *[Interruption]* The guidelines have to be established by the heads and it has to be administered by the CDB. Did you read that? I read that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What is the input of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Will the heads decide what are the criteria and conditions? How much money is in that fund to date?

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member said something in the nature of a question and I want to answer it. You asked what about the people of Trinidad and Tobago

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, January 14, 2005

and for that I have to go back to the origin of the fund. The fund, as stated, was established for Caricom countries. The fund indemnifies Caricom countries for oil prices in excess of US \$30. Oil price must first be above US \$30. We are giving them back, in a form, that excess. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago nor the people, we consider, have anything to do with that. It is an issue for Caricom heads, the CDB and so on. It is their money, in a sense. We have taken a decision that we will not charge them a price above US \$30, and we have fixed it. That is all that we have done! It is their money and they have to decide how it is to be used.

If the heads agree that it can be used for that purpose, who am I to say that they ought not to do it? I cannot prejudge to know better than they do how to use, what is in effect, their money. Mr. Speaker, that is the point I want to make. To the extent that we have said we will charge you US \$30 per barrel and no more and any excess will go into that fund, that fund belongs to the Caricom countries and they have to determine how it is to be used and everything else is niceties, Mr. Speaker. That is the logic of this situation. *[Interruption]* How much is there in the fund? Well, from July 01 TT \$25 million per month for six to seven months that is about \$150 million going on to \$175 million, something like that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Hon. Minister, with due respect, I asked how much money is in the fund and you told me from July of last year until the end and then now.

Hon. K. Valley: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: But no moneys were appropriated by the Parliament last fiscal year and therefore any moneys put in that fund would be illegal. If it is different tell me. The Prime Minister announced in September that he would be creating this and he would be putting into the estimates \$300 million. If no moneys were put into the 2004 estimates, Parliament appropriated no moneys and, therefore, it would be illegal to sink moneys into that fund for fiscal 2004? Tell me if it is different.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me go back to the Cabinet decision. Right now I know it is \$300 million in the fund, the total amount that was approved by Cabinet was \$375 million. As you know, during the year at the midterm review, one can always put in the excess. Mr. Speaker, paragraph 9 of the same Cabinet Note says:

“At its meeting held on September 11, 2004 SCE reviewed the matter and reiterated its support for the facility on the condition that funds be utilized for poverty eradication. It was also agreed that the sum of TT \$375 million be provided in the 2005 Estimates of Expenditure to meet commitments retroactive to July 1, 2004.”

[Interruption] How many appropriations do we have in a year? One?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: *[Inaudible]* This is the closing of the books for 2004 and that is why you came with the Caricom Disaster Fund for us to approve what you have spent.

Hon. K. Valley: Hon. Member, I am here longer than you are and I know the rules.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I know you are but that does not apply. We are talking about the law not about length of service.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Valley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I just want to read again what I read. The Cabinet Note says:

“It was also agreed that the sum of TT \$375 million be provided in the 2005 Estimates of Expenditure to meet commitments retroactive to July 1, 2004.”

In this new year, recognizing that three months have gone, no appropriation was made in the last year, so we will put it in this year's estimates. We put an original appropriation of \$300 million! At the mid-year review—which is normal—we will put the other \$75 million, so do not worry, there will be \$375 million. At present, conceptually, there should be about \$150 or \$175 million.

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that the Member spoke about the different forms of assistance that we were providing to Caricom: There is the oil facility, the Caricom Trade Support Programme, which has been launched. We have not disbursed any money from that fund as yet. It was launched in Jamaica and St. Lucia and at both launches Trinidad and Tobago was seen in an excellent light. They said that this was proper infrastructure for the Caribbean Single Market and the Economy (CSME).

Mr. Speaker, the point was made, and I remind my colleagues again, that the Caricom Trade Support Programme helps the private sector. Its consultancies are in the private sector. Now, first of all, who is going to get those consultancies? I submit that, in the main, it is going to be Trinidad and Tobago firms. Secondly, the purpose of the consultancies is to build capacity in those companies and, to that extent, those companies will be able to buy more. From whom will they buy, Mr. Speaker? Again, I submit, our Trinidad and Tobago firms will benefit more than anybody else. The reality is that Trinidad and Tobago dwarfs Caricom with respect to its trading patterns. From where I see it, it is enlightened self-interest by putting in place a Caricom Support Programme.

The second issue the Member spoke about is the fact that we allow the islands to come to our market to raise funds. When we do that, Mr. Speaker, what are we doing? We are moving in the direction of one of our major objectives which is positioning Port of Spain as the financial centre of this part of the world. Yes, he is correct, some \$500 million was raised on this market by the countries in the region in the last year.

At present, the Central Bank has reserves in the facility of some \$2.4 or \$2.5 billion. What does one do with excess foreign reserves? Either you invest it in financial assets or you allow bond issues on your market. When you want to position your country in a particular way, obviously, you would want to do that. More importantly, when you do that, Mr. Speaker, you have flows coming through later on; capital and interest flows. I do not know why the Member—especially a person who has served as the former Governor of the Central Bank—would make such a statement. To my mind it is not assistance to the islands, it is really simply doing business. We charge them interest, Mr. Speaker! This is not subsidized in any way you know! The banks in Trinidad and Tobago get a better interest rate from lending to these islands. Of course, one would argue that the risk is slightly higher also but they get a higher interest rate than if they were to invest moneys in the United States.

Mr. Dookeran: I just want to correct your interpretation of my comment. I listed the support of Trinidad and Tobago to Caricom. I did not comment on whether or not that particular support was wrong. I did not say that.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, the way it was said the uninitiated would have a certain opinion. I am glad you have clarified that you do not feel it is wrong. But I do not even think it is support, it is simply in the nature of business.

Mr. Dookeran: It started in my time. [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Valley: This is so interesting. I find him getting better and better. Do you not find so? [*Interruption*] The way it was said it was as though something was wrong with it. Did you not get that impression?

Mr. Khan: Yes.

Hon. K. Valley: The way the Member mentioned it was as though it was wrong to allow these islands to borrow money in our market.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have dealt with most of the issues raised by the Member. I do not know whether there is anything else. Let me just say that I support the matter before us. This is a normal course of business and what one ought to see is that there is no supplementary appropriation on this occasion. Three ministries needed additional funds: the Tobago House of Assembly, which required \$13.8 million more than was appropriated; the Ministry of Finance required \$10 million more and the Ministry of Housing required some \$56 million more. The Ministry of Education did not require \$80.3 million of its appropriation, so it is merely a transfer between Heads with no need to increase the overall size of the expenditure.

There is one other point I should make. This is really a Variation of Appropriation Bill. When one talks about a proper Finance Bill, is when one raises the taxes and so on. That is just a small point but I think it should be noted.

Mr. Ramnath: Are you in a position to say what is the amount of petroleum products imported by Caricom countries for the last year, in barrels of oil equivalent to the—

Hon. K. Valley: I really cannot say but I am sure my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, would be able to do that.

Mr. Ramnath: Do I get you correctly when you said that we are, in fact, selling Caricom, when prices go above \$30—at US \$30 a barrel?

Hon. K. Valley: No, that is not what I have said.

Mr. Ramnath: And the difference goes into the fund?

Hon. K. Valley: Let me tell you what it is. The Caricom countries buy at whatever price it is, \$50 or \$53 or what have you. The purpose of the Oil Stabilization Fund is to receive, in effect, any price received above the \$30. They pay the \$53 and you put in the fund, in that case, let us say \$23 and we are now going to use that \$23 to support LIAT.

Mr. Ramnath: I now understand why you did not want to say that you are subsidizing it.

Mr. Persad-Bissessar: You said that no decision has been taken with respect to this \$120 million going towards the CDB for helping LIAT?

Hon. K. Valley: Yes.

Mr. Persad-Bissessar: So what was the announcement yesterday about? Please enlighten us.

Hon. K. Valley: The announcement yesterday merely reported on the meeting in Barbados and the proposal. There has been no formal proposal to the Cabinet as yet. I can tell you, however, that a Note is being prepared but I certainly did not feel that I wanted to hurry Cabinet, in other words, to push a Note of that magnitude before Cabinet on the morning of the Cabinet meeting. I expect that Cabinet would opine on it on Thursday coming but, fundamentally, it is going to be subject to the agreement of the heads. Until we get the document from the Secretary General stating that he has received the consent of the heads for the use of the fund in this manner, I can assure you that not a cent would be disbursed.

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that we are not increasing the size of expenditure that we are merely transferring funds and this is really just cleaning up of the accounts so that it can be sent for audit.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (Caroni Central): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate to make a brief intervention and since the Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for Arouca South have an obsession with 69 I promise to be as relevant as I can be. *[Interruption]* *[Laughter]* That is why I am staying away from it.

Mr. Speaker, this, as the Member for Diego Martin Central said, is a routine procedure that is done on an annual basis where the Government shifts money between ministries that have not utilized the moneys allocated for their programmes. These moneys are shifted to other ministries where their programmes have done well. *[Interruption]* I am talking about 69(2).

Mr. Speaker, for instance, the Ministry of Education could not utilize \$80 million of its allocation so this has been disbursed to different ministries.

Mr. Speaker, we have been seeing a pattern emerging where every time there is a variation of appropriation in this House moneys are taken away from the Ministry of Education. At the beginning of the year a lot of money is allocated to the Ministry of Education and at least twice during the same year moneys are taken away because the Ministry cannot utilize the amount of funds allocated to it.

Mr. Speaker, there are areas in particular ministries where programmes have not been doing well and those moneys are transferred from one programme. As I have said, this is really a routine exercise which is done on an annual basis by the Government in office. However, when we look at some of the areas from which moneys have been transferred—some of the areas that have lost money—and we look at the areas into which these moneys have been transferred and we look at the track record and the performance of some of these entities and programmes, we have serious concerns.

Firstly, I would like to look at the transfer of moneys with regard to the Ministry of Health. In the document that was presented at the Finance Committee earlier this week, \$26 million has been transferred from the Ministry of Health to other programmes. The major item in the \$26 million that has been transferred, the major area from which the \$15 million has been transferred is drugs and other related materials and supplies. That \$15 million was budgeted and not utilized and so it was transferred out to other programmes. When we look at the areas to which this money was transferred, as I said, we have serious difficulties but I will deal with that later.

Mr. Speaker, \$15 million was budgeted for drugs and other related materials and supplies but everyone knows that one of the worse years in the health sector, as far as the provision of drugs and other related materials and supplies are concerned, especially in the hospitals, was 2004. There are many occasions, especially in the South West Regional Health Authority at the San Fernando Hospital and even at Port of Spain General Hospital where surgical operations had to be cancelled because there were no drugs to put patients to sleep.

Mr. Speaker, when a surgical operation list is cancelled that is a very serious thing. On a weekly basis when patients attend clinic the consultants or the doctors who see them put them on a list for operation. Every week is booked for about three months; sometimes for about six months. When a list is cancelled—sometimes two lists are cancelled in two days or three lists in three days—it takes these patients about three to six months before they can get another appointment to have their surgical operations done. So cancelling a surgical list is not a simple matter. When a list is cancelled because you do not have basic drugs to put patients to sleep; when you have the moneys at your disposal and when you have the agency at your disposal to purchase the drugs—that is NIPDEC and so on—that is a serious indictment against the Ministry of Health.

There are many occasions as well—I do not know if the Minister is living in Trinidad and Tobago; he is living in a very privileged position—on a regular basis in the hospitals that patients are given prescriptions to buy drugs outside. They are given prescriptions to go outside because the drugs are not available in the hospitals. I am saying that from personal experience because I see the prescriptions on a regular basis. The relatives of patients in the hospitals are given prescriptions to go to private pharmacies to buy the medication to take to the hospitals so that they can be administered to the patient. Those who are in a privileged position where they can buy medication do so, but there are many others who cannot buy the medications and they have to take whatever is the outcome, having to be treated without the medications. Mr. Speaker, \$15 million was available but the Ministry of Health could not utilize it.

Mr. Speaker, the explanation given in the Note says—and this explanation does not make sense.

“It was anticipated that more patients would have accessed the private pharmacies for their prescriptions, however patients continued to use the facilities at the public pharmacies at hospitals and health centres.”

Mr. Speaker, does that make sense? I am sure the Minister is talking about CDAP here. He said:

“The patients did not access these medications at the private pharmacies, they accessed them at the public pharmacies.”

Why did they budget the \$50 million in the first place? If you provided drugs at public pharmacies and the patients accessed them, then why did you provide the \$50 million in the first place?

Mr. Speaker, the CDAP caters for a particular category of illnesses. I want to put on the record that CDAP is a good programme catering for persons with chronic illnesses. The CDAP has 42 items on its list but there are thousands of items on the hospital formulary. On a daily basis there are patients who need antibiotics, drugs for stomach ailments, which are not provided for in the CDAP; they need injections, which are not provided for; they need operating theatre supplies; they need supplies and medicine in the Accident and Emergency Department; they need reagents in the laboratories and so on. There are a host of drugs and other supplies that are needed in the hospitals apart from what is provided in CDAP.

Mr. Speaker, there are some institutions in this country, the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital—I keep repeating this and I hope the Minister would take note and do something about this—that do not have basic equipment, like blood pressure apparatus to take the blood pressure of patients. There are two or three blood pressure apparatus, functioning, in an entire hospital. They deliver about 6,000 and they do not have blood pressure apparatus which is a very basic piece of equipment, they do not have syringes to give injections; those are very important pieces of equipment that are needed on a daily basis; they do not have gloves to do examinations in the Mount Hope Maternity

Hospital and yet \$15 million could not be spent by the Ministry of Health to provide these very basic things at the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I have had calls from the St. James Infirmary on two or three occasions saying that basic things are non-existent. In that facility they do not have soap to bathe patients. If you go there you would know what I am talking about. You have old and disabled patients who cannot look after themselves. They told me they were bathing with dish-washing liquid. They were using the nurses' caps to bathe these patients because they did not have washrags. Mr. Speaker, all of these things and yet \$15 million that was at their disposal was sent back to be transferred to different programmes. Mr. Speaker, that can only be the height of incompetence and mismanagement by the ministry.

Recently the neonatologist at the Port of Spain General Hospital complained bitterly and publicly about the lack of neonatal equipment at the Port of Spain General Hospital. Do you know what the response of the Prime Minister was? His response was that if she breaks the law he will lock her up. He did not look into the allegations; he did not look at the interest of newborn babies who are very sensitive at that age and need the equipment in order to survive; he did not look at any of those things, all he said was: "If she breaks the law, I will lock her up."

Mr. Speaker, \$26 million has been transferred to the Regional Health Authorities and, as I have said, \$15 million was to have been used for drugs. The other \$11 million was to be used for other things. Out of this \$26 million, half of it, \$13 million, went to the North West Regional Health Authority. What did the North West Regional Health Authority do with this money?

There is a report done by the internal auditor at the North West Regional Health Authority, which covered the period June 2003 to 2004. The report gives us a clear picture as to where this money went. The report demonstrates that there is corruption, nepotism, favouritism, mismanagement and probably fraud at the North West Regional Health Authority in dealing with its finances.

Mr. Speaker, the moneys that have been transferred that could have bought drugs for the sick patients of this country, were transferred to the North West Regional Health Authority for these purposes. I am sure when the financial reports of the North West Regional Health Authority for 2004 are finally submitted there will still be a large deficit in its finances. I am predicting that there will be a deficit in the vicinity of at least \$100 million.

Mr. Speaker, let me read some of what this report says. The first thing is that:

"The Human Resource Department was unable to provide a Personnel Establishment Listing for the North West Regional Health Authority as required..."

4.00 p.m.

This is the human resource department, which is supposed to have as part of the documents that they keep the names of people who have been employed, their qualifications, their

interview record, the date of assumption of duty, and their salaries and so on. And the human resource department had none of these documents, and more than that, they did not have a personnel establishment listing.

The North West Regional Health Authority is a big region. How can you function if you do not have a personnel establishment list? And I will tell you what the implications of that is later on. The auditor went on to say:

“This document shows the jobs in the Authority by Division/Department /Section/Unit, Salary group, number of positions per job title approved by the Board and can also be used for controlling the recruitment of staff.”

I feel this is why there is no personnel listing. When you have personnel listing then each person that you hire must be hired against one of these jobs on the establishment.

“Internal Audit was informed that a Listing of persons currently being paid by the North West Regional Health Authority was available and this was subsequently received...”

And it was received in less than three years. Summary of permanent count of positions was by institutions.

“Employees holding permanent positions

Employees who were issued permanent appointment letters...”

A perusal of the document—that is, the document of permanent positions at institutions—revealed that one (1) column said 321 positions but no names, and you know why.

“It was explained that these positions were shown in blank column since the Human Resource Department...”

at the North West Regional Health Authority could not determine where these persons were working; 321 of them, blank. They were being paid but the human resource department could not determine where these people were working. That is not all. The report goes on to say:

“While the total number of permanent positions shown on the listing amounted to 1,690...”

That is the listing that was obtained by the internal auditor; the total number of permanent positions shown on the listing amounted to 1,690.

“the Payroll Registers showed that approximately 4,000 employees were being paid monthly.”

So you had a payroll of positions, 1,690 people but 4,000 people were being paid. Where were the other 3,210 people? Where are they? What are their names and what are they doing? Where are they working? This is very important and I will tell you why. When we were at the ministry we discovered that there was a scam at the North West Regional Health Authority where a few

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[DR. RAFEEQ]

Friday, January 14, 2005

doctors who were non-existent were being paid. We called in the Fraud Squad and the Fraud Squad did its investigations and the matter is now before the court. Some people have been arrested and charged. Where are these 3,210 persons when the auditor could have only picked up 1,690 names of people who were on the payroll? There were 1,690 positions, yet the payroll register showed that there were 4,000 employees on the payroll.

The next issue is that:

“Advertisements were not seen for the filling of the under-mentioned positions...”

He mentioned some of them. I want to read this. This is instructive. Food Service Supervisor, Cheryl Ann Lee Yuen, Special Projects Officer, Cheryl Ann Lee Yuen; one person, two positions. Medical Records Officer, Plant Engineer 11, Dental Surgery Assistant, Special Projects Officer and Special Projects Officer. We do not know what these Special Projects Officers have been hired to do but these persons were hired. One person is holding two positions; these persons were hired and no advertisements were placed.

That is not all. The way they went about hiring people in the North West Regional Health Authority; anybody hired, people with any kind of qualifications and gave them any salary that they wanted. There was no control. And I am reading from the audit report—

“Copies of certification achieved as reflected on resumes submitted by certain middle management personnel were not seen in the Personal Files...As a result, it could not be determined whether the selected personnel possessed the required qualifications for the job positions.”

So when you have personal files without the certificates, without their qualifications and so forth, the auditor is making the point:

“...it could not be determined whether the selected personnel possessed the required qualifications for the job positions.”

Mr. Speaker, these are positions I am telling you about that were not advertised, but this one really takes the cake. The Regional Health Authority went ahead and hired two doctors from Mauritius; they are probably—I am not too sure —husband and wife because they carry the same surnames. I am not too sure about that. They interviewed them and the thing is no doctors interviewed them. A human resource consultant interviewed them and hired the both of them as consultants. One was hired as a Consultant Urologist and the other as a Consultant Neurosurgeon. After they were hired by the North West Regional Health Authority they then had to decide where these people would work because they were not hired against vacant positions so they had to decide where to put these people to work. They had already been hired and they signed a contract and salaries were involved and so forth. They sent one to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the Medical Chief of Staff at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex raised concerns on the appointment of these two doctors on the

grounds, first of all, that there was no request to hire staff and that staff at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex had no involvement in the recruitment process. Secondly, there were limitations of inpatient beds and coverage by the anaesthetic staff; and, thirdly, the addition of the two members of staff was unlikely to impact significantly on patient care at the Complex.

They sent these doctors, hired them first, and then decided where they should work because, as I said, they were not hired against any vacant positions when they sent them to Mount Hope. The doctors at Mount Hope said:

“We do not need these people but since you have sent them we will allocate them to work with a consultant. And having allocated them we will assess their performance in three months and then tell you what these people are able to do.”

After three months they made their assessment and said these people can work as Registrars, they cannot work as consultants. But they were not willing to work as Registrars even though that was within their competence, even though that was what was assessed that they could have done. So the decision was taken by the North West Regional Authority to pay them as Consultants. They were paid as consultants. The people at Mount Hope said they could not perform as consultants so the report that was made by the auditor said the doctor “was paid the sum of \$21,040 per month with effect from 2004, February 20, for which he was rendering no service to the Authority”. Yet he was hired and being paid a salary of \$21,040.

He was sent to San Fernando and San Fernando said we do not need him, we do not have a vacancy; he was sent to Point Fortin and Point Fortin said we do not need him, we do not have a vacancy. That is the implication of when you are hiring people and you do not have a personnel establishment within the authority. So you hire anybody because you do not have positions against which to hire them. And, of course, these positions, as I said, were not advertised.

There is more, and I would not call the name but this person was employed as a pharmacist at a salary of \$5,280. That is Range 38—a one-year contract. That was the highest end of the range at which the most senior pharmacist at the authority was being paid. This was a junior pharmacist. She was being paid at a rate at which the longest serving pharmacist at the Port of Spain General Hospital was being paid. As I said, that is not all. There was this person who was recruited as a medical records officer on a permanent basis at the basic salary of \$8,000; traveling allowance, \$1,000, telephone and cellular \$350, COLA, \$55.00.

Mr. Speaker, this position in the public service was classified much lower than that. The auditor went on to say:

“The compensation package paid proved to be a contentious issue with the Manager, Medical Records...”

Because that person was receiving more money than the manager herself. At the time of the audit in August 2004, the matter has not yet been resolved.

And that is what we are being asked to vote for this afternoon. We are being asked to vote for moneys for the North West Regional Health Authority for these things. The document goes on to say:

“The under-mentioned Contracts/Letters of Offer of Employment were signed by either the Vice President, Human Resource or Manager, Employment/Employee Services which were in contravention to Section 12(1) of the Regional Health Authorities Act, No. 5 of 1994, which states:

‘A document, not required by law to be under the seal of an Authority shall be duly executed if signed by the Chairman, the Chief Executive Officer, or a member duly authorized by resolution of the Board.’”

No evidence was seen as to the board having delegated this authority to the Vice President, Human Resource or Manager Employment/Employee Services for the signing of these documents. This is because, as I said, they were just hiring people, anybody at whatever salary. It was an employment agency.

Mr. Speaker, let me just remind you that last year when we heard that the North West Regional Health Authority was owing \$108 million in moneys that were deducted from employees for PAYE, that is, taxes and Health Surcharge, we made the point because the North West Regional Health Authority said at that time that it was to employ doctors and nurses. It was not to employ doctors and nurses, it was for this purpose and we said so at the time, that they were employing people whom they did not need because it was just an employment agency. That is why their bill ran up so much and they were not able to pay PAYE and Health Surcharge.

Human Resource Officer. They employed a human resource officer—\$8,000 basic salary, travelling allowance, \$1,000, communication allowance, \$350 and COLA \$55. Human Resource Officers were the highest paid of human resource officers in the public service. People who have had 15 and 20 years experience; that was their salary at that time. These were junior people without any experience but they were being hired at a salary that was equivalent to the salary of a senior human resource officer in the public service, and what were they doing? What was the Human Resource Department doing when you do not have the records of people who have been employed in the authority and you do not have a personnel establishment, you do not have any kinds of files?

“The persons recruited as Human Resource Officers were paid the above-mentioned compensation package but it appeared that this package was never ratified by the Board of Directors.”

As I said, the basic salary of \$8,000 being paid to human resource officers is equated to the most senior Human Resource Officer in Range 63 in the Civil Service Classification and

Compensation Plan. These were officers now joining the establishment at the North West Regional Health Authority because the auditor went on to make the point:

“Presently, persons appointed to the position of Human Resource Officer in the Authority possess the basic minimum human resource qualifications and no relevant work experience.”

That is what they are doing with the moneys we are being asked to vote for. Then he gives a breakdown down of the Health Surcharge and the PAYE they did not remit to the Board of Inland Revenue. From May 2002 to September 2002, moneys that were collected as PAYE and not remitted \$28,869,424. For the same period, Health Surcharge, \$920,240.40. November 2002 to September 2003, \$35,878,649 collected as PAYE and not remitted; Health Surcharge \$1,397,310 not remitted. November 2003 to June 2004, \$25,859,189 in PAYE not remitted; Health Surcharge \$822,562. A total of \$93,747,376.07 collected by the North West Regional Health Authority over that period of time and not remitted to the Board of Inland Revenue. And we do not know. They paid these people whom they were hiring during the year, all of these ghost gangs they were paying. Names that they could not find, people that they could not find but who were receiving salary on a monthly basis. Ninety four million dollars collected and not remitted. But listen to this statement.

“Receipts from National Insurance Board as evidence of the submission of National Insurance deductions made from the employees’ salaries were not presented for audit inspection.”

That is, while the auditor discovered that \$94 million was collected in Health Surcharge, and PAYE and not remitted to the board, the auditor was not able, because the records were not available, to tell him how much was collected by way of National Insurance deduction and not remitted to the National Insurance Board. So it is more than \$94 million.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the issues that we have serious concerns with as far as the moneys that we are being asked to vote for the North West Regional Health Authority and what they are doing with these funds. There is another issue which I would like to mention.

You would have seen in the newspapers some time ago, that the Chief Executive Officer of the North West Regional Health Authority said that the chairman of the authority, Eastman, had a beneficial interest in a company which was providing services to the North West Regional Health Authority. In today’s newspapers, the Minister of Health said yesterday that as far as he is concerned there is no contract between the North West Regional Health Authority and Eastman Associates, and as far as he is concerned that is the end of the matter. He is not going to pursue the matter anymore because as far as he is concerned there is no contract between the North West Regional Health Authority and Eastman and Associates. That is not the issue. The issue is whether Eastman and Associates were employed or hired by the board to do any work on behalf of the North West Regional Health Authority. That is

the first question that must be asked. Whether they were hired and paid any money? Whether there was a contract or not, that is not important. Whether they were hired by the North West Regional Health Authority to do any work on their behalf; and, secondly, whether they were paid to do any of this work; and, thirdly, whether the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority, having a beneficial interest in the company, whether he was part of the discussion to hire Eastman and Associates.

In the news release that was given today, it was said since he became chairman there was only one instance in which they were asked to provide service for the North West Regional Health Authority. So they have admitted that they provide service for the North West Regional Health Authority and we are asking whether the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority was part of that decision to employ a firm to provide services; a firm in which he has a beneficial interest. That is what we are asking.

Mr. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, the North West Regional Health Authority did not request any staff from Eastman and Associates. There is no contract with Eastman and Associates and, therefore, all human resource companies, when they are aware that an organization is looking for a particular type of personnel in a particular area, will automatically look at their database and if they have anyone who can qualify and might suit that job, they would forward the resumé. The fact of the matter is that no contract was given and there was no decision to give any contract to Eastman and Associates.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, that is not what was recorded in the newspapers by Eastman and Associates. They said that since Mr. Eastman has been appointed as the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority there was only one instance in which they provided service to the North West Regional Health Authority. I am asking the question whether they provided the service free of charge. We want to find out the position that they provided service to the North West Regional Health Authority, whether this position was advertised, whether applications were received, whether there were interviews, whether all of these people were found to be unsuitable for the job and whether the board then decided to go to Eastman and Associates and ask them for resumé and whether the chairman of the board was present at that meeting where they decided to go to Eastman and Associates and ask them for resumé. These are questions that we want answers to.

I will tell you Mr. Eastman who is the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority and some members of his team were invited here to a meeting with the Joint Select Committee that is looking after some of the ministries. When they questioned him on some of the issues, and I raised these issues in Parliament before, the issue of the authority having appointed a CEO today and sent her on leave the following day and a lot of other issues, the issue of the \$107 million taxes not paid and so forth, when he was questioned about this he went back to the North West Regional Health Authority and wrote a letter to the chairman

and members of the Joint Select Committee demanding an apology for the questions we asked. We have that on record—demanding an apology. He is presiding over the disbursement of maybe \$500 million or \$600 million of taxpayers' money and does not want to account to the Parliament for it. When we asked him questions about the disbursement of those funds, he demanded an apology from the Parliament.

There are certain positions, and I do not know if the Minister is going to respond today. There is a financial consultant at the North West Regional Health Authority, and I want him to tell us how she was hired, whether the position was advertised. I want the Minister to tell us how was the IR consultant hired and whether that position was advertised? The present CEO, I want the minister to tell us—I know the position was advertised, but I want the minister to tell us when he got the information, whether proper interviews were held and that person was selected. The senior Vice President, Operations, I want the minister to tell us whether that position was advertised, whether there were interviews and how that person, in fact, was selected. These are some of the concerns we have in the variations of appropriations we are dealing with here this afternoon.

There are just two small issues I wanted to raise in the five minutes I have again. The first one has to do with the issue of Mount Hope. The Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, as you know, falls within the purview of the North West Regional Health Authority. Now it is separated. I do not know if the boards are functioning and if they have their own administration, North West and North Central, but during the period that we are reviewing here that was under the purview of the North-West Regional Health Authority.

In the budget statement of three months ago, the Prime Minister explicitly said that all the services that are provided at Mount Hope will be available to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago free of charge. He made that statement. I challenged him at that time saying that was not possible because he did not provide any funding for it, he did not have the necessary equipment to do it, he did not have the necessary human resource to do it and when I told them that will cost in the vicinity of \$200 million to get it going, they said they can only talk about \$100 million but that was not so. They had the equipment; they had the personnel; they had the wards; they had everything; it was just a few million dollars more and they had everything.

Two days before the new year started there was an advertisement in the newspaper saying we have lied. They did not say it in those words, but we have misled you. That what we said was not true, we are not providing all the services free. We are only going to provide one set of services free and that is, that if you go to a health centre or if you go to a hospital and you are referred to the institution, you come with a referral letter.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen that even when patients are referred from other hospitals they are refused admission at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. That is a hoax. People were led to believe—they were told explicitly that from January 01, 2004, that they

can go to Mount Hope and they can access all the services there free. They cannot access orthopaedic services there, they cannot access renal dialysis free there, they cannot access nuclear medicine, they cannot access cardio surgery, angiogram angioplasty; they cannot access ENT surgery, and the Hibiscus Ward. They cannot access these services even though the Prime Minister explicitly said in his budget, all the services at Mount Hope will be provided free of cost to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago from January 01, 2005. So another hoax and that is flip-flop.

The last point I want to raise, because moneys have been budgeted and allocated in the variation. I think \$14 million have been taken from the Ministry of Education and given to the Tobago House of Assembly or the Ministry of Health to be spent towards the Scarborough Hospital. We have seen the massive scandal that this project is evolving into. And when I spoke in the budget debate I warned this Parliament and I warned the country that by the time this hospital is completed, the cost would be tripled the amount that was budgeted for it. The cost that was budgeted was \$110 million.

On Monday I asked the question and the answer was provided, for the debate today, that in fiscal 2004, \$48 million of the \$110 million budgeted have been spent. Up to today, I am sure they have crossed \$60 million so they have crossed 50 per cent of the contracted price for that hospital. What have we got for that? We have got just the foundation, not even the full foundation. We have got a foundation just for \$60 million.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that by the time that hospital is completed it would triple the budgeted cost of \$110 million. We do not know when that hospital will be completed, we do not know how much it will cost, we do not know whether the quality of work that is being done at the Scarborough Hospital is of good quality because the consultants who are in charge of looking after the quality of work, they are already saying that the quality of work is substandard. When we are being asked to budget here \$14 million in addition to what has already been budgeted for last year for the Scarborough Hospital, we know that is money that is going down the drain.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much. I wanted to make these few comments on this Bill and with the way these moneys are being spent, it is difficult for us to support the Bill. Thank you.

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Dr. Fuad Khan (Barataria/San Juan): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to join the debate. There are just some small points I would like to raise. I saw, in the minutes of the meeting, a part where a former President of the country was given \$907,000—correct me if I am wrong—which was appropriated to him for medical expenses. When I saw this, the first

thing that came to mind was: Where did he have the medical treatment done? What medical treatment was given for that quantum of money?

You see, Mr. Speaker, a kidney transplant in this country costs approximately \$110,000. So if one equates it to \$907,000 of medical expenses, we have to ask ourselves how to ratify that quantum of money. What did the former President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. ANR Robinson, do? He had to do about 10 kidney transplants or maybe a brain transplant.

The Ministry of Health has been in the news of late. It has been in the news for the past two months on an ongoing basis and my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, went at lengths to show that there are certain sums of money on the items that were given to the Ministry of Health and transferred to the North West Regional Health Authority. I made mention, under Goods and Services, Ministry of Health, sub-head (2) sub-item (39), of \$10 million of the \$15 million for drugs and other related materials and supplies being sent to the North West Regional Health Authority.

The Member for Caroni Central took pains to address the fact that certain discrepancies in the allocations of drugs and human resources were seen in a report by the Internal Auditor, Mr. Harriram Laloo, to Miss Yolande Selman, where an audit was conducted to ensure certain compliance of protocol. That is one part of it. If they are going to deny the population proper drugs and other materials and supplies and send this across to North West Regional Health Authority's sub-head, we have to ask ourselves: Is what they are doing in the North West Regional Health Authority above board? Should they get \$10 million when people are being denied drugs and other materials? This management letter says a lot.

My colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, went through some of the items. There is one item—and I want the Minister of Health to listen to this and investigate it—the management letter that shows that the audit was conducted to ensure certain things and pointed to files “being maintained in a manner in keeping with sound Human Resource Management practice”.

We have been looking at the Human Resource Personnel chairman, Mr. Eastman, and other firms. We have been looking at that, but nobody has been apprised of the fact that the post of human resource officer in the North West Regional Health Authority was established, but not ratified at board meetings; that 8.3 of this management letter also says that the post of human resource officer was established by way of board approval, included four units inclusive of employment and employee services, et cetera, and that there was no indication that the ratification of the board was ever done.

It goes on:

“The persons recruited as Human Resource Officers were paid the above-mentioned compensation package but it appeared that this package was never ratified by the Board of Directors...

The post of Human Resource Officer in the Public Service is tiered as follows:”

Range 46, range 53 and it goes on to range 63. The letter says:

“Presently, persons appointed to the position of Human Resource Officer in the Authority possess the basic minimum human resource qualifications and no relevant work experience. Therefore, it would be more prudent to follow the human resource structure applicable in the Public Service to allow for equity in the appointment/promotion process”.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reason I have started with that is that there is a part of this management letter that indicates how personal records and files are indexed. In all ministerial departments, there are files being indexed, so for letters of appointments, letters of interview, letters of finance—any letter at all in a file in any of the ministries—one could see if it was removed or replaced by another letter or changed in any form or fashion.

Mr. Speaker and Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, 5 of this letter says:

“5.1 There was no unique identifier number for each employee...

5.2 Minute Sheets were seen at the front of Personal Files in most instances but the correspondence placed in the Files were either folioed or stopped being folioed as far back as the year 2000. The correspondence in the files was also not in chronological order making it extremely difficult and time-consuming to locate relevant information.”

There is method in that madness.

“The effect of not folioing correspondence is that they can/may be deliberately removed or other pieces of correspondence inserted in the files which cannot be easily detected by Management.”

This has been going on in the North West Regional Health Authority. There have been numerous complaints. *[Interruption]* We are now in 2005. For four years, it has been happening. It is not a blame thing. I am just trying to tell them where to look for the corruption. I am not blaming anybody. All I am saying is that this is where the corruption lies. People are being paid and files are being put in and taken out. There have been complaints about Human Resource Officers who are not qualified; whose own interview documents and assessment documents have been missing from all files.

“There were several instances where Interview Assessment Forms and Interview Summary Selection Sheets were not seen in the Personal Files. Appendix A refers. As a result, it could not be ascertained whether interviews were held for the various positions as required by Section 2.4.2. of the Regional Health Authorities’...

Copies of certification achieved as on resumes submitted by certain middle management personnel were not seen in the Personal Files. As a result, it could not be determined whether the selected personnel possessed the required qualifications for the job positions...

The Finance Department is governed by instructions from the Human Resource Department and communication information obtained from the Assumption of Duty Forms would assist tremendously in minimizing overpayments...

RECOMMENDATIONS...

- B. The Personal File of each employee should contain Minute Sheets on which should be recorded the historical contents of the File with each document being sequentially folioed. This would prevent unauthorized insertion or deliberate removal of documents from the files without them being easily detected by Management."

Mr. Speaker, this is serious business because cases in the courts have been lost and won based on what is in a personal file. If letters are inserted and removed willy-nilly, which is what is happening by the human resource officers, who gets the blame? The Human Resource Manager and the board of directors who did not ratify anything. This is where most of the movement—the hiring and possibly the firing and different letters of payment of funds would be going. So they are moving money from Drugs and Services and handing it to the North West Regional Health Authority without checks and balances and we have not heard a single thing from the Minister of Health—I hope he says something here this evening.

This talks about personal records and different doctors, but in this whole management report, you see the negativity of what is happening in the regional health authorities—not just there; it is all over—the corruption, discrimination, nepotism, inequality of movement, inequality of job specifications or job movement. This is occurring at the human resource lower level. These people have to be checked out for their qualifications. Do the interview assessment and get proper people to handle the position, equivalent to persons in the public service range 46 to range 53.

After these files were gone, there were a number of people overpaid and as you go on through the system it will come to mind that the system of appointments and many of the qualifications of people here and job advertisements were not done appropriately and the recommendation in this file is that the jobs must be advertised properly.

That is as far as I would like to go with the North West Regional Health Authority because I would like the Minister of Health to investigate that aspect of it and much of the corruptive movement would be rectified. *[Interruption]* Send the file to the DPP! Send the file and let them investigate it the way we did it!

Another concern of mine is the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, Goods and Services. Let me say, in the old days when we had no TV, I was fortunate enough to look at TV peeping through the neighbour's house. Mr. Speaker, I do not even know if you remember those days when one person in the whole district had a TV and everybody would line up to see their black and white TV. We saw TTT in those days. We got our information from TTT. We had Sesame Street. Some of us learned from it; some on the other side are still learning from Sesame Street. We had Bonanza. We all grew up with all that was on TTT until the communications network was opened, then came TV6 and the others.

It was painful to see the Minister of Public Administration and Information, who even forgot the NLCB—they had to remind him—sitting there callously saying goodbye NBN; goodbye TTT; goodbye everybody else and we hope to open it. At the same time, I have heard it said that one Mr. Lee Sing has been able to bypass the system in the same way it was bypassed with Citadel and enter National Broadcasting Network (NBN)—through the back door or front door? The NCC door.

Recently, a newspaper called me about the Ministry of Health and I said to them that the Minister of Health is a good businessman; that is why he is so successful. However, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central has more empathy for people, so they should switch portfolios. I am appealing to the Member for Diego Martin Central. We have done it already. Today is the last day for NBN. Imagine I am standing here looking at it.

Sub-Head 04, sub-item 01, NBN, transfer \$12,361,000 across to the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. You know what it is going to buy, Mr. Speaker? They have shut down NBN, kicked out the people, because they did not like that they were not in control of a state enterprise. They want to do the same thing Castro did in Cuba—formulate policies to brainwash the public. Now what have they done with the \$12 million? Rather than keep the people in NBN and organize around it—have the same board; the same system and structure—they are throwing out the people. They say we are going to have a new system with the same thing. Now \$27 billion goes to WASA with Mr. Grimes who came last in the interview; Caroni (1975) Limited shut down. Anyway, let me go on. *[Interruption]* The Member grew up with TTT like me.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am only from the days of CCN.

Dr. F. Khan: The NBN, \$12,361,000 and guess what it is going across to do—rent and lease vehicles. Imagine they are taking \$12 million to rent and lease vehicles and the President has to forego a vehicle because they have to give Mr. Robinson \$900,000 to go God-knows-where for medical treatment. I do not blame Mr. Robinson. After seeing what is happening in the health system in this country, if I were Mr. Robinson and since I have them where they are, I, too, would say give me the \$900,000; let me go abroad to have medical treatment. He might be afraid to go into the system.

It is not midnight yet. The Member for Diego Martin Central knows that when you have an agreement, it stops at 12.00 midnight. I am appealing to him. He can still throw in the empathy and talk to his people.

I was looking for the movement of the Ministry of Works and Transport, but I am shifting to the Tobago House of Assembly. The Tobago people have been the beneficiary of *The Cat* and the *MV Sonia*. *The Cat*, I understand from my good friend, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, is called the “vomit comet”—moving very fast making people vomit. You see, Mr. Speaker, Tobago election—new ferry. The *MV Sonia*, a new boat, was supposed to have been built in 2004 and leased from the Tomasos Brothers, Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. Listen well! I have nothing to say about *The Cat*. It seems to be a very nice boat. I want to talk about the *MV Sonia*. [Interruption] Why are you laughing at me? When I say that, you are only thinking of Standing Order 69. The UNC sent out a release under Sen. Wade Mark, which said that the *MV Sonia* is not a new vessel. Its first name was the *Atsalakis 010*; its second name, *Adamantios Korais*; its third name, *MV Sonia*; its fourth name; *Adamantios Korais* and the last name, *MV Sonia*. The former owners were Tomasos Brothers Itali-Hellenic Tourist Inc. Somehow, I decided to search the net. I do not know why.

Mr. Speaker, the Tobago House of Assembly elections are on Monday. The Sunday *Newsday* had an article and gave a website of what was occurring which corroborated what Sen. Wade Mark was saying. I thought it ended there.

I registered on the website www.equasis.org and I placed in the IMO registration number of the *MV Sonia*, 9257735. It is surprising, Mr. Speaker, that it gave the same dates and names to which the *Sonia* was changed. From September 24, 2001, it was *Atsalakis 010*; on August 04, 2003, it went to the *Adamantios Korais*; it went back to the *Sonia* on July 26, 2004 and then October 19, 2004, three months afterward, it became the *Adamantios Korais* again and then it became the *Sonia* on November 08, 2004.

The current and former flags it flew were Greece in 2001; Italy in 2004; Greece in 2004; Italy in 2005 and the Bahamas in 2005. The current and former registered owners, the Tomasos Brothers, September 24, 2001, Itali-Hellenic November 11, 2004. January 06, 2005, it went back to the Tomasos Brothers transport. That is not all. That is when all this took place in this country. The Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago said this is not so.

Mr. Speaker, this is the surprising thing. On January 11, 2005, four days after it was registered as a Tomasos transport, it went on to be reregistered under new owners unknown. So the Tomasos Brothers were registered as the owners on January 06, 2005 in Italy or Greece; it went back to the unknown person on January 11, 2005. The unknown managers are International Shipping located at 4770 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami Florida, United States of America, member of the ISME, that is the unknown ship manager. Date of record is January 11, 2005.

That is not all. Searching again international shipping, do you know, Mr. Speaker, that the ships that they run fly under the Bahamas flag. *MV Sonia* is one and also carrying the Bahamas flag is the *Beauport*. International Shipping are also the managers of the *Beauport*, which is a boat with a lot of negativity when it was brought here initially.

As the Opposition, we are here to bring the facts to the Minister. He cannot know everything—Ministers cannot know everything; they just go according to the technocrats. In the Ministry of Health, when we were there, we depended on technocrats. I am not calling on the Minister to resign; I am just calling on the Minister to give information. This is serious business, Mr. Speaker, something that the UNC was chastised for by the PNM government. They are now falling into the same trap of the international shipping owners who should be investigated and they should find out why they allowed it to be under Tomaso's transport and then threw it across as a clandestine move. That is what I have to say about that.

Moneys have been appropriated across the board and this serious type of affair should not be left unchecked. If that method of approach was made to whitewash and fool whoever is in authority, they should be brought with the same handcuffs by the same Anti-Corruption Squad, in the same way that the Anti-Corruption Squad targeted the United National Congress.

Mr. Speaker, those are the two points that I wanted to make. My colleague has done the rest. There are other things in this statement of transfer. There is a transfer of \$22 million from the Ministry of National Security. My other colleagues will deal with that. The special Anti-Crime Unit is now obtaining \$39 million; for what? The twenty-two million dollars was taken from the salaries and COLA of the police service and given across the board to rent and lease vehicles; promotion and publicity of \$3 million and to the special Anti-Crime Unit. The front page heading in one newspaper last week was "15 murders in 12 days".

Mr. Speaker, as Standing Orders 69 and 70 have confined us to a debate on what is before us, I have made my points and I ask the Minister of Health to investigate what is happening in the human resource department and deal with it because there are certain movements for people to do the same nonsense in the North Central Regional Health Authority, although I told you to disband the whole thing and start over. I think that the Minister of Works and Transport should investigate that part of it and deal with it accordingly.

With these few words, I thank you.

5.30 p.m.

The Minister of Health (Hon. John Rahael): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I enter this debate in order to bring clarity to some of the issues that were raised by the Members for Caroni Central and Barataria/San Juan. I would be the first to admit that in the public

health institutions, particularly the North West Regional Health Authority, there are many issues that need to be resolved.

In 2000, when the NWRHA and the Central Regional Health Authority were made into one Regional Health Authority, the problems began. It is clear from all reports that the NWRHA, in fact before 2000, was more or less in control of the region under its purview: the Central Regional Health Authority, the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the South West Regional Health and the Tobago Regional Health Authority.

In 1994, when these Regional Health Authorities were formed, a study was done to indicate why we had four Regional Health Authorities in Trinidad and Tobago. One of the major problems we have today is because of the collapse of the Central RHA into the NWRHA.

I am going to take you back a bit to show you that immediately after the merging of the Central RHA into the NWRHA all the human resource problems came to the fore. When it was done, it was done in haste. There was no planning as to exactly how they would integrate both RHAs. The human resource area was one of the major problems. I can take you back to reports done by the previous administration that pointed to this. It mentioned many of the problems that existed. I would quote from some of the reports. It stated that the annual salaries of several officers on the executive payroll were between \$168,000—\$274,000 per annum. The approval of the Minister, as required by law, under the Act for the payment of annual salaries and allowances in excess of \$150,000, was not produced in respect of the following. They list the names of the officers. When the Central RHA came into the North West Regional Health Authority, it was as though the chairman of the NWRH, at the time, wanted his own empire to do whatever he wanted in such a way that it would have been very difficult for anyone to be able to track what was happening. We saw it becoming a reality. The intentions may have been honourable on the part of the Members for Caroni Central and Barataria/San Juan, but certainly not from the Chairman of the NWRHA at the time. The same chairman immediately, in the same year, started to give out contracts left, right and centre, without the approval of the board. We know that.

We know about the oxygen contract at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. The Member cannot deny that. The Member took away a contract from a reputable company, Industrial Gas Limited, which was servicing both the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital for many years, under both the PNM administration and the UNC administration. The minute he took control of this empire he took the contract from Industrial Gases Limited and gave it to a company that was formed two months before the contract was awarded. The contract to Industrial Gases Limited, which is a subsidiary of Neal and Massy Limited, was costing the Central Regional Health Authority at the time, approximately \$48,000 per month for the oxygen. He gave it to Optimum Limited for \$99,000 a month for 10 years. If that was not enough—I am telling you why they did it. I will repeat it. That same year, the Member

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

Friday, January 14, 2005

gave a contract to a company to put a CT Scan machine at the Port of Spain General Hospital. It is amazing that he gave the contract to this company. It was a contract for five years, which gave that company exclusive rights that no other company, not even the NWRHA that actually owned the hospital—

Mr. Hinds: A party to the—

Mr. Ramsaran: “Shut yuh mouth over dey!”

Mr. Speaker: Please! Order! Hon. Members, the Minister is in fact speaking. Hon. Minister, if you would like to make an intervention in the debate you will have 75 minutes. That remark, I am sure you did not mean it.

Hon. J. Rahael: The Member gave the contract to a friend of his. What I cannot understand is that not only did he give the contract to someone but he gave him exclusive rights. Today we would like to put a CT Scan machine in the Port of Spain General Hospital but because of the contract that was signed by the then Chairman of the NWRHA and that company, our hands are tied. He has now offered—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Hinds: The people of Trinidad—

Dr. Khan: Minister of National “Insecurity”.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am appealing to you for the last time, the hon. Minister is on his feet. Please, Member for Laventille East/Morvant and Members on the opposite end, let the Member make his contribution.

Hon. J. Rahael: With that contract, we cannot put our own CT Scan machine in that institution. They are charging poor people \$1,200—\$1,500 to get a CT Scan done at the Port of Spain General Hospital. When we said that we would provide free services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, it is because now a patient at the Port of Spain General Hospital will have access to all the facilities at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. That patient will be able to access the CT Scan we have at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex at no cost.

When we talk about providing the services at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, what do we mean by that? We mean that the citizens who wish to access, through referral to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, will be able to access that service at no cost. You cannot expect that all the patients of the private hospitals and health institutions in Trinidad and Tobago will all of a sudden go to Mount Hope and get free service. They would get it. What about the waiting list? It would take years. That is why you must have—*[Interruption]* We said that it is available. If you become a patient, you can go to the Port of Spain General Hospital and are admitted and need a CT Scan you will not have to pay \$1,500. You can go to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and would be able to access it at no cost.

Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite spoke about equipment. The Member for Caroni Central is very much aware that in 2004 more equipment were placed at our public health institutions than in the past 10 years. The Member has been in government for seven years. I challenge him to name one out of those seven years that he was able to provide the range of equipment at our public hospitals. *[Interruption]* Sorry, he served for six years. Thank God it was not seven.

Today, in San Fernando, Sangre Grande, Mount Hope and Tobago there are CT Scan machines available. There are mammogram machines in Port of Spain for the very first time, in the history of the public institutions. In San Fernando and Sangre Grande you can now get mammograms for the screening of breast cancer, which is one of the leading causes of death of women in Trinidad and Tobago.

Six months ago, any patient in any of our public health institutions who needed to get an MRI done would have had to go to a private institution. They would have had to pay \$3,500—\$5,000 in order to access an MRI. Today, we have a state-of-the-art MRI machine at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. *[Desk thumping]* Today, any patient in any one of our public health institutions in Trinidad and Tobago will be able to access that service at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex at no cost. That is what we are doing. *[Desk thumping]*

The Member spoke about making funding available in the health sector. For the period 2004/2005 the largest sum has been allocated to the health sector since 1997. In 1997, \$663,000 was allocated. In 1998, \$534,000 was allocated. Instead of increasing the allocation during their time, it was decreased. The sum in 1998 was less than the sum in 1997. In 2000, \$823,000 was allocated. When we came into office they presented the 2001 budget and had allocated \$1,064,000 to the public health sector. The following year we increased that to \$1,371,000. That is an increase of almost 30 per cent and we continued every year thereafter. In 2005, \$1,000,861,000 has been allocated to the public health sector; not only in terms of dollars, because you could say that we have more money now therefore we could allocate more dollars, but also in terms of percentage. In 1997, it was 1.8 per cent; 1998, 1.4 per cent; and 2000, 1.6 per cent. Today the percentage GDP to health is 2.5. That is the highest ever in the health sector. *[Desk thumping]*

With respect to the allocation for pharmaceuticals, the Member for Caroni Central got up and made a song and dance about \$15 million within the Ministry of Health. It did not come out of the Ministry of Health; it was reallocated within the Ministry of Health. Mr. Speaker, in 1997 they allocated \$44 million for pharmaceuticals.

Dr. Rafeeq: That is not true. In 1997, \$48 million was allocated.

Hon. J. Rahael: Thank you. My figures state \$44 million. I will give him the benefit of the doubt.

Dr. Rafeeq: You should also mention what it was in 1995 when you left office.

Hon. J. Rahael: In 2003/2004, the figure moved from \$44 million to \$80 million; almost double what they allocated in 1997. That was in a space of four years. The funding for pharmaceuticals was sufficient for the needs. The Member comes here and states that there was no medication and that surgeries had to be postponed.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point—I said it before—that in the health sector—I have served in other ministries including the Ministry of Local Government, but in the health sector—there is misinformation. This is something that is mind-boggling. Sometimes I wonder if it is just misinformation or people do not know, therefore, they are innocent. Sometimes you wonder if it is sabotage.

I would now like to talk about what the Member for Caroni Central referred to when surgeries had to be postponed. On October 05, 2004 we received a fax from the San Fernando General Hospital, addressed to the Permanent Secretary. I will read it:

“Dear Sir

On Tuesday, October 05, 2004 we have been forced to cancel operations for all minor lumps, bumps and surgical procedures that require Formal Saline.

Formal Saline is normally prepared in the pharmacy but is not available neither are there any stores of Formal Saline available anywhere in the Hospital. This is for your specific information.

Hereunder is the list of cancelled cases:

Department	Cases
General Surgery	23—7 major, 16 minor
Obstetrics and Gynecology	3—2 major, 1 minor
Ear Nose and Throat	5 major and minor.

We regret this inconvenience to the public.

Medical Chief of Staff

Head of General Surgery”

Mr. Speaker, when this fax came, the Permanent Secretary immediately brought it to my attention. We immediately contacted C40, which is Nipdec, that provides all the pharmaceuticals and drugs for all our health institutions. Of course, I was very angry that these surgeries, based on the letter we received, had to be postponed. When we contacted C40, do you know what they told us? They said that was impossible. We faxed the letter which we received by fax from the San Fernando General Hospital. This is the response.

“Reference is made to our telephone conversation of today regarding the availability of Formaldehyde at San Fernando General Hospital.

I wish to inform you, that early in September, San Fernando General Hospital indicated to Central Stores that they did not require any stock of Formaldehyde. In fact, on checking with the pharmacy after your telephone call, I was told that there are two 4-litre bottles in stock at the hospital's dispensary."

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Would you kindly allow me? Hon. Minister, when you mentioned the first fax, you talked about something called Saline. This response is about something else. I think they are two totally different substances.

Hon. J. Rahael: It is not. May I now inform you? I think the Member next to you—Formal Saline is what is used—*[Interruption]* In brackets, it is Formaldehyde. It is one and the same. They are referring to the same thing. The pharmacists will tell you that. *[Interruption]* I can provide the Member with a copy of the letters. When we contacted the Medical Chief of Staff we asked why we were sent a letter indicating that surgeries had to be postponed because they did not have the drug that was required when, in fact, it was in the stores. He said: "That is what I was told."

This was not only at the San Fernando General Hospital. The media will take something, publish it and run with it without checking the facts. We are all aware that over the holidays, old year's night, an eight-year-old young man by the name of Akiel Jeffrey was shot by a stray bullet. The young man was taken to the Port of Spain General Hospital. He was stabilized and referred to the Mount Hope Hospital. He was attended to and placed in the ICU. He then had surgery where the bullet was removed. He was warded and then discharged. On Tuesday, January 04, 2005 an editorial on page 10 of the *Newsday* indicated:

"Why was Akiel discharged?

Why was Akiel Jeffrey, the eight-year-old Petit Valley schoolchild, who was shot by a stray bullet early New Year's morning, discharged from the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC) on Sunday only a day after surgery?

We ask the question because young Jeffrey had to be rushed back to the EWMSC for treatment when he experienced severe stomach pains not too long after he had been discharged. Would it not have been better for Akiel Jeffrey to have been kept at the Medical Sciences Complex for a few days to monitor his progress,..."

They went on and on.

"Or was there a question of availability of beds and the authorities had concluded that Akiel's problem was trivial? Did they view Akiel's condition as not being major and had come to the conclusion that he was occupying bed space which they felt would have been better utilised by another child? Was this not a cynical dismissal of the health concerns of a minor,..."

They went on to chastise the institution. When I read this that Tuesday morning, I immediately contacted the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex to find out if the child was readmitted. The report came back that there was no young man by the name of Akiel Jeffrey at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. The young man never went back to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. The young man never went for treatment at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. This is a *Newsday* editorial. This is misinformation! Everyone is taking potshots at the health sector because we are shaking it up. We are making things happen. [*Desk thumping*] Everybody is taking potshots now. [*Interruption*] I am not attacking. That is a fact!

When we contacted the mother of the child, she said she never took him to be readmitted. She said she had to go to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex to fill a prescription and took the child with her. She went to the hospital, collected the prescription and went back home. This is a big editorial. When I brought it to the attention of the media, what do you think they did? They gave us a piece in a corner. We all suffer from that.

“NWRHA: Akiel was not readmitted

The North West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA) yesterday said that eight-year-old Akiel Jeffrey was not readmitted to the Paediatric Priority Care Facility at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex after being treated for a gunshot wound on New Year’s day.

He was struck by a stray bullet from the gun fired by a young man...in Petit Valley, ushering in the new year. At a media briefing on Tuesday, Health Minister John Rahael *Expressed* concern with *Newsday*’s editorial column which questioned why Jefferey was discharged from the hospital after receiving surgery to remove the bullet. The editorial noted that Jefferey had to be rushed back to the hospital because of stomach pains.

The minister said he sought answers from the NWRHA only to be told that the boy did not return to Mt Hope for treatment.

The NWRHA looked into the matter and Rahael reported that Jeffrey's mother took him to EWMSC...he was feeling better. ‘There was no need to seek any treatment or see any doctor.’”

Mr. Speaker, I am raising this because the doctors indicated that they did not have a particular medication in the hospital and because of that they needed to cancel the surgeries.

After this was pointed out to them, it never made the news. Normally, if one surgery is cancelled it makes the headline. Here 31 surgeries were cancelled. This was sent to the Minister and the following day it would have been in the headlines,

but we acted swiftly and told them that they had it in the pharmacy. How could they say that they do not have it? It never appeared in the press otherwise the doctors would have made sure that it did.

Mr. Bereaux: Who is the doctor?

Hon. J. Rahael: Forget the doctor's name. That is misinformation.

There was an article which dealt with everything concerning the South West Regional Health Authority. Do you know what was the banner on the top? The banner indicated: "Problems at NWRHA". The North West Regional Health Authority is the whipping boy. One of the reasons we decided that we must now separate what was NWRHA and North-Central Regional Health Authority; bringing it back to its original size is so that we can bring back proper human resource management. For the six years the Members opposite were there they did absolutely nothing in Port of Spain. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: That is not true, "dey tief".

Hon. J. Rahael: No, we are talking about health.

Mr. Speaker: Please!

Hon. J. Rahael: Be that as it may, much has been said about the article with respect to the internal audit that was done at the NWRHA. This internal audit was commissioned by the present chairman and board of the NWRHA. Do you know why? It is because of all that has been happening. The Member for Barataria/San Juan did indicate—there are many reports since 2000. When they brought the two Regional Health Authorities together the problems started. In the conclusion of this document from the PMSL, that was commissioned by the UNC, states:

"There is no doubt that the managing of the North West Regional Health Authority, particularly after the merger with the Central Regional Health Authority in early 2000, is a monumental task. Structural and human resource problems have been inadequately addressed and much remains to be done."

This is a report that was presented on September 10, 2001. The mismanagement of human resource was so deeply rooted in the NWRHA that it is going to take some time to put in order.

In 2000, the former Minister, the Member for Diego Martin East, commissioned an accounting firm to go into the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex to bring their financial accounts up to date. Since 2000 there has been no audited report of the NWRH until this administration came into governance. These are the facts. What did they find? It is a maze. In this report they claimed there were 18 bank accounts. Do you know what the accounting firm had to do? Not only did they have to go through the 18 bank accounts, they had to write all the other banks to find out if there were other bank accounts in the

name of the NWRHA or the Central Regional Health Authority. At the time, they did not know how many bank accounts they had. That tells you how bad it was. Mr. Speaker, we continue to ensure that we put things in place, first by separating them and putting in proper management.

Look at this report. The listing showed that despite there being 1,690 permanent positions, 4,000 employees are being paid monthly. The Members for Caroni Central and Barataria/San Juan know full well that it is impossible that the NWRHA would have 1,690 employees, as we knew it then. They must admit that. When the Member was there, what was the number of employees at the NWRHA? In the St. Ann's Hospital there are approximately 1,000 employees. In the Port of Spain General Hospital there are 580 beds and approximately 2,000 employees. We are not talking about the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, our health centres, Caura Hospital or the other institutions. Port of Spain General Hospital has more than 1,690. That is why this whole audit has to be discredited, because it is incomplete. We are going back and verifying all that has been said. It is the board that commissioned the internal audit and this is the kind of thing that is coming out. Again, that is inaccurate information. It is very difficult to manage any enterprise with bad information. It misdirects you so we have to be very careful. Every piece of paper with information that comes to me I have to double check.

Dr. Moonilal: Would the Minister indicate what action, if any, is being contemplated against the person responsible for promoting such, in your opinion, inaccurate and misleading information?

Hon. J. Rahael: There is nothing I could do to the editor of the newspapers, but certainly within the organization, the board will deal with that. This is an RHA issue. I know the board has been meeting with the internal auditor and they have been going through it. It is so easy to say: "Fire him". The Member was there and he knows it is not that easy. Every single document that comes to the Minister of Health has to be cross-checked, double-checked and triple-checked by him.

There was a tender document when one of the tenderers wrote to say that his tender was "X" dollars. He was trying to mislead me totally to believe that his tender was 60 per cent lower than the other tenderer. I called the NWRHA. He indicated that it looked as though the other tenderer was going to get the contract. I contacted the NWRHA and they investigated the matter. They checked the tender documents and told me that it was nothing close to what he mentioned; it was almost the same price. I was not satisfied with that, I told them I wanted to see it for myself, only to realize that it was very close. One was \$20,500,000 and the other was \$21 million. They proceeded to award it to the best tenderer. All of that is consuming the Ministry and we have to deal with it. In spite of all of that, we are making tremendous inroads.

The Member for Diego Martin Central could also attest to this. A Trinidadian who also has dual citizenship in Canada was in Canada and needed to have cataract surgery done, had

to wait approximately four months in order to get that surgery. In Trinidad and Tobago one has to wait one month. The waiting period for cataract surgery is less than one month in our public health institutions. [*Desk thumping*] “Doh shake yuh head!” If there are any registered patients—I make this statement boldly—who were registered at any one of our public health institutions and were on the waiting list since June 01, 2004 and have not had cataract surgery, it is because he or she cannot be found. Find that patient and bring him. We will do the surgery tomorrow. We will do it!

Dr. Moonilal: Give me one month of your Minister’s salary.

Mr. Hinds: You always like two salaries, “eh”. “Yuh go get jail fuh it.”

Dr. Moonilal: Always.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please, one must be careful in crosstalk. Let the Minister continue, please.

Hon. J. Rahael: We continue to reduce the waiting list for surgeries in all areas. We continue to provide equipment for all our institutions.

The Member for Caroni Central spoke about equipment and infusion pumps. In 2004, more than \$3 million worth in equipment was provided for the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. Among the equipment were infusion pumps, ventilators, incubators, et cetera. I would identify them: 12 incubators, 15 cots, ventilators, infusion pumps, oxygen hoods, et cetera. This was provided at a cost of \$3.1 million. We are talking about mid-2004. We are refurbishing and expanding the neonatal department of the Port of Spain General Hospital. Within a week or two, once we get Dr. Manning-Alleyne to sign the tender document with respect to equipment, we are going to go out for tender. In San Fernando, already tenders are out for equipment in gynaecology, obstetrics and neonatal. All these tender documents are out. Again, I make the statement boldly, within the past two or three years, the number of pieces of equipment that are in our public health institutions is unparalleled. I make that statement boldly.

The Member spoke about nuclear medicine. What did they do about nuclear medicine when they were in governance? They ran down the nuclear department at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. Tenders are closed. Soon tenders would be awarded for two gamma cameras.

Dr. Khan: Will that service be free to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. J. Rahael: You cannot walk off the street and walk into an institution such as the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. You have to be referred. Anyone of our citizens, in any of our public health institutions who requires any of the services at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will be able to access it at no cost. I also want to make the point that at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex there are contracts with certain corporate companies and companies in the energy sector. That is going to continue and they will continue to pay for that.

There are persons and other corporate entities that have insurance for their employees and have contracts with the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and they would send their employees there to access the service. Are we not, therefore, to make a claim against the insurance company? If we were to do that, we would be very foolish! We would not be acting in the best interest of the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are doing.

Dr. Khan: You have changed the position, indicating that anybody who was referred by a public health institution will be given free services at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. What about the general practitioners who are not affiliated with the hospitals but have patients who require the MRIs and CT Scans and cannot afford it externally?

Hon. J. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, I take the point. However, while I appreciate what the Member is saying, it cannot be open season for private doctors to make referrals. There is a social services department at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, which will ensure that the person you are sending is someone who qualifies. Let us face it, I can go to you tomorrow and I need an MRI and you could send me to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex to get it done. That is not what the intent is, obviously. I have my own insurance. The intent is to provide all these services to persons who are in our public institutions and persons who will qualify with respect to social services.

Dr. Khan: Sorry to take your time. What you are saying is that public health patients will be treated free. What is going to happen, and is already happening, is that health sector reform plan has where it will bring in the private practitioners who are external. That is in the plan. That will make the health system easier. What you doing now is that you have overloaded the health facilities. People are now sent there to get letters to go to Mount Hope. That is what you have done.

Hon. J. Rahael: If you go to the Port of Spain General Hospital and you are warded and the services are available there, you will get the service there at no cost; likewise San Fernando, Sangre Grande, Tobago and all our public health institutions. If there is a service at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex that is not available at other public health institutions, then those patients will be able to access that at no cost.

The Member mentioned the National Health Insurance Plan. If he realizes what is happening, slowly there is the introduction of the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP). All citizens can now access medication they require on a CDAP prescription. That is an indication as to where we are moving. The intent is that by 2007, there will be a National Health Insurance Plan in place where all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be able to access health care at any health institution. There will be no public and private health institution. That is where the private doctors will come in. The exact model has not been worked out as yet. There is a steering committee that has been appointed. There is a secretariat to give support to the steering committee. Within six months, after they get going, they must tell us what model we should use

in Trinidad and Tobago. There are different models: the Canadian model, the French model, the Costa Rican model and the Puerto Rican model.

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.
[*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Rafeeq: Hon. Minister, having extended your time, can I get one second of your time please? Are you saying that Mount Hope will be offering free services to patients who are referred from the public hospitals? What about inpatients? Can someone from a health centre be referred to Mount Hope as an inpatient?

Hon. J. Rahael: The answer is yes. Let me make it clear. You have to understand what we also want to do is to educate our population. Not every time you have an ailment you would want to go to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, Port of Spain General Hospital or San Fernando General Hospital. We have refurbished a number of health centres. We are continuing to do so. We are putting in the type of equipment that is required, so that people will be able to go to the health centres. That is their first call in order to get service. If they cannot get what is required there, they will be referred to the hospital.

In the San Fernando region, if someone has to be referred from the health centre, that person should be referred to the San Fernando General Hospital, likewise, in Port of Spain and Sangre Grande. It is only when the large institutions in that particular region do not have the service; they will refer the patient to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

Dr. Rafeeq: Are you saying if there is a patient at the St. Joseph Health Centre who needs surgery—

Hon. J. Rahael: That person would go straight to Mount Hope.

Dr. Rafeeq: If the patient needs orthopaedic surgery that person would go straight to Mount Hope?

Hon. J. Rahael: Yes.

Dr. Rafeeq: I do not know if you are in a position to answer this, if not you can give a subsequent answer. What are the inpatient services that Mount Hope will be offering free?

Hon. J. Rahael: Certainly, what exists will continue. We will continue to expand the other services at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. There are many plans for the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. The oncology centre is on its way. The architects were here this week. We were going through the plans. The stakeholders are involved. I touched base with the various cancer societies in Trinidad to get a feedback.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

Friday, January 14, 2005

We have to check, not only within the Ministry or the consultants; the stakeholders have to report to me to let me know how it is coming along. There is high praise throughout. The Member for Caroni Central should take some credit for it.

At the end of the day—I said it when I was sworn in as Minister of Health—in the health sector, there can be no politics. We do not know which one of us, God forbid, going home tonight, might get into an accident. When the EHS arrives, they would take you to a general hospital. [*Interruption*] Accident and emergency is separate from that situation. We are not playing politics in the Ministry of Health. That is why I made the point on a television broadcast that there is no side. It is not this side or that side. It is one side, especially when we talk about health services. I made the point that it can be anyone of us, God forbid, who may require the services at any of our public health institutions.

There are many problems that need to be addressed. The study showed it. We talked about the dual system of reporting. That cannot continue. We are going to address that this year. We have to address that. There cannot be two employees doing the same duty, sometimes under different terms of reference and remuneration, and have two different lines of reporting. If there is an RHA employee and a public servant doing the same thing, yet their remuneration is different, one will be disgruntled. There may be a supervisor who may be an RHA or public servant supervisor. The one who is not at that level will not listen to the supervisor. That is unreal! How could that work?

This year we will address that. This year we expect many more demonstrations and upheavals in the health sector, but I have gone through this already and we will go through it again. We will do what is required to improve quality health care in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are about.

We welcome everyone. Anyone who has a contribution to make, we welcome them regardless of their colour, creed, race or political persuasion once they are not coming to sabotage the system. We cannot have someone who has his or her own practice and at the same time working in a hospital, but that interest is with respect to referring patients to his or her private practice. It is happening everyday.

Mr. Speaker, in the Port of Spain General Hospital we put a mammogram machine. I had to refer one of my constituents to the Port of Spain General Hospital for breast screening. When she went there she told the doctor that she came for a mammogram. The doctor told her: “We do not offer that service here, but I can refer you to where you can go and get it done at a cost of \$300.” She said: “No, the Minister told me I can get this service here.” He said: “The Minister told you that, okay.” He then gave her the paper to get it done. Do you understand what I am saying? There are many stories like that. We all know that but we have to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, not only is there bad news, there is good news. I would like to read one piece of good news. This is a letter to the editor in the *Guardian* of Wednesday, September 08, 2004. I quote:

“Great job by doctors, nurses

My gratitude to the management and staff of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and to Caribbean Heart Care, most notably receptionist Michelle, for all that they did for me.

To the doctors who performed the open-heart surgery, both local and foreign, the staff of ICU, especially Dr. Roopchand, the nurses and assistants on the Dependency Ward who made me feel comfortable after the surgery, I express my thanks.

Everyone did their utmost to see that I was comfortable at all times.

Even after I was discharged from hospital the head nurse of the ward called me to find out how I was progressing. This is certainly a plus for our country. I really appreciate the treatment that was given to me.

Thank you, and may you all continue to give of your best.

Monica Bruce Ruben

East Trinidad”

Dr. Khan: Could the Minister indicate whether that was a free service, or did the Ministry pay Caribbean Heart Care for that surgery and how much?

Hon. J. Rahael: Every month this Government provides, for those who cannot afford, free open-heart surgery. There are 10 surgeries every month. The Government pays Caribbean Heart Care US \$10,000 per surgery. That is 50 per cent of the normal cost. Member, do you agree with that? Privately, that would cost \$140,000—\$160,000. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I do not want to talk about negotiating skills. I do not want to teach the Member all these things. We are providing from health centre to open-heart surgery services.

I hope, through my intervention, I was able to bring clarification with respect to those matters. I thank you very much.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the very passionate contribution of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. When he started I was in great doubt as to his sincerity. At the end of his contribution, I formed the opinion that the Member does indeed want to do better.

Mr. Hinds: Is doing better.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Minister of National “Insecurity” does not get to speak in this Parliament. He should stop heckling me. If he wants to speak he should stand and I will give way. I can hear that he genuinely wants to do things.

When I put together all that he has said, I cannot help but believe that he has misled this Parliament, as has the Minister of Finance, with respect to the free services at the

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, January 14, 2005

Mount Hope Hospital. He spent a lot of time today trying to explain the new position; the flip-flop position from what happened when we were all in this House for days dealing with the budget for 2005. In very big, bold letters, in the budget statement of the Prime Minister, it was clearly stated what was to happen at Mount Hope. I will read those words. We can see what the Minister is saying today is very different from what was promised to the people of Trinidad and Tobago by the hon. Prime Minister in the budget statement for 2005. This comes from page 22 of the budget statement.

“There exists in this country today an inequitable and pernicious system whereby residents of Mount Hope and surrounding areas receive free medical treatment at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, while other citizens have to pay. We shall put a stop to that. With effect from the First of January 2005, all medical services including the use of the medical facilities offered at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will be free to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I repeat:

“...all medical services including the use of the medical facilities offered at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will be free to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.”

When this statement was read, the Member for Caroni Central, in his contribution to the budget debate, asked how is it that the Government is going to offer free services to all nationals at the Mount Hope Hospital, when in the estimates for 2005, not a single cent had been placed in the estimates in order to do such. If the Government is now going to allow free access to nationals from all parts of Trinidad and Tobago, it was clear that the Government had to put out more money. The Member for Caroni Central asked: “How can the Government do it?” The Prime Minister said: “Do not worry about that. Money is not the problem. When the time comes, we will put the money that is needed. We have the money.”

Yet, here we are, January 01, 2005 and they have reversed this position that was clearly stated by the Prime Minister. I do not care in what way the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West dressed it up, it is a total change from what was promised to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the 2005 Budget. That is why the Member has found himself in the unenviable position of trying to make sense out of nonsense. He is genuine with his passion in wanting to help people, but basically his contribution was trying to make sense out of nonsense. Having promised the people that anybody could go to Mount Hope and access free services, the Government is now saying that we all have to line up at the public health centres or hospitals in Port of Spain or San Fernando, wait to see a doctor in the lines that will take so many hours and days, to get a letter. The Member for Barataria/San Juan said it.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what they are doing now is further overloading an already overloaded public health system. The facilities at Mount Hope and the services that are available there are not the same at other institutions. In fact, the sibling of the Prime Minister has indicated publicly that what is being given out at the Port of Spain General Hospital is substandard to what is happening at Mount Hope. In this country, there is a perception that the facilities at Mount Hope are superior to what obtains in other public health institutions.

First of all, they have broken a promise, and this is nothing new. This is not the first time and it will not be the last time. Today, my own constituents are suffering from broken promises made by the Member for San Fernando East when he visited the constituency of Siparia. He promised that he would deal with the flooded areas. Over the Christmas season, my constituents were further flooded out, and to this day those flooded waters have not gone down.

Mr. Speaker, what you are getting in those flooded infested waters in the Penal area is something called caiman. In our language, we say crocodile or alligator. That was another broken promise that was made publicly by the Member for San Fernando East, just as the broken promise with respect to Mount Hope Hospital services.

I did not intend to engage in the health debate. I think my both colleagues have done quite well with respect to that matter, however, I do wish to speak with respect to the changes with respect to the appropriation for the Ministry of Education.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was really blowing his trumpet and singing praises to the Government. He said that every year the Government increases the allocation to the Ministry of Health and also the Ministry of Education. What has happened is that as the years go by, the amount of money allocated to basic social services like health and education continues to increase. In the budget for 2002, which was the last UNC budget, there was an allocation of \$2 billion for the Ministry of Education and, thereafter, the allocation continues to increase with successive budgets.

Mr. Speaker, what is interesting—since the Minister does not seem to understand this matter—is that this is not just a question as to how much money is being allocated each year, but what is being done with the money, and how do you implement the projects and the promises made with respect to each budget allocation. So, every year, we come to this Parliament and the Minister of Finance makes promises to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, based on the projections within the budget estimates for the coming fiscal year, and by the end of the year, those promises are broken, and then they fail to implement the different projects.

So, they started off the fiscal year really grand and nice by blowing trumpets about the large allocations being given to the Ministry of Education—the highest

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, January 14, 2005

ever and the largest chunk of the budget going into education—but the year has always ended with this downside of the failure of the Government to carry out these projects, and then the five Ministers of Finance will then come and tell us nicely that we have savings. That is the reason given for not utilizing the money. People were happy when they heard the word “savings”, because it means that you have been prudent and you have had good financial management, so there were savings and you are now going to take those savings and invest. We know that the word “savings” is really a misnomer when we are dealing with appropriations.

In effect, what has happened is that the Government has been a failure and that is why we have all these savings. *[Interruption]* I am saying that by the end of the fiscal year you have been a failure because you did not utilize the moneys by carrying out the different projects.

Again, in October, when we were here, since the largest slice of the pie went to the Ministry of Education, with due respect, I think the Minister of Education should have come to this Parliament and given us an account for the large slice of the pie that went to that Ministry for the previous fiscal year, and to tell us about projections for the coming fiscal year. Once again, all the moneys in this Appropriation Bill are coming out from the Ministry of Education. The Minister does not have the decency or the wherewithal to come and tell us why she has failed to spend that \$80.5 million, and what she was able to do otherwise. Why is the Minister giving up this money? What was the Minister able to achieve? All this money is coming out from the Ministry’s appropriation, but she has no time to be here in this House. I guess, like the Member for Diego Martin Central, this is a Friday evening and there are better places where they may want to be.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at what happened with respect to each of the fiscal years. In the 2001/2002 fiscal year which was the last UNC budget, but the first PNM administration in this incarnation—in January 2003, the Ministry of Education had a decrease of \$62.1 million. With respect to the 2003 budget—the Minister was then in full swing in 2003, and she came very jovially to the Parliament with great hopes and expectations and asked for an increase of \$130.9 million. This was in July 2003. There were grand plans being announced like the de-shifting of schools, the construction and upgrading of schools, and all the wonderful things that were supposed to be done with this additional \$130.9 million. The Minister came and got approval in this Parliament for an increase by way of a Supplemental Variation of Appropriation Bill, and before the end of that fiscal year, we were back again in this Parliament, because the very Ministry that had asked for this additional \$130.9 million increase came back to this Parliament and said, “Listen, I have savings, I did not spend the money, I want a decrease.” Again, we ended that fiscal year with a decrease of \$117.5 million in January 2004. That was in the 2003 budget. The reasons given by the Ministry of Education for not spending the money each time were the same.

When we came here in January 2004 to decrease the amount of money appropriated for education, the explanation given for the \$117.5 million was that the Ministry of Education was unable to meet settlement of arrears of increments to secondary school teachers because of outstanding queries with respect to statements.

Mr. Speaker, today, I ask you again to look at where we are decreasing the allocation for the 2004 budget, and the reasons given are the same—outstanding queries with respect to statements; no receipt of statements from other Ministries; waiting on applications from retirees; and the requirement of legal documents are outstanding in certain cases. These are the same reasons that were given in January 2004 for the failure to settle these arrears, and the same reasons are now being given to us in 2005, for the failure to settle these arrears in 2004. For two straight years, we were being given the same reasons for failing to settle arrears to outstanding public officers and so forth.

In addition, phase 4 of the primary school computerization project was not completed because of the non-finalization of security and other considerations with respect to the installation of hardware in some schools. We return now in 2005 and this is exactly the same reason that is being given. They have not been able to begin phase 4 of the computerization project.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that I asked the Minister of Education a question in this House, with respect to the computerization project. When we were in office, we had begun placing computers in every school in this country, and when we left office we had completed phase 3, and phase 4 was about to begin. Mr. Speaker, three years later, not a single school has been given a computer under the Schools Computerization Project. Every year the Minister of Education returns the money because she has failed to implement that project with respect to the Schools Computerization Project. Why is that? Why for three years can the Minister not get it right? The project was already up and running and it was not a new project, and we had already completed phase 3.

I asked the Minister of Education to tell us how many schools were allocated computers, and the number of computers that were allocated to each school as at January 2002, because January 2002 would have been the first month after this administration took office. No computers were put in schools. Why? Why after three years can the Ministry not implement phase 4 of the Schools Computerization Project? Why every year are they putting money into the budget and boasting about modernization and saying that we are living in this brave new world of technology where computers are going to overtake everything, and we must give our children this advantage in this new world, if they are to survive and so forth, but every year they return and tell us that they have failed? Why is that?

Mr. Speaker, the reasons continue. The Secondary Schools Book Grant Credit Card initiative was not completed during the fiscal year as returns were only finalized in the new school term—this was for the 2003 budget—due to the late submission of claims with

respect to works undertaken in primary schools. Those were the reasons given for the \$117 million that was not utilized by the Ministry of Education in the budget for fiscal year 2003.

What was even more interesting was that Sen. the Hon. Enill mentioned that an Appropriation Bill is about the reordering of priorities. I will come to the 2004 budget, but I am using the 2003 budget to show exactly the same thing happened with respect to the \$117 million. That sum was transferred out from its vote because the Ministry failed to carry out projects. The vacant posts that were budgeted for were not filled to the value of \$23 million. I am now going to talk about the vacant posts that were not filled in 2004. There is a large number of vacant posts in that Ministry and there is no wonder that Ministry is on the verge of collapsing.

The arrears to public officers were not settled to the tune of \$68 million; fees for private students were not paid in the sum of \$4.8 million; the grant for secondary school books were not paid for \$45.7 million; library and textbooks were not provided for the sum of \$16.2 million; improvements and refurbishing works to secondary schools were not done to the value of \$52 million; replacement and construction of blocks within existing schools were not done for the sum of \$15.1 million; the construction of Caroni Village SDMS Charlieville ASJA Boys, Charlieville ASJA Girls and Barrackpore ASJA schools were not done and that is a total of almost \$80 million. In 2003, all these matters were not considered priorities by the Ministry of Education, so the Ministry reordered its priorities and transferred the money out.

The teaching and learning strategies project was not implemented for the sum of \$18 million; asbestos abatement project was planned, but was not done, \$1.5 million. In 2003, there was \$117 million for the reordering of priorities and these projects were not done.

Mr. Speaker, in this fiscal year, the Ministry of Education is asking us to approve—what has already happened—a decrease of \$80.3 million. We are just rubber stamping it here today, because with the Parliament majority they will be able to pass this Bill. They have already utilized these moneys in this way, and we are just being asked to approve what the law says to do. What is this \$80.3 million all about? What did the Ministry of Education not do with that \$80.3 million? That money is now being taken away from the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, vacant posts within the general administration were not filled, and that amounts of \$14.3 million; and the settlement of arrears to public officers, a decrease of \$41 million. Again, that is exactly the same thing from the previous fiscal year. General administration equipment of \$25 million relating to the Schools Computerization Project was not done. When we looked at the note that was given to us from the Finance Committee as to the reasons for the decrease, the note says that savings of \$80 million were identified under Head 26, the Ministry of Education, due to the following: a number of

posts on the Ministry's establishment remained vacant during 2004. That is the same thing that happened in 2003; the positions of heads of department and deans in primary and secondary schools were not filled as new job specifications were not completed; under the vote Settlement of Arrears to Public Servants there is still a number of outstanding applications in respect of retirees and legal personal representatives of deceased teachers. That was the same reason given for the year before. So one year later or two years later there was no change. This is the same inertia, the same nothing that is taking place in this Ministry. Tendering procedures with respect to the primary schools computerization programme was initiated in the last quarter and the funds were not utilized. These were the reasons given for the \$80 million. [*Interruption*] Again, we are talking about re-ordering of priorities.

We also have a Statement of Transfers before us from the Finance Committee. Mr. Speaker, I want you to pay attention to this matter. This does not really show what is happening in the Ministry. In addition to the \$14 million for vacant posts in General Administration, there was a decrease. Listen to what is happening with respect to transfers. Vacant posts under General Administration, a transfer of \$11 million away from that particular head; salaries and COLA in secondary education—meaning vacant posts—\$79.9 million; salaries and COLA in primary education, \$103 million. We are talking about \$206 million with respect to vacant posts in the Ministry of Education.

The Member for Tabaquite requested a listing of the vacant posts with respect to the \$14 million and that response came on our desk today. When I counted the number of vacant posts there were about 800 vacant posts that were being accounted for with respect to that \$14 million. What does this mean? This means that for about 800 workers there was a saving of \$14 million. Mr. Speaker, do you know what it means when you have a savings of \$206 million in the Ministry of Education since vacant posts were not filled? We are talking here about 4,000 vacant posts.

If you take an average of \$14 million for about 800 workers—when we put that figure with the \$206 million which was not utilized for all those vacant posts—we are talking about 4,000 positions that were not filled. Even if that figure was overestimated, then take away 1,000 vacant posts, so then there were 3,000 vacant positions that were not filled in the Ministry of Education. There are so many vacant posts in a system that is so vital and so important in this country; in a system where we are seeing the collapse of the education sector; in a system where the Minister herself was talking and lamenting on the low levels of literacy and performance at the National Examinations. We are talking here about \$206 million that was not used, because vacant positions were not filled in the Ministry of Education. What a sorry state of affairs. What a sorry state of affairs when you could leave 3,000 or 4,000 positions vacant in a sector that is so vital to the life of this nation. That is just with respect to vacant posts.

With respect to heads and deans of department, that matter was also the subject of a question that I had asked the Minister during the 2004 fiscal session. I asked the Minister

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, January 14, 2005

what steps were being taken to fill the posts of heads and deans in our schools. We had created these positions of heads and deans for a particular reason, given what was happening within the school system; and given the size of these factories that the PNM had created in the junior secondary schools and senior secondary schools and so forth.

We have a situation where there was one principal who was administrator as well as academia and who was in charge of 1,000 students with the assistance of one or two deputy principals. This just could not work. So, within the school system you have academia, discipline, behaviour counselling and all the other good things that we want to see nourished and nurtured in our children. There is where the concept of heads and deans came about. I prepared that Cabinet Note. I remember doing that Cabinet Note. I went through that Cabinet Note over and over again on the computer in order to show why we needed those positions. This was also based on advice from the technocrats and educators worldwide.

Mr. Speaker, the heads were to look after academic, so you would have a head of department for subjects whether it is English, History or Mathematics and, therefore, you will have heads for every 200 or 250 students, and there will no longer be a head for 1,000 students or 800 students, but heads for subject areas looking after a smaller number of students. In addition to looking after the academic side, there would be deans for a smaller number of students and for students with problems, concerns or even that one-to-one relationship interaction with students so that they could meet and talk with the deans on a one-on-one basis.

I remember going to Iere High School. Incidentally, Iere High School will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this coming week. When I went to Iere High School there were about 200 students. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you could remember the days when you went to high school. Those schools were places of joy, learning, and at the same time it was a family unit. The factories that our schools have become have alienated students and that is creating the indiscipline problems. The heads and deans were to assist with academia, but also to bring back that kind of one-on-one relationship with those in authority.

When we asked the question in this House with respect to heads and deans, we were told that 150 heads and deans were appointed. These were persons who have been serving in the education sector prior to the creation of these positions and have not been recognized. So, these persons were recognized and they were appointed. I also counted that listing with respect to heads of department and deans and that figure is less than 150. This means that since January 2002 to now, not a single head or dean was appointed.

I read a letter in the newspaper this week and this letter probably put a spinner as to why heads of department and deans are not being appointed. The Minister came here and told us all kinds of things about job specifications, and that the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA) was unhappy about this matter, but this was agreed upon by all the stakeholders. When we took that note to Cabinet, we took the views of all the

stakeholders. Maybe the Government has changed its mind because the Minister did tell this Parliament that she was having problems with TTUTA agreeing to the appointments of heads and deans. The Minister told us that they did not appoint any heads of department and deans because of the problems with TTUTA, the Chief Personnel Officer, the Teaching Service Commission and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, listen to this article which appears to be coming from a person who is a teacher. I am reading from the *Newsday* newspaper dated January 12, 2005 and the article says:

“In the teaching service, there are teachers who enter the service with the minimum requirements and retire with the same qualifications without trying to upgrade themselves and there are teachers who go as far as gaining their doctorate through hard work, making great sacrifices with their family and social life, just to be better teachers.

It is sad to see the way the Minister of Education...TTUTA President are treating these teachers. At my school, whenever there are extra-curricula activities, these hard-working teachers are the ones who organise the programme, whereas the first set of teachers mentioned here, just watch on, without giving any assistance.

Now these hard-working teachers with their masters and doctorate get the opportunity for a little promotion in the form of heads of departments and deans, and the Teachers' Union...is blocking them from achieving these, although the teachers are in the union.

The Ministry of Education had certain requirements for the posts of head of departments and deans and the teacher with the masters and doctorates has the qualifications but others who would strike or protest in a second without asking the reason do not have the qualifications so the interviews have been stopped, and the qualification lowered to help them. Is this progress? Why not take the highly qualified people for the job and let the people who are not qualified, seek to get the qualifications? This is the only way the teaching service can improve.

A few years ago, teachers were interviewed for the posts from the Victoria and North Eastern districts and only the highly qualified teachers were interviewed and awaiting the results.

Now, these same teachers are told that they have to go back to be interviewed because the qualification standard has been lowered. If it is lowered, these highly qualified teachers still have the requirement, so why do they have to be interviewed again?

Something is definitely wrong with the people at the top in the Ministry of Education and TTUTA.”

Mr. Speaker, is this the reason that the Minister of Education has lowered the qualifications for heads of department and deans? All those persons who were interviewed and who were qualified for the posts, they have put a stop on all of that for three years. In essence, what the Ministry is doing is watering down the brandy; they are lowering the qualification in order to bring in their friends and family in the system. Why did the Ministry not appoint any heads of department or deans for the last three years? In addition, they have lowered the qualification requirement for heads of department and deans, and these are hardworking qualified teachers out there.

The Member for Diego Martin Central said that he has been here longer than I. As I said, this is not about age or seniority, but this is a question of what is right and what is the law. If there are teachers with the qualifications—whether these teachers have been in the Teaching Service for 5, 10 or 40 years—this is not an issue of seniority. If you want heads of department, deans and good administrators then you should appoint teachers with the qualification and experience, but the Ministry of Education is going the other way around. These teachers are going to end up just like the officers in the Police Service who have served for donkey's years and just float up to the top. If the Ministry is lowering the qualification; they are going to just bring down the system.

Mr. Speaker, the whole purpose with respect to heads of department and deans—persons who would have led the way and provided a cadre of leadership within each school—would be of no use. Again, I do not know why the Minister is not here to tell us that this is not so—she has not stopped the interviewing process, and she has not stopped the appointing process—because she has lowered the qualification. The Minister should tell us whether or not that is so, because that is what the teachers are saying out there. The teachers are saying that the qualification has been lowered and that is why for three years they cannot get new job specifications. That was said in a note from the Finance Committee in relation to an answer. So, with respect to the 150 heads of department and deans who were appointed, were there any job specifications for them? That is a contradiction. The fact that these heads of department and deans were appointed in 2002 meant that there were job specifications for them, but something probably happened in the interim that they were not happy with. The Government must come and tell us why it has failed to appoint these other heads and deans.

Mr. Speaker, those were the issues that I felt were important that I could not let the record go without noting our disappointment, given what is happening in the education sector with respect to the re-ordering of priorities in the Ministry of Education. There are vacant positions in the Ministry amounting to \$206 million. Is this Government serious? Can anyone of you feel happy and confident to know that in the education sector there is the sum of \$206 million for vacant positions that were not filled? Do you have children in the school system? Do you have grandchildren in the school system? Do you have nieces

and nephews in the school system? Do you feel comfortable to know that! This is not just at the administration level, but at the level of secondary schools, primary schools and so forth. Mr. Speaker, you will not find \$206 million returning from the Ministry of Education because of the failure to fill vacant posts. The Government should go back and check its estimates.

So, there are all these vacant posts and the school system is crying out for the kind of supervision and guidance that we need within our school system. We have seen the indiscipline in schools; we have seen the violence in schools. Why is the Government not finding time to hire these persons to take care of this matter? Why is the Government not implementing the projects in the Ministry of Education? The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and the Minister of Education should not come here and boast about the billions of dollars being given to them when they are not spending the money at the end of the year. I am disappointed with respect to the matter relating to heads and deans, and the whole philosophy behind the computerization project in schools.

Mr. Speaker, recently, I read that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had awarded a contract to Ainsley Gill and Associates to work as a lobbying team in the United States of America. I also read that the Government is expected to pay that firm US \$300,000 on a quarterly basis. The contract was for US \$1.2 million to lobby the George Bush administration on behalf of the Patrick Manning administration. This was on the Internet, heartbeatnews.com. My question is who is Ainsley Gill's friend? The competing contract proposal was for US \$300,000 and not US \$1.2 million. That is a very highly reputable firm.

The standard fee that is normally charged by most reputable firms like the Kessinger Group and other firms who would lobby for countries like Trinidad and Tobago is US \$300,000 for the year, and not US \$1.2 million. So, who is Ainsley Gill's friend? *[Interruption]* How did this firm end up with this contract? Why was there not a competing proposal for US \$300,000 which is the normal fee charged by major firms like the Kessinger Group? BPTT has already questioned the credibility of this firm, and they have denied that they are amongst the clients of Ainsley Gill. Apparently, that was one of the claims that was made. I read that in our local newspaper. This firm's credibility is being attacked but, more seriously, we are talking here about people's money. How did this happen? The normal fee for that kind of work by very reputable firms is US \$300,000. There was another proposal for this job for the same US \$300,000, but you gave it to another firm for US \$1.2 million. How did that happen?

The Member for Diego Martin Central said earlier that is the way the Government does business, when we talked about the moneys that are being given to all these countries and so forth. This is a business so we are going to get interest on the business. What is the Government getting out of this US \$1.2 million when it could have gotten this same thing for US \$300,000? What is the cost benefit? I am asking the Government to examine that matter.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, before the Minister closes, could I ask the Member whether that other firm tendered? As I am aware, this contract was given out by the Central Tenders Board. I would really like to know whether that other firm submitted a tender to the Central Tenders Board.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Well, I want to thank the Member for the confidence that he has placed in my information gathering skills, but that information is within the Ministry of Finance, and the Central Tenders Board falls under the Ministry of Finance. So, this is within the Minister's purview and not mine. I cannot answer that question.

Mr. Valley: But you were making a case that there was a firm which was available for US \$300,000. If you are making a case then one has to assume that you know whether or not that firm tendered. If the firm did not tender then the firm was not available to the Government.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: There was a proposal, and this was a competing contract proposal. That is my information. I do not have the actual tender documents. My information is that there was a competing contract proposal which implies that there was another bid for this US \$300,000.

Mr. Speaker, there is another matter that I would like to raise and this matter has to do with the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). Whilst in the Heads in the Variation of Appropriation Bill in the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Tobago House of Assembly and the Ministry of Housing, the Finance Committee Report talked about a \$7 million allocation to the CCJ, that gives me the locus to speak on the CCJ.

On Monday, the hon. Attorney General made a statement in the Parliament with respect to why the debate on the CCJ was being postponed. This was after this matter has been postponed on several occasions. I would really like to address that issue and to warn and advise the Government—the Member for Diego Martin Central likes to warn Members and he also likes to give gratuitous advice—that it would be very foolish for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to intervene in the proceedings before the Privy Council which involve the Jamaican government and the Jamaican opposition. This would not only be foolish, but it would be totally illegal for the Trinidad and Tobago Government to intervene in the proceedings involving the Jamaican government and the Jamaican opposition that is before the Privy Council.

Mr. Speaker, the provisions of the Trinidad and Tobago Constitution with respect to the Privy Council are very different from the provisions relating to the Privy Council in Jamaica. The Trinidad and Tobago Constitution and the Jamaica Constitution are very different, so we cannot have the same issues.

The Attorney General stood in this Parliament and told the nation that the issues were pertinent and they were relevant and, therefore, he was exploring options to intervene in the matter. These issues are very different. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to be compromised by those who should know better, so I am going to ask for your protection.

The Jamaican Constitution provides specifically for a referendum to be held in certain circumstances. The Trinidad and Tobago Constitution does not provide for any referendum to be held. If we want to hold a referendum, we could just do so because we feel like doing it. There is nothing in law that requires a referendum to be held for any purpose whatsoever.

One of the issues that is before the Privy Council with respect to the Jamaican case is that the Jamaican opposition is contending that before the Jamaican government could pass this CCJ legislation in that Parliament, they must hold a referendum. The Jamaican Constitution has an expressed explicit provision saying that one of the ways of dealing with constitutional amendments is by way of a referendum. That is the first issue before the Privy Council, and that issue is totally irrelevant to us. *[Interruption]* I am speaking here about the money that was allocated to the CCJ. We are allocating money to the CCJ that does not exist and will not exist. The Government is evading the issue by putting off the debate and saying that it is going to wait now. The Government is going to be wasting money again because they are going to pay all these queen's counsels, king's counsels, senior counsels and about 10 lawyers and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, do you know how much money these lawyers are making out of the maladministration of this Government? There are lawyers laughing their way to the bank. These lawyers are benefiting from millions of dollars of legal fees that are being paid to them because of cases being brought against the Government for maladministration. Let us talk about that matter. I am saying that the issue that is before the Privy Council is totally irrelevant to Trinidad and Tobago.

The second issue that the Jamaican opposition is contending is that the Jamaican government needs to entrench the new CCJ in its constitution. Again, the Jamaican Constitution is different. The Jamaican Constitution has nothing about the Privy Council. Our Constitution deeply entrenches the Privy Council. The right of access to the Privy Council is a deeply entrenched provision of our Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, we could pass all these laws here. There are sections in the Constitution that the Government could come and change tomorrow with just a simple majority. There is the fundamental rights section which people talked so much about, and that is an entrenched provision and it only requires a two-thirds majority, but the right of access to the Privy Council was believed by the founding fathers of this Constitution, to be so fundamental to our democracy that they deeply entrenched it. That amendment to the Privy Council requires a three-fourths majority of the House before the Privy Council could be removed or any changes with respect to the right of access to the Privy Council. That does not apply to the Jamaican constitution at all. The Privy Council is entrenched in our Constitution and the Jamaican Constitution has nothing about entrenchment. Those are the issues that are before the Privy Council.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, January 14, 2005

Mr. Speaker, why on earth is the Trinidad and Tobago Government going to intervene in a matter that clearly in law has no locus standi, except to go and shake hands? There is this Caricom father thing that the Prime Minister seems to be engaging in and he is taking taxpayers dollars and wasting them before the Privy Council. Do you know what the Jamaicans said when they were debating the CCJ Bill? Do you know what was said when the Bill was rejected? The leader of the opposition in the Jamaican Parliament, Mr. Edward Seaga, said: "It is not that we do not love our brothers and sisters of Caricom, we love them, but we love Jamaica more."

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, as I close, may I say while we are approving the Grenada disaster relief money—we have put into the 2005 estimates a further \$30 million and that is fine—that we love them and we want to help them, and when the Government is taking this \$120 million to put in LIAT, that is fine. I want to say like what the Jamaicans said—remember they were the ones with the Federation, and that is when they were big. They had bauxite and they were brave, bold and strong.

Mr. Speaker, I was a student in Jamaica and I lived in Jamaica for 13 years. They are great people, lovely people. I was a student there and then I became a lecturer. I lectured at the University of the West Indies in Mona before I came back to live in Trinidad. The Jamaican people are great people, but they are very patriotic people. When I went to Jamaica the Jamaican dollar was worth more than the US dollar. You could not buy anything with our dollar, because you could not use a "Trini" dollar anywhere.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that years later I had the privilege of being a student at the University of the West Indies in Barbados. The "Trini" students and other Trinidadians were scum in Barbados. If you were to go and sit next to them, they did not want you sitting next to them. They wanted the white tourist and the Americans and so forth to sit with them. They do not want to see us from Trinidad and Tobago. These are the same people today that I say that we love, but we must love Trinidad and Tobago more. That is why I ask the Government that when it is giving away all this money to remember Trinidad and Tobago has to be taken care of first.

Our infrastructure is in a total mess. There is a total collapse of the infrastructure in this country and the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro has grand plans and more plans. The flooding in this country is a disaster and money is not being allocated for flooding and disaster relief in Trinidad and Tobago. I am saying that we are very happy to help Grenada but, again, I am asking the Government to keep its promises. The Prime Minister is not here, but the people of

Penal will never forgive him. I guess he does not mind because he thinks he probably will not get any votes there. The Prime Minister must keep the promises that he made with respect to the flooding last year, because the flooding has not stopped.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I rise to say that when this Bill to vary the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act 2004 comes before us and one reads the documents in our hand, one reads that in accordance with the authority delegated by Cabinet, the Minister of Finance approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$624,440,482 between subheads under the same headings and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, when one goes through this document, one would realize that almost under every head there are moneys being transferred from that same head to a different subhead. I would like to remind the Minister of Finance and the Government that a budget is about planning and implementation. When they come to us—three months after the financial year has expired—with this document in hand, it shows the inability of the Government to manage this country, and the way the Government operates. The Government takes this country for granted.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to quickly touch on a few items that have been approved under the same head and money transfers in my mind, and just to read further that these transfers reflect strange circumstances in ministries and departments and a consequential re-ordering of priorities. So to me this was not good planning at all. It was poor planning, and, of course, I do not know how much planning could be done in Trinidad and Tobago to stick to the budget. I know we must appropriate funds here and there, but when we look at this, it is almost as if a new budget has been laid before us.

Mr. Speaker, just to look at the first one, the President. I note there was money appropriated to purchase a vehicle for the President, and what has happened. This money has been used for medical expenses for the former President in the tune of \$970,425. Now if—and as said in the covering note to the Act—the Government did not have to come to Parliament as the Constitution dictates, nobody would know that this Government continues to repay President Robinson and every time I get up to talk, it is almost \$1 million per year and more. You will check the *Hansard* and see what I am talking about. And here is another one, medical expenses—\$970,000.

Mr. Speaker, under the Office of the Prime Minister, under Subhead, Current Transfers and Subsidies, Pensions—and this refers to old age pensions—\$10 million was not used and it was appropriated last year. Disability grant: \$39.5 million. This money was approved for people with disabilities. I have some documents in my possession of a child who is totally

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. RAMSARAN]

Friday, January 14, 2005

disabled, and I heard the Minister of Health, this evening, talk about social workers and so on, and this is a very sad story. I want to read this into the record.

The mother of this 15-year-old, mentally retarded child used to receive the sum of \$80, and it was stopped in October 2002 because, according to the letter written here, the family is now in receipt of extra money. And this extra money, Mr. Speaker, is the husband, Mr. Ambrose, who used to work at Caroni (1975) Limited, and according to the language here, it was closed down, and he received \$14,000 back—pay or VSEP from Caroni (1975) Limited. Mr. Speaker, I want to put this carefully on the record. To summarize, the money was deducted from a loan that was taken by the family prior to the VSEP. The letter from Republic Bank:

Dear Mr. Persad

Re: Loan Account in the name of Ambrose Persad

We confirm that the sum of \$14,019.63 being part proceeds of Caroni VSEP was applied to the captioned loan account for close of sale.

So, Mr. Speaker, the fact that the person received this \$14,000 from Caroni (1975) Limited did not really increase the income of the house, but you know what, this person has been writing everybody. I have copies of letters to the Minister, to the Prime Minister, to everybody who would be in a position to help. The MP, Mr. Subhas Panday, has written the hon. Minister and he has outlined the case and asked the officers to assist, and up to this time nothing was done and the person wrote me asking if I could assist.

Mr. Speaker, this is really, to my mind, something, very, very distasteful and I would like, when they come to this Parliament, when they talk about caring, when they talk about what is taking place, that they do as they preach. The Minister mentioned social workers. Here we have Terrance Pamena, Medical Social Worker, writing the Ministry, asking that they reconsider this case and the above name is a client of this department, whose daughter, Amrika Persad, a mentally retarded child, was in receipt of a special grant which was stopped in October, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, this family has made requests, and if you look at the child here, she is 15 years old, mentally and physically retarded. What we see, the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and the Government transferred \$49.5 million from Pensions and Disability grant, and I want to read where the money went. Official Entertainment—\$7 million; Promotions, Publicity and Printing - \$2.5 million and expenses of Cabinet appointed committees—\$40 million, Mr. Speaker.

I have many other letters here—because of the time and so on, I do not want to read all into the record, but subsequently I will do that—where people have written me as the former Minister of Social Development and they know I may be the shadow Minister, so to speak, and they all are very deserving and they require assistance, Mr. Speaker. So I would put it in

the record one of these days, but just this one is very touching. People come to me from time to time and they are not being given the services that are voted in this Parliament. That is why I am making the point. You come to this Parliament, you promise, you sound good, \$X million, \$450 million for old age pension and \$200 million for disability grant. But at the end of the day, because of the powers that are delegated to the Ministers, and they could go to Cabinet and have these moneys transferred from subhead to subhead, what do they do, Mr. Speaker? Promotions, Publicity, Official Entertainment, and we have poor people out there, disabled people, especially. I have a letter from George Daniel about how he is being treated and what has been happening with the increase in disability allowances, and so on, and I feel that these people should be given the priority; not the Prime Minister and people to carry on and have a good time in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Head 15, again a document laid before this Parliament—\$4.573 million transferred from Head 15, Subhead 9 to Subhead 6—Tobago House of Assembly. They said where the money came from—from education. They were supposed to build the Scarborough Methodist School. They were supposed to establish a childcare centre, they were supposed to build a secondary school, that is Mason Hall Government, that is very close to the Landate place. They were supposed to build medical and dental centres and a new health centre; this to the tune of \$4.5 million, Mr. Speaker. It went to the Tobago House of Assembly, Subhead 6. Mr. Speaker they have not noted where this money is going. Is it to fight the THA elections? Is this money going to be used to do things that are not legal? It is not printed and I write here: “What to do”? What are we going to do with that \$4.573 million, Mr. Speaker?

These are the questions I must ask, because we have a Government here that would come, lay a budget—headlines—talk for three hours and at the end of the day, come back with an Appropriation Bill and say that it spent the money elsewhere. Would this get the same—with due respect to the hon. Minister this evening—low keyed, had to be, because I know he understands finance and he knows that this is a slap in the face for any Government, to come here at the end of the year, three months later and say that we have used the money elsewhere. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind this Government that there was a period in this country, where up to this day, no Appropriation Bill has been laid in this Parliament, and that is from December 24, 2001 until elections were held in 2002. That is very important, that must be laid in this Parliament. Mr. Speaker, the records are here for those who want to read, to understand the waste that is taking place.

Ministry of Planning and Development, although the figure might be small. But here we have important things to do. Here we have \$520,000 for short-term employment. Now this is what is printed here. What is short-term employment? Who were employed? How were they employed? Was it jobs for their friends? Five hundred and twenty thousand dollars is a small amount in comparison to what is taking place, but this is what is happening. The Minister of National Security—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Member gave way? Mr. Speaker, if the Member would recall, we came to this Parliament and indicated that an agricultural census would be done and the \$520,000 was to pay the young people who were employed to carry out the census. A simple explanation; no friends and family. I do not know if any friends and family of yours were involved.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: So, here we are, and the Ministry of National Security again, what do we have in this country, Mr. Speaker? Two hundred and sixty murders for last year, 130 kidnappings. What do we have? Moneys were voted for various reasons and they were transferred. Promotions, Publicity and Printing—\$3 million. The special anti-crime unit—\$39.187 million. Are we in Trinidad and Tobago happier today, because of the anti-crime unit? And to spend \$39.187 million. I would like the Minister of National Security to tell us what was done with this money and how are we better off for it. We could turn page after page and see the wastage taking place and when you go down to other Ministries, you will see, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I know the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could defend this, but \$5 million for purchase of property in South Africa. Mr. Speaker, this is the wastage that I am talking about, and no explanation. Had the Government not—and I repeat, because of the Constitution—have to lay this document, we would not be wiser, Mr. Speaker, except here and there.

Ministry of Public Administration, \$12.361 million for NBN; that was voted for NBN. Mr. Speaker, that money was transferred to purchase vehicles. Vehicles for whom? NBN is no longer there. The \$12.361 million did not go back to the Treasury; it was used to purchase vehicles; and this is the kind of wastage that I am concerned about. I want people to understand that when we come to this Parliament and we talk about a budget, a budget is to plan and to implement. Whenever people come to Parliament with this amount of movement between Heads, to me it is a failure of the Government.

When we look at the three areas, and my colleague from Siparia mentioned, the Ministry of Education, which I consider to be hapless, because in my own constituency five schools have started around 1999 and up today, they have not yet been completed. Again, in today's document the Minister mentioned it, so I would not repeat it, but schools have not yet been completed. And more money, \$753 million has again been added to the vote, as if they are some kind of money Satan. But back to what I am trying to say here, \$80.389 million was taken from Ministry of Education, and what do we see, Mr. Speaker? The Ministry of Housing is receiving \$56 million and more, and let me read into the record. The transfer of \$56.575 million is required to bring to account expenditure incurred by the NHA in excess of the approved appropriation for its rehabilitation programme, and Mr. Speaker, listen to this, during the period August 2002 to August 2004. Why, may I ask was this not appropriated at the end of 2002/2003, well of course now, 2004? Why was this allowed to happen? Who was accountable? Why did this take so long to come to the Parliament to be approved? This is what I call sleight of hand, you just come here and you put a thing in a document and hope that it passes.

Mr. Speaker, if you remember this period August 2002 to August 2004, especially February 2002 to August 2002, when in this Parliament we had film stars, like Jennifer Lopez being employed by the NHA; where we had paint jobs all across the place being done by the Jamaat al Muslimeen and others, Mr. Speaker, and money and wanton wastage, today, in 2005, we are asked to approve these figures. I consider this, in my mind, to be using this Parliament to undermine the stability of our country.

NHA—we have been complaining about it and this letter is very instructive. This was written on February 26, 2002. This is the start of this period. Mr. Speaker, what was discussed? Government's objective to construct 100,000, two and three bedroom, multi family and single family housing for low income citizens. Areas to receive priority attention for the new housing construction were as follows: San Fernando West, Barataria/San Juan, Tunapuna, Ortoire/Mayaro, St. Joseph and Tobago. The authority to communicate with the People's National Movement constituency's representative and chairpersons for the listed constituencies, seeking the assistance and cooperation in identifying the following: lands for the new housing construction; the MPs and the chairmen for listed constituencies, contractors with a good track record in the housing industry; and we are approving this in 2005. Action taken: letters dispatched to the persons stated above; matters discussed; availability of building plans lodged in NHA, which could be made readily available to developers and contractors; identification and sorting of building plans, including plans used by the PEU. Mr. Speaker, decision taken: Central Project Management to submit track record on the housing construction industry.

Mr. Speaker, this name is turning up here—I do not know if it is the same person. The Chairman's office will now take responsibility for the River Springs Development and Ms. Cheeseman to submit an executive summary on the Bien Venue development. Mr. Speaker, this is a period in history that we ask the Minister of Finance to come to this Parliament and let us know what happened to the funding between December 24, 2001 and October or November of that year, because we want to know. This will come bit by bit to us, and we want to know what has happened.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about houses. Was it the fairness agreement signed by a few prominent citizens of this country? Mr. Speaker, equality of treatment, fairness to property and get people to share in the wealth of this nation? I am asking the Government, to treat the housing as if it belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Let there be houses in the non-marginal constituencies. What is more important, Mr. Speaker, is that even the PNM strong constituencies, there are people who are homeless, and I would like to see this thing come across—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Member give way? Mr. Speaker, just to indicate that there are houses in the constituency of Arouca South now being built by the NHA. That is certainly not a marginal constituency. On each occasion we win by nearly 14,000

votes over the UNC. That is not a marginal constituency. We have houses being built all over in the constituency of Arouca South. So the Member is misleading this House.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Not at all, not at all. I would love to have houses in Chaguanas and I win by the largest margin in Trinidad and Tobago. I received the most votes in Trinidad and Tobago for the last three general elections. So, Mr. Speaker, I too, would like to see houses in Chaguanas. The point is that we have to make sure that we treat people equally. Whether they are in a PNM constituency, Arouca South, Chaguanas, it does not matter to me. Mr. Speaker, what we need in this country—and I agree with principle of fairness. You want to treat the country equally, do it.

Every morning we read in the newspaper, discrimination, things happening here, things happening there. We here got to share our wealth equally. Mr. Speaker, just before the Grenada situation—when things are done properly, I want to compliment the Government, and this is exactly what I would like to see in a document. They say funds were not provided in the 2004 Budget for this unforeseen event and a decision was taken to issue an advance from the Contingency Fund in the said sum of \$10 million; it is now necessary to retire this advance. That is how business is done, Mr. Speaker. You do something and you come to the Parliament and you say you did it, but do not come and hide things and according to the Member for Diego Martin Central, you find the LIAT thing. It is a big suspense story. You have to be Sherlock Holmes, looking with your peepers, but I found it. The fact is that this is not how you run a Government. The Opposition ask a question, you tell them. Do not say, you find it. I know where it is. This is arrogance. You are dealing with the money of Trinidad and Tobago, taxpayers' money.

I would like to end as I started, Mr. Speaker. Let us come to this Parliament with a housing policy; a policy that is fair to all of us. We must not continue as we are doing and using houses to pad votes, as is stated across the country, this is no secret. I ask the Minister of Health to come to this Parliament and say what is going to happen to Mount Hope because what he said today, I do not know if he had the Prime Minister's permission to say. Let him come and tell us what is taking place at Mount Hope. Mr. Speaker, you must understand we are Members of Parliament, and people come to us and ask us what is happening to Mount Hope. I went to Mount Hope and this and that is not happening. We in the Parliament must know what is taking place.

So I ask the Minister to please come to us, let us know your policy, and we could inform our constituents and even non constituents, as people from all over the country write us from time to time to find out what is taking place. So, Mr. Speaker, if we want to say we are going towards 2020 vision, the First World nation and so on, I want to see that when a budget is prepared, that it is properly planned, it is properly presented, it is properly thought out, so that we would not hide things. Mr. Speaker, when we approve a budget it is cat in bag, as I said before. Here we have this amount of money being transferred from buying a motor car to

medical expenses and so on. So I ask the Government when you come to this Parliament, treat us equally, let us know your plans, plan your budget carefully and we would respond and support what you have to do. Thank you very much.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me thank all of those who contributed although, quite frankly, I never imagined that simply bringing the books to the end of 2004 to a close could generate such widespread enlightenment. There has been a lot of criticism though, about some of the decisions that were made and my low-keyedness has absolutely nothing to do with the issues, it is just that the parliamentary system is one in which the rules are made and we are required to follow them. Quite frankly, what we are seeking to do every time we come here, is to follow those rules, and the Government of the day—whether it is those on this side, those on that side, or those on the other side—finds itself in a situation where there are some decisions that are not made by the Government per se, they are made by other agencies, but they impact on the work that we do. In fact, we have to take the responsibility, although we have absolutely no way of influencing those decisions and, of course, I talk about the question here of filling of vacant positions.

All of us understand that the way that is done, is really not through—unless it is a contract position. It is really done through the Service Commission, and I can tell you about my own experiences in trying to fill Customs and Ministry of Finance positions. I can tell you about stories where at best, if you wanted to fill a position it would take you four years. When I joined the Ministry, for example, the Permanent Secretary at the time said to me that four years before he was Budget Director then and he recognized that there was going to be some staffing deficiencies, so he put proposal in place to try to get some budget analysts, and six years later he was still waiting.

Now, during that time I would have imagined you would have had a change in administration. So that what one sees, in whatever we do on an annual basis, is really how the system is serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And sometimes I think that is where we really need to focus our attention. But that is for another place and another time. I just wanted to make a few observations as they relate to the same issues that the Member for Chaguanas, the Member for Siparia and some of the other Members spoke about. You see, there was a lot of discussion about transfers as they related to things and as they related to priorities, which seemed to suggest that they were all negative. But if we look at the same report, for example, under Head 26, Ministry of Education—\$215,985,746, we can see that, for example, on page 39 of the report, additional funds were also required in the sum \$37 million to meet payments due to the Board of Management for construction work carried out on the undermentioned schools as the allocations were exhausted.

Now, clearly, they were exhausted because at the time that the planning was done certain estimates were made about cost, and an allocation was determined to deal with that.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, January 14, 2005

But in the context of actually carrying out work, things happen, and those things are normally accounted for by variations. So that you have eight schools here, in which—I can only report what the facts are. The point I am making is that, that is the mechanism by which you deal with those matters that are legitimately before us.

The other issue that basically I wanted to talk about, had to do with the Contingency Fund issue. The Contingency Fund is in fact \$25 million and it was amended in 1979. Mr. Speaker, allocation is not the same as cash flow, it is not the same as expenditure. To say that if one has to vary cost, and to say that when one does that it is as a result of bad planning, or it is a result of fiscal mismanagement, is really not a proper characterization of what it is. In any situation there is a time factor. We are sitting today and we are planning for events that will take place over the next 12 months, over the next 18 months, over the next five years, but there are intervening circumstances that will affect both the capacity to do it, the way in which we do it and the timing of it. In many instances what happens is that when we come to Parliament with these reports, it is indicating that these events have occurred, this is what we have done and these are the decisions that were taken. And quite frankly that is how the parliamentary system, and that is how the rules that are available for us, operate.

In another system there are different rules and we basically have to follow the rules, because that is exactly the way in which it is done. Mr. Speaker, the matters that were raised in this debate that I have to respond to, I cannot find them. And the reason I cannot find them is that there is none. So that, Mr. Speaker, I could basically give you a great discussion, if you want, about the economy, about unemployment and all of that. But I do not think that is relevant to what we are here for today, and we are going to have another opportunity very shortly, when again we would be doing the Finance Bill and where really we can have a very robust discussion about Government policy and the implication and application of those policies. And so, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Second Report of the 2004/2005 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of the 2004 appropriation.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (2004) BILL

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill):
Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum of the issue of which was 2

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Finance Bill

Friday, January 14, 2005

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House be now adjourned to Friday, January 21, 2005 at 1.30 p.m., and I inform my colleagues on the other side that we would follow the Order Paper. In other words, we would debate the Tourism Development Bill, after which we would do the Amendment to the Home Mortgage Bank. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.48 p.m.