HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 24, 2005

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 1999. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

   To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

2. Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

   To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

Private Hospitals
(Details of Surgical Procedures)

5. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Health to state:

(i) What private hospitals are being utilized to conduct surgical procedures on patients belonging to the public health institutions of Trinidad and Tobago;

(ii) Whether these private hospitals were chosen by open tender, and if not, what was the process used;

(iii) With respect to each such private hospital, the specific procedures, the number done and the quantum of money paid for each procedure to date?

The Minister of Health (Hon. John Rahael): Mr. Speaker, in response to question No. 5(i), the private hospitals which are currently assisting the Ministry of Health in liquidating the backlog of surgical cases are: Westshore Medical Centre, Southern Medical Clinic and Fibroid Caribbean Limited together with the St. Clair Medical Centre.

In response to 5(ii), these private hospitals were chosen on the basis of selective tender process. Following discussions with the Ministry of Health, quotations for performing hernia operations were invited from the Private Health Institutions Association, Westshore Medical Centre, Southern Medical Clinic, Medical Associates and the St. Clair Medical Centre. The lowest quotations were received from the Westshore Medical Centre and the Southern Medical Clinic. The prices quoted by each of these two institutions were $3,000 per procedure.

With reference to Westshore Medical Centre, as of January 05, 2005, 65 hernia procedures were done at a cost of $3,000 each. With reference to Southern Medical Clinic Limited, 24 persons were referred for hernia screening and as of today, 12 surgeries were done. Other persons opted to have their procedures rescheduled and the agreed cost per surgery was $3,000.

With reference to Caribbean Fibroid Limited and the St. Clair Medical Clinic, 50 embolization procedures at a cost of $13,500 each were performed to date. Caribbean Fibroid Limited is the only institution which conducts this new procedure locally.

UNUSUAL WEATHER CONDITIONS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Franklin Khan): Mr. Speaker, I am authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement.

Mr. Speaker, and Members of this honourable House, for the past three months Trinidad and Tobago had been experiencing unusual weather conditions with persistent rains on a daily basis. In any given year, the rainy season, from observation, and according to rainfall statistics, usually tapers off in the month of December as a transition to the start of the dry season in January of the following year.

Contrary to normal rainfall pattern, the month of December, 2004 was especially wet and this trend continued unabated into the month of January, 2005. I will quote the actual rainfall statistics provided by the meteorological office in a short while.

Mr. Speaker, suffice it to say that weather systems in our part of the hemisphere are responding to global changes in the normal weather pattern that we have all grown accustomed to over the years. It is as though Mother Earth is screaming at the fossil fuel debate, that is, global warming.

Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would have witnessed very graphically on their television the catastrophic effects of some disastrous events and would have

empathized with the hundreds of thousands of people who were affected either through physical injury, psychological trauma, or the death of loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, the world is still coming to grips with the tsunami that devastated several countries fringing the Indian Ocean in Southern Asia. We have seen the devastating mud slide that killed several persons in California and which was precipitated by record-breaking rainfall in that region, while on the other side of the globe, drought conditions and forest fires challenged the authorities in Australia.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, Europe also experienced its fair share of abnormal weather with heavy rains and hurricane-like winds. Fortunately for us in Trinidad and Tobago, we were spared the ravages of Hurricane Ivan, that monster hurricane that proceeded to devastate our Caricom neighbours in the north including Grenada and Jamaica.

More recently, in early December 2004, we experienced a strong earthquake measuring 5.0 on the Richter scale. Fortunately for us again, no significant damage was done. Nearer home, heavy and unusual rainfall caused severe landslips in Tobago where one person was killed and others injured, while the North Coast Road, the Arima/Blanchisseuse Road, Toco Main Road and the Paria Main Road came under such threat that certain sections had to be closed to avoid potential accidents.

Guyana, our Caricom neighbour to the South, continues to be submerged with three to five feet of water in the streets of Georgetown, the capital city. Many scientists around the world have attributed these unusual occurrences to the phenomenon of global warming and its attendant consequences, the melting of the polar ice cap.

Mr. Speaker, as a small emerging nation, Trinidad and Tobago is on the fringes of that international scientific debate on global warming, but we must be alert to the implications of climate change and be proactive in our development planning to cater for all eventualities.

Mr. Speaker, that our twin island state has experienced unusually heavy rainfall over the last three months is indisputable and, as a consequence, the infrastructure has been impacted very severely. Some of these impacts are as follows:

- Severe landslides in Tobago resulting in the death of one person and injury to others;

- Other impacts included destruction of roadways and flooding of low-lying areas;
- We have experienced flooding in the flood plains of the Caroni, Caparo, North Oropouche River and the Oropouche Lagoon, and to some extent, along the East-West Corridor and the city of Port of Spain;
- Numerous and severe landslides along the North Coast Road, the Arima/Blanchisseuse Road, the Toco Road and the Paria Main Road in the Northern Range; and
- Numerous landslides along many main roads in rural areas in Trinidad.

This unnatural occurrence has brought much distress to several communities throughout the country and has resulted in losses in the agricultural sector, delay in reaping of the sugar cane crop, and probably more significant to the Ministry of Works and Transport, damage to the built infrastructure including roads and homes.

Mr. Speaker, before I proceed to give details of the impact and the responses of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, it is useful to outline for hon. Members here the empirical context within which all of these local events are occurring.

Information obtained from the Meteorological Services Division of the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment indicated that rainfall for the months of November, December and up to January 19, 2005, measured at Piarco were 262 millimetres; 218 millimetres and 220 millimetres, respectively, all exceeding the 30-year average of 227.8 millimetres, 155.6 millimetres and 71.3 millimetres, respectively.

Mr. Speaker, rainfall measured at Hollis Reservoir over the same period is even more extreme. Actual rainfall for the three months were 382.6 millimetres for November, 431.8 millimetres for December and 403.8 millimetres up to January 19, 2005 as compared with the 30-year average of 379.4 millimetres, 260.6 millimetres and 147.0 millimetres, respectively.

Mr. Speaker, the country has not experienced such severe rainfall in January since 1943, and the month is yet to be concluded. The mountains of the Northern Range have been super-saturated with a record of 565.1 millimetres measured at the Maracas Bay Police Station. Again, these statistics are up to January 19, 2005.

The previous record set for January in 1984 was 217.6 millimetres and in 1943, 360.7 millimetres have already been exceeded for the period up to January 19, 2005.

The Director of Meteorological Services attributed this abnormal weather pattern and spate of flooding and landslides to several factors as follows:

1. Changes in the pattern of the weather system resulting in the repositioning of the subtropical jet stream and equatorial trough which enhances low level troughs to produce excessive rainfall which is 200 per cent or more above the normal average;
2. Precipitation occurs in the night, and with temperature inversion, the air is trapped and the moisture in the atmosphere causes additional rainfall;
3. Topography—with rainfall occurring on the Windward side of the Northern Range in a band from Sangre Grande to Arouca all resulting in excessive rain;
4. The position of the soil—the soils of the Northern Range being basically clay, and constant rainfall from the wet season to now has culminated in the soil's inability to hold water thus resulting in landslips;
5. Removal of the natural forest for construction purposes; and
6. Illegal farming.

Mr. Speaker, I will now deal specifically with landslips. You and Members of this honourable House will recall that I addressed the issue of flooding on December 17, 2004 and I outlined the Government's policies, plans and programmes to combat the flood menace in the short, medium and long term via the implementation of a comprehensive national drainage programme at the approximate cost, in the first instance, of TT $1 million. I am pleased to announce that this programme is awaiting improved weather conditions for a nationwide implementation.

Since that time, another adverse environmental impact of the persistent rain has reared its head in the incidence of numerous landslides all over the country. It is not my intention to repeat information already disseminated to the Parliament and so this statement will focus on the landslides being experienced in Trinidad and Tobago as a result of poor land management practices and probably, more importantly, local weather abnormalities which derive from global weather changes.

Mr. Speaker, landslips and mud flows usually strike without warning; they may be small or very large and can move from slow to avalanche speed. They

develop when water rapidly accumulates in the earth. This water then saturates the soil and increases the weight of the material on the soil, increases poor water pressure, hydrates and expands the clear minerals, dissolves minerals that hold particles together and thus decreases the share strength of the material.

The majority of our soils are composed of clearage material that swell when wet causing a reduction in inter-granular friction. All these processes serve to weaken the slope and, as a result, masses of rock, earth or debris move downslope causing a landslide.

Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of the excessive rainfall over the period November 2004 to January 2005, numerous landslides, rock slides, mud flows, faulty trees and road pavement failure have occurred on our nation's roads.

To date, the Ministry of Works and Transport has cleared 159 landslides, 59 mud slides, 237 fallen trees, four collapsed bridges and 116 incidents of localised flooding from clogged drains. Approximately 60,000 tonnes of earth-fill have been removed and it is expected that an additional 30,000 tonnes will be cleared over the coming months. A major road pavement failure occurred along the Toco Road, in addition, the North Coast Road is showing signs of distress in certain sections and further investigations are necessary to assess and determine whether its structural integrity has been compromised.

Mr. Speaker, the statistics quoted above in relation to my ministry's operation over the period indicate that we were not caught by surprise by these events. Landslips along mountain roads of the Northern Range have traditionally occurred at the tail end of the rainy season and the Ministry of Works and Transport has successfully managed these events with an emergency response mechanism that has been tried and tested. Our emergency response plan which rapidly mobilized the internal and external resources and realized response time varying from one to four hours was put into effect on the evening of December 04, 2004.

In most instances, the main road network was kept opened or at least single lane traffic, except for the North Coast Road which was closed for approximately two days. The ministry's response plan involved the co-ordinated efforts of the Highways Division staff and equipment; the respective regional corporations, Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, private contractors using heavy equipment, the fire service, the army, CEPEP and, in some cases, the local community members themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record that we are grateful for the assistance rendered by all the state agencies that contributed to the maintenance of the roadways during this challenging period. In the immediate term, the Ministry has put plans, procedures, and systems in place to mobilize at short notice the necessary resources to deal with any emergencies that may arise and will initiate preventative slope clearing measures to prevent any sudden failure. The objective of the strategy is to ensure a safe and reliable road network for all commuters.

In the short term, a landslip repair programme has been formulated to treat with all existing slope failures. The cost of implementing this programme is estimated at TT $190 million and it will be implemented on a phased basis.

A note will be taken to Cabinet this week seeking approval of a first phase in the sum of $100 million and it is expected to commence immediately. The approximate distribution of the works and resources are as follows:

- St. George East, $10.1 million
- St. George West, $10.25 million
- Caroni, $38.35 million
- Victoria East, $35.7 million
- Nariva/Mayaro $4.9 million
- Victoria West, $17 million
- St. Patrick, $17.1 million
- St. Andrew/St. David, where there were severe hardships, $62.3 million
- Expenditure in Tobago will be handled by the Tobago House of Assembly.

In addition to this landslip repair programme, other programmes are currently being finalized including a drain construction programme. In the medium term, the ministry recognizes that a rational and scientific approach to landslip management will necessitate the preparation of a database on the regularly occurring landslips combined with cutting-edge engineering analysis of soil properties and groundwater infiltration and flow.

In this regard, we intend to initiate discussions with all relevant agencies including the University of the West Indies to formulate appropriate mechanisms

aimed at predicting potential failures, thereby providing an early warning system to the population.

In particular, discussions with the University of the West Indies will centre on a research and development project focusing on the identification, analysis and management of landslides with specific reference to disaster or hazard reduction.

In addition, discussions will be held with the relevant emergency response agencies with a view to procurement of appropriate heavy equipment to deal with natural disasters, particularly landslides.

Finally, in an attempt to fully meet the design challenges of this field of civil engineering, the ministry intends to intensify and expand its training programme in slope stabilization and landslip repairs and management.

Mr. Speaker, I have just elaborated to you and Members of this honourable House the challenges that we faced since November 2004 and the response of the Government to these challenges. The approaches outlined are indicative of a well thought-out strategy to deal with the immediate to long term.

The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can rest assured that the State agencies are prepared to treat with landslide emergencies of this nature. However, we will continue to improve on our degree of preparedness for much bigger events which may have the potential to do damage on a much larger scale.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

CARONI (1975) LIMITED AND ORANGE GROVE NATIONAL COMPANY LIMITED (DIVESTMENT AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT) (NO. 2) BILL

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 01, 2004]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: On the last occasion, Friday, October 01, 2004, the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was on his feet and he has 13 minutes left of his 45 minutes.

Hon. J. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, when the House was adjourned on October 01, 2004 I was making the point that the transformation of Caroni (1975) Limited had been one of the most successful transformations that had ever taken place, and the

benefit to the employees of Caroni (1975) Limited was the best that had ever been given to any worker in any category in Trinidad and Tobago.

I have stated to this honourable House the facts surrounding why it was necessary for that restructuring to have taken place, and I also provided documentary evidence that the former administration of the United National Congress was in fact going to close Caroni (1975) Limited and send home all the workers with the basic enhancement according to the union agreement with the company.

Mr. Speaker, we took into consideration the human aspect of disengaging the number of workers, and we provided training and counselling, we ensured that the cash enhancement above what the union's agreement had called for were the highest percentage ever paid to workers of Trinidad and Tobago who would have accepted the VSEP, an average of 30 per cent across the board. So with respect to the cash enhancement, there were employees at all different levels benefiting from that offer.

Mr. Speaker, not only did they benefit from the cash enhancement, but also training and counselling. The Government had set aside $25 million to ensure that all the employees of the former Caroni (1975) Limited who were prepared to access training programmes would have been able to do so.

We also included in that VSEP package the opportunity for first-time homeowners to access a parcel of land so they could own their home. We made it quite clear at the time that if, in fact, you had owned a home before January 01, 2003 you would not have been entitled to that option, which was the first option given to the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited to those who did not own their homes.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to those who wished to remain in agriculture, we provided a first option to lease Caroni (1975) Limited's land for agricultural use for those who were serious and interested in continuing in farming and other areas of agriculture. We went even further to increase the tax-free benefit, that is, the severance benefit from $150,000 to $300,000 so that any employee receiving up to $300,000 would have been able to do so tax free.

Again, in looking at all areas with respect to the employees of Caroni (1975) Limited, those who wanted to access training, those who wanted land for farming, and those who did not own their home had been given the first option for lands that would be designated for housing.

Mr. Speaker, we also took into consideration those who were living in Caroni (1975) Limited's housing and we made a special concession by giving them the first opportunity to purchase that home up to 20 per cent less than the market value. So today we can report the success of many of these programmes.

As of December 31, 2004 over 2,300 former Caroni (1975) Limited workers accessed training programmes. They accessed training programmes in air conditioning and refrigeration, engine management system, carbon steel welding, and over 104 of them accessed that training, and, as you know, today in the fabricating and erection of steel structure there is a shortage of fabricators so all of those 104 persons, who would have taken that training course would have been employed as we speak.

Training in small engine repairs, occupational safety and health administration, tile laying, pipe fitting, auto electrical, as well as construction electrical, and I must say that all those who took courses that relate to construction and the construction industry in Trinidad and Tobago, I am 100 per cent sure that they are gainfully employed.

Mr. Speaker, those who wish to access the many training courses through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources were able to do so as well. So here it is over 2,300 persons have accessed that training facility which we had provided for them, of course, at no cost to the individual.

We also provided counselling for those who required it from the institutions that were most suitable to provide that counselling. Just to give you some of the institutions that the workers accessed for training. They were: the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology; the National Energy Skills Centre; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies; the Southern Academy of Computing; Metal Industries Company Limited through the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; the Trinidad and Tobago Nurses Association; of course, the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme; Automated Technology College and many other institutions of high learning.

Mr. Speaker, not only did we ensure that the training facilities were provided, we are also in a position today to talk about those persons who would be able to access land for farming and agriculture.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have identified over 36,751 acres which are going to be reserved for agriculture and all of this is taking into account the land that is most

suitable for agriculture. We were able to use many studies that were available to us, including one that was done by the University of the West Indies that the hon. Member for St. Augustine mentioned in one of his contributions. Not only did we provide that amount of acreage, as of December 31, we have identified 6,164 residential lots within the area for those who will be accessing land for housing. We did this, and we keep our commitment and our promise to the former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited, because this is a Government that keeps its promises; this is a Government that will honour its commitment and we are doing so with respect to the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. I do not think anyone could dispute that.

Yes, it is one year and probably four months since VSEP was received by the former workers, but this exercise was one that had to be done carefully and accurately because we talk about transparency. And to ensure transparency we had to make sure that those who applied as first-time homeowners were, in fact, first-time homeowners. We have been able to identify over 6,000 former Caroni (1975) Limited workers who would now benefit from this exercise.

When you look back, as I said earlier, at what the former administration had proposed for Caroni (1975) Limited, you would see that the people of Caroni (1975) Limited are much better off today than they would have been had the UNC remained and carried out its plan. They are aware of it. In a letter to the editor on page 12 of the *Express* of Monday, October 04, the headline reads: "Panday betrayed sugar workers too". The writer, Dr. Chris Mahadeo, had this to say:

> "Nothing was being done about Caroni to appease the workers who were in a rut while the UNC was in government, and many times I would be asked by sugar workers whether the UNC government was going to shut down the company."

Well, we know for a fact that they were going to do so. It continues:

> "In other words, sugar workers during the UNC reign were getting the feeling that the government of the day was conspiring to gradually shut down the company and that it was being done in a clandestine manner with the big shots creaming off the top, but no one was talking to them and levelling the playing field with them on their bread and butter issues. In other words, sugar workers were being kept in the dark about the future of the company under the UNC government."

This, coming from a person who, in fact, was the advisor to the Member for Caroni East. She goes on to say—

Mr. Singh: It is a "he".

Hon. J. Rahael: It is a "he"? It continues.

> "Some that I spoke to are now blaming Junior Minister of the Ministry of Finance in this PNM government when they could not have done any better."

This is just one of the many articles that have been written to the media indicating that the UNC offer would have been detrimental to them. What are we experiencing today? The other side talks so much about—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Rahael: I thank hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening today? Today we are being told that the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited are on the breadline; they cannot get jobs; that this Government did not care about them and did not care for them. I have just outlined a number of things that we did in order to ensure that the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited were well taken care of. [*Interruption*] Yes, I would repeat it again. You see, you have a problem because they no longer come to you for anything, because you have not been able to represent them as you should. Where were you when the restructuring was taking place?

Nevertheless, the point I am making is that today you cannot get workers to harvest cane. Do you know they are all employed elsewhere? The *Guardian* of Monday, December 27, 2004 states: "Labour crisis in sugar industry". This is an article written by a *Guardian* reporter, and I quote:

> "Speaking with the Guardian, Shah…"

Referring to Raffique Shah:

> "also believes that the 2005 crop will be bleak…"

because of the lack of labour.

> "Shah said despite paying labourers as much as $150 a day, farmers and harvesting operators were finding it difficult to get workers."

That is a fact. He went on to say:

> "The next alternative will be to import labour from Guyana to fill the void.
>
> Shah said TICFA, which is harvesting cane on 350 acres of state land, found it difficult to get workers to 'throw fertilizer' on the fields."

Where are the workers? The workers are gainfully employed in many other activities.

That was on December 27, 2004.

Mr. Singh: You took them out of the cane field to bring them back?

Hon. J. Rahael: I am glad the Member for Caroni East has acknowledged that these workers were taken out of the cutting and harvesting of cane and have been given better quality jobs. [*Desk thumping*]

The *Guardian*, Monday, January 03, 2005—just a couple weeks ago—another article states:

> "Labour shortages are affecting the sugar industry.
>
> The statement was made by Trinidad Agro Supplies, a company which was contracted to harvest 3,000 tonnes of cane from state lands in Central Trinidad for the 2005 crop.
>
> A company spokesman said despite paying good wages, the industry was failing to attract unskilled and skilled labour."

Here it is:

> "…despite willing to pay good wages, the industry—"[*Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members at the lower front benches, please, the Hansard reporter is right in the middle of both of you.

Hon. J. Rahael: I am making the point that, in fact, almost all, if not all, of the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited would be gainfully employed today, otherwise this shortage of labour in the sugar industry would not have been so.

But I want to continue.

> "He said Trinidad Agro Suppliers was ready for the 2005 crop season, which was carded to start on Wednesday.

> Speaking at TAS' offices at Exchange Village, Couva, on Saturday, the spokesman said cane cutters had earned up to $1,200 a week during last year's crop."

Here it is, cane cutters earning $1,200—[*Interruption*] Look at it here! Trinidad Agro Supplies—"Shortage of labour affects sugar industry", "Labour crisis in sugar industry", talking of allowing workers from Guyana to come to Trinidad and Tobago to cut and harvest cane.

I am making the point that the success of Caroni (1975) Limited is unparalleled, where we were able to take an industry and revolutionize it to the point where we have been able to upgrade the skills of the workers who previously worked in the sugar belt. We gave them the opportunity to do many courses—and we are not just talking about courses in agriculture, but courses in many different areas, including computerization, computer technology, auto-electrical and so on, providing better skilled labourers for Trinidad and Tobago. I am confident that the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo, will ensure that the programme and what we have put in place for Caroni (1975) Limited will be carried out to its full commitment on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Once more, let me say how pleased I am to have been associated with the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited, and to say that all the former workers of that company are now better off than they were two years ago.

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

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*)**:** Mr. Speaker, let me, first of all, wish you and Members of the House a very happy New Year. I was hoping that I would have been the first speaker, not realizing that we had the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West coming to repeat what we did on the last occasion. This avaricious, hedonistic miscreant must, of course, come to the Parliament and repeat the misinformation, the lies, that have been spread across the country about what a successful transformation took place in Caroni (1975) Limited. My hon. friend from St. Joseph will deal with a lot of the misinformation, because the Member has continued, in spite of knowing the truth, to repeat the untruths about what the UNC had intended to do or what he perceived the UNC had intended to do.

If he wants to know whether it was true or not true, he could ask a gentleman by the name of Gerry Hospedales from the Ministry of Finance, who had presented, on behalf of the technocrats, a certain option. To substantiate his other

arguments he chooses to quote from Dr. Chris Mahadeo who is somewhere in the US recovering from some serious long-term problems, which I do not wish to discuss here today. I think it is well-known that when you do not get what you are looking for, there are opportunities to be very critical.

I just want to refer to a few points made by the hon. Member. I cannot believe, representing a totally sugar constituency, that I would hear—totally sugar; there is a sprinkling of heavy industry that employs 90 people in each one of them. They cost US $1 billion to put down and because of the high-tech nature of these industries they do not employ many people except during turnarounds when there are opportunities. But the Member for Diego Martin Central is, perhaps, more familiar than I am. I happen to live there and represent a constituency that, of course, is solidly UNC. Whether I represent it in future or not, it will always be a constituency that would be represented by the UNC.

You have this Member for Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West whose only interest in Central Trinidad has to do with things other than providing the ex-workers of Caroni (1975) Limited with a decent set of benefits, coming to the House and drawing conclusions based on utter nonsense. Two thousand workers have been trained and a senior Minister of the Government—because I presume that being in the front line of the Government as Minster of Health and formerly Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—to come to the Parliament without information and to draw conclusions, is an attempt to deceive the House of Representatives. [*Desk thumping*]

When you hear about a shortage of workers in the sugar industry, it makes you laugh, because Caroni (1975) Limited, with all of the stability that existed at the time it was in existence, paid workers $96 a day. Why would anybody refuse $150 a day to do the same kind of work that they did for $96 a day? The truth is that we have returned to indentureship in the sugar industry, that is to say, you take what you get. There is no representation allowed; you work under slave conditions and you expect people to leave their homes and go back to that state.

Mr. Singh: Massa day come back.

Mr. K. Ramnath: In the Sugar Manufacturing Company, there are two gentlemen, a fellow called Cummings and one called Paul. Cummings is well known to the Prime Minister—at least that is what Cummings says, and he is a CEPEP contractor. Cummings is hiring labour for SMCL at the gates of the Usine Ste. Madeleine factory. There are no established conditions of employment. There is no guarantee that you would be treated fairly. There are no health and safety

regulations in place and you can be fired at will, because there is no representation. In fact, nobody has been employed to date by SMCL because the crop has not started.

So what we are hearing here is that you must wait at the gate until the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro deals with the problems of rain, flooding and the consequences before you can earn a day's pay. We are back to slavery conditions in the sugar belt and I never thought that the PNM would have reintroduced a second indentureship in South and Central Trinidad. And the Minister comes to apologize for Government by giving misinformation, false information and outright lies. Let me ask him—[*Interruption*] The word, "lies" is parliamentary. If I call you a liar, it is unparliamentary. I am not calling you a liar, but people can repeat lies.

Mr. Manning: You are here long enough to be more sophisticated than that.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, I try to be sophisticated but when I deal with rogues, how can I be sophisticated? [*Desk thumping*] When you fire people—

Mr. Speaker: You were going so well and I am enjoying it. Please address me. Do not be sidetracked.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You notice I speak to you directly.

You use Raffique Shah, who claims he is writing some autobiography for the Prime Minister, as authority. Is Raffique Shah really writing an autobiography for the Prime Minister? Do you know what I wonder? Whether his intention is not to place the Prime Minister in ignominy and that no one will ever remember him. Perhaps that is the conspiracy. Raffique Shah has sold his soul to get a directorship at Plipdeco. The PNM policy is that you have to be a member of PNM to get a directorship, unless they have changed their policy. But it is a well-known fact, stated by the PNM. The Prime Minister knows what I am talking about.

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member for Couva South for giving way, because he knows what he has said is just a piece of mischief or he is just being mischievous. The fact of the matter is that we have a deliberate policy in the Government, of seeking to get the best expertise available to us, and in many instances that expertise was available among people of a political affiliation different from mine, and it did not matter in the decision that the Government took. The reality is that in selecting boards of directors, we try to be as broad as we can and in many instances it involves people who are not members of the PNM.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Prime Minister obviously wants to make a speech and he can respond. Whatever they do is their business, but the fact of the matter is that you do not use Raffique Shah, who was a mutineer. Do you know that? He was a mutineer. He tried to overthrow the PNM. They must be really forgiving; surely a born-again Prime Minister.

Raffiqie Shah is struggling to survive in the cane farming industry. He has never planted a root of cane; he never harvested a root of cane. He rides the backs of some defenceless sugar workers and then he pontificates about the future of labour in the industry and the possibility of bringing Guyanese labour. Because, you see, they also know what Burnham did to the Indians in Guyana and they also know that they supported him when he was ravaging and raping the sugar workers of Guyana. They said nothing! [*Desk thumping*] Do not get me vex here today, you know. I might behave like the Member for Diego Martin Central. I might resign from the PNM and go and crawl back the next morning.

Mr. Valley: But you crawl back too!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I never crawled back. I stood up as a principled man.

Let me get back to the point. This Trinidad Agro Supplies, I do not know who knows these people. I do not know if any Member of this House ever heard about Trinidad Agro Supplies. You see, Trinidad Agro Supplies is like the very many friends of the PNM who got some acreages to harvest. Probably they never had anything to do with the industry. And he will not call the name of the spokesman so that we can verify whether this gentleman really said that he could not cut the canes on the 3,000 acres of land because he had a shortage of labour. People will not work under the conditions that these recent contractors are imposing on labour in the country.

My friend from Point Fortin had to resign from the Government in protest against inhumane conditions meted out to workers at Atlantic LNG and it was a slap in the face for the PNM who made promises to the workers of this country that they were going to have a sectoral wage, and then reneged. If they want to find out why workers behave in a certain way, they must try to understand the circumstances in which workers are required to work in this country. The reason you cannot have people employed by some of these unscrupulous contractors, including Sugar Manufacturing Company—I will have a lot more to say about that company at some time—is not because the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited are employed; it is because they do not want to work under those slave-type conditions.

Of course, my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West knows about slave conditions. Well, I would not want to engage him at this stage. The sum of $25 million to access training. Why do they not come and say, out of a total of 2,000 people who accessed this training, how many got employed? They will not tell you that, because they have no information. Did you see some of the courses being advertised? Those courses are being advertised on a daily basis by Automated Technologies Centre, by NESC, TTIT, Cipriani, Southern Academy, whoever they are, by YTEPP and CEPEP. They are saying that 2,000 people went there and, therefore, they were adequately trained to meet the demands of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly, the industries, but bring no evidence to suggest how many people were employed.

If you are in the Government and you cannot provide that information, you are doing one of two things: you are telling a blatant untruth, or you are trying to mislead Members of the House. One hundred and four people went for carbon steel welding; 100 per cent gainfully employed. One hundred per cent of those 2,000 people gainfully employed. Counselling seminars—after you have destroyed the lives of people in the sugar industry, you want to counsel them as to how they should deal with the fallout and the retrenchment in Caroni (1975) Limited.

This issue of tax-free benefits up to $300,000—the Prime Minister was around at the time. When Texaco decided that they were going to reduce the retirement age from 65 to 60, the government of Trinidad and Tobago at the time, the PNM government, allowed for some portion of the severance pay—I think it was $80,000. It started then and it went up to $100,000. What will happen to TSTT workers? Would they not benefit from the $300,000 benefit? What will happen when you start to retrench government workers, which is included in your long-term plan, to reduce the public service, and so forth? Would they not benefit from it? What is so special about this provision as it relates to Caroni (1975) Limited?

I want to tell you something. This benevolent Government—you know they have this self-centred and self-obsessed egotistical Minister in the Ministry of Finance, waving the flag in Caroni and in the villages. I do not know how they allowed her to walk the streets. I heard she was in Basta Hall and I went there and did not see her. She refused to come when she heard I was there. She has joined the rest of those who championed PNM exploitation and who ended up as rejects. I want to remind her of Kamaluddin Mohammed, Errol Mahabir, Ebid Mosahib, Winston Mahabir, Hardeo Hardath. Find out where they have gone and see whether you will not be going in that same direction. They have been cast aside.

The reward for this blind loyalty to the PNM—they were not wanted in the PNM. They have no use for you in the PNM. They use you to go and fly the flag to try to influence people to accept their racist policies. I am not going to sit here and allow you to rape the sugar industry and come here and heap praises upon you. Total reprobate!

Mr. Khan: What "go" happen to me, boy?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not know whether anybody recognizes the Minister of Ortoire/Mayaro in that same league.

Caroni severance pay; range for daily paid: There were 24 daily-paid workers who got $39,000 severance pay, including 10 per cent enhancement; 1,142 daily-paid workers, with a 40 per cent enhancement, got $51,000. [*Interruption*] Listen to the statement: "Imagine if we did not give them any enhancement." You see, his father left Caroni in a will for him. He never served one day apprenticeship in the sugarcane fields. These people have been toiling the fields for 160 years, and before that, the African population, and he said, "Imagine what they would have gotten had it not been for that."

You see, when you stand here and you say how well his statement was, the transformation was the most successful ever undertaken and the best benefits to any worker in any industry in Trinidad and Tobago—listen to it: 456 workers got $46,000 severance pay. The range is for a total of 9,204 daily-paid workers, severance ranged from $36,000 to $58,600. Your whole life's work is valued by this benevolent Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West as worth between $36,000—$58,000. The country must hear the truth. This apologist for the PNM, the mover of the Motion—but do you know what happened? One thousand staff members, their benefits ranged from $200,000 to $300,000, and these people were at the highest level of the management. The CEO of Caroni (1975) Limited, prior to this exercise, was receiving $16,000 per month. When the exercise was proceeding, the CEO's salary went up to $25,000—$28,000 per month. They have a CEO now who gets $28,000 a month who has no company over which to preside. And because the present—CEO is prepared to do their dirty work, his salary went up from—$16,000 a month when you had factories running and you had contributions—to $28,000 a month.

The point I want to make is that in today's world senior people in the sugar industry, these are very qualified people who have attended higher institutes of learning, including universities, and so on, who are engineers and scientists, they have to leave, after enhancement, with the paltry sum of $200,000—$300,000. I

think the Prime Minister probably earns a little more than $100,000 a month, so he would have recovered that in about three months. Or he ought to earn that, because certain people in certain jobs—

Mr. Manning: The Member knows the effects this will have, and he is quite right. The salary of the Prime Minister, the terms and conditions of employment are public knowledge laid in this Parliament and they constitute a figure less than half of the figure that he just called.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I deeply regret that. Perhaps I am making a case for myself. It is a shame that Members of Parliament are treated so badly. I want to make that very clear. If you are saying that Caroni (1975) Limited did well by paying senior people between $200,000—$300,000 for their life's work, it means you are doing that against a background of your own impoverishment.

I had spent 15 years in this House and my final salary was $2,970—after 15 years of service. I was entitled—they told me at the Treasury—to half of that as a pension. People have given their lives in this institution and they are impoverished by the time they leave here. There is no indexation of pensions—

Mr. Manning: Not all of them are impoverished, you know; some have done well.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am quite sure you know; you have worked with a lot of them.

The point I am making is that this so-called most successful ever undertaken plan is nothing but a farce when one looks at the benefits that they have. Let us take another burning issue, and that is the issue of pensions. I want the Governor of the Central Bank to take note of what I am saying because he is now in charge of supervising the insurance industry. This Government has a big liability with respect to the daily–paid pension plan of Caroni (1975) Limited which they have not addressed. I want to discuss what I am talking about.

There is no workers' representative on the management committee of the pension plan. What Caroni (1975) Limited has done—or what is the current management of Caroni, one or two workers—is to appoint one of their own, the CEO, as the workers' representative on the management committee.

Mr. Singh: That is an Enron debacle.

Mr. K. Ramnath: That is right. He has no mandate to sit on a management committee. The company took out pension contributions from the workers and

never paid it into the plan. The company did not pay its own contributions into the plan. As a result of which, the plan is in deficit. The Government ought to pay into the plan all that was owing by Caroni (1975) Limited—that is the workers' contribution as well as the company's contribution—plus interest. They have no authorization, in law, to interfere with that pension plan. It is well understood that that is the function of the management committee, and if the management committee cannot function, then it is up to the trustees to decide where we are going.

The Prime Minister took a note to Cabinet to pay these workers, not the $1,000 a month that the Ministers bandied about as what they would get as a minimum pay, but he took a note to Cabinet to pay $650 a month. They will not say what the surpluses would have yielded in terms of benefits to the members of the plan. They have decided to run Caroni (1975) Limited outside the agreement which is registered in the Industrial Court. A lot of these issues relating to voluntary separation and the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited, and so on, are issues which have been agreed to between the union and Caroni (1975) Limited and with the demise of Caroni (1975) Limited, it means that workers no longer have any access to the court to discuss these matters when the company's assets have been divested as they propose to do in this Bill.

In their very dishonest approach to dealing with an issue as important as this one, I want to know whether the Government intends to put the money in, as it did in the case of NBN. I am very pleased. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West stood up in this House on the last occasion he spoke and said the workers will get $1,000 a month.

Mr. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, just to correct this piece of information, since the Member is talking about misinformation. The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, having recognized that there was the deficiency in the pension plan for daily-paid workers, agreed to fund the daily-paid workers' pension plan to the tune of up to $300 million, because Caroni (1975) Limited was not remitting the payment of workers to the pension plan, and the Government committed and approved up to $300 million in order to satisfy the daily-paid pension fund.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Minister had better be sure of what he is saying. I challenge him, whether a note has not been taken to Cabinet by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, to pay daily-paid workers $650 a month. I challenge him to say that such a note has not been before Cabinet. Because the committees set up, led by Mr. Hospedales, recommended among other things—

you see, they do not know; they are totally confused. But they know what I am saying is true. You will get fired, as you got fired from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

Mr. Hospedales' committee recommended $1,000 a month and as part of the bargaining process with the All Trinidad Union and ATAS and CISA, workers were led to believe that they will get a minimum of $1,000 a month pension. In fact, there was a violation by Caroni (1975) Limited to refund daily-paid workers' contributions to the plan which existed before 1995, without the authorization of the Board of Inland Revenue. You just cannot say, "I am giving back your money because I do not want to have a plan anymore". The Board of Inland Revenue has to give such permission and no such permission was given. So they have made a total mess of this entire exercise. They are totally confused. They know what we are saying is the truth. Their plan was simply to shut down the industry, grab the lands, give it to their friends, give a few lots here and there and change the rules every morning.

When the All Trinidad Union went to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance to protest what Caroni (1975) Limited was doing, that is, to disenfranchise workers from getting a lot of land, she told them she was going to review the matter. If it was Government policy that you had to be a first-time homeowner, then why are you saying "we are going to review it"? Mr. Jagroo came in public and indicated that they were going to review it.

Sen. Sahadeo: If the hon. Member would give me an opportunity. Mr. Speaker, just for clarification of the record, in the first instance, we met with the President of the All Sugar Canefarmers Trade Union and it is for that reason we met because we believe we must be in constant dialogue, which would clarify and get rid of all the miscommunication. That is precisely one of the levels of miscommunication. From the onset, the letters of offer indicated that if you already owned a home you would not qualify for a residential plot of land. So it was not meant to reconsider. What we agreed on was those applications which were not accepted or rejected, were given the opportunity, if they have data to the contrary, to provide such data, if they can qualify. In other words, if it meant that the information at hand was inaccurate, we were prepared to review that data. Thank you.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Let the good lady speak to the President of that union about this matter. The company went on record as saying publicly that they are going to review the process, because Minister Rahael, the emissary, who went

during the dark hours of the night to meet people to offer them VSEP, told them that they were going to get a lot of land as part of the arrangement.

Mr. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, he is misleading the House. On a point of order! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please! Order!

Mr. Rahael: I always qualified it by saying if you do not own your own home.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You see, it tells you how the whole thing was improperly done. You know, I have to read something here. I want to read what Mr. Hospedales had to say. [*Interruption*] I have a lot of respect for the gentleman. When I have to criticize him, I will, especially when he talked about a couple hundred million dollars is nothing compared to—I think he was misquoted. I quote:

> "The Government reviewed the historical and financial evolution of Caroni, which was formed in 1975."

This is the Dr. Williams' position. You know, I do not know why they treat him with such disdain and contempt, a man who has done so much for them. There is no memory of the contribution he has made. They are so engaged in praising themselves. Dr. Williams is saying:

> "The Government, through the newly formed company acted not only to save jobs but also to secure control of one of the commanding heights of the company."

That was in 1975. Do you see what they are doing to Dr. Williams?

> "Hon. Patrick Manning in 1999, delivering a speech preserving the legacy: 'Building a Nation, the Making of a People' said the policy statement recognized that the business of sugarcane cultivation processing could not continue as it has in the last six years. In advancing a programme of action to restructure the industry, the policy statement, they laid emphasis on the application of technology-based solutions; agreed a new automated factory should be installed at Usine and Brechin Castle. Cane farmers whose lands were not appropriate for mechanical harvesting were to be compensated and assisted; recommends that lands released from sugarcane cultivation should be utilized in major programmes of agrarian reform." et cetera.

You wonder today whether the Cabinet or the Minister responsible for implementation, looked at what the Government stated policy was. But it is also

important to listen to what the committee had to say. The committee said:

> "Indeed the East-West Corridor which was the centre of industrial and commercial activity still reflects the evidence of a fallout of the unplanned adjustment. It could be argued that the escalation in crime and violence which the country has been experiencing was in part due to the dislocation that was caused during the 1980s."

The committee was warning them about this kind of dislocation. They took no notice of it.

> "The committee noted that many of the job opportunities available in the districts near to Caroni lands depended largely on Caroni's operations. Accordingly drastic reduction in employment in the company was likely to depress private sector activity in the area. There was clear justification for establishing a manpower programme on a phased basis."

And they went on to detail how it will be done. It said:

> "It will be done over a four-year period and discuss the social cost to the society with respect to the dislocation of approximately 10,000 workers."

Mr. Speaker, it makes good reading if one were to look at the two committees' reports on the rationalization of the sugar industry. But I just want to return to the issue—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the Member would just give way to answer one simple question. I just want to get clarification. Is the Member saying that he has no problem with the rationalization of the sugar industry and that he is really dealing with how it was done? Is that what it is?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I thought you were listening to me. Absolutely, I have no problem with the rationalization of the sugar industry. The UNC has no problem with it, but you cannot treat people in the way you have treated them, and when you put an unscrupulous—I beg your pardon—the gentleman from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West to handle this matter in such an unscrupulous way, what you are doing is having absolutely no respect for the human being, and then he comes here to talk about, it is the best package.

Let me tell you something. This visitor who piloted the Bill, I have a serious problem. I do not think she should be in this Chamber. But that is my view. Something is wrong with the Constitution for people like me to be lectured to by someone who has picked up a job at the side of the road. They say they are here

by virtue of the Constitution. Well then, something has to be wrong with the Constitution, that you can come to this Parliament and you pilot a Bill that is aimed at destroying thousands of people and you defend it.

The Speaker is here by virtue of the Constitution as well. I do not know whether that is good or bad. But she comes to the Parliament and behaves as if they are doing such a great favour. She walks around the place—I do not know—under all kinds of security, calling my grandmother and grandfather "Nana" and "Nanee" and "Kaka" and "Kakee", and so on. Do you know how much "Nana" and "Nanee" pension was? The average pension to staff employees: one employee, $21 a month; 45 employees, $187 a month; 117 employees, $453 a month; 108 employees, $167 a month.

These are the managers of the industry and they have done so well with these pension arrangements, as they claim. One hundred and ninety-two employees received $2,000 a month—life's work—and 17 employees, $3,800 a month. Those 17 employees will be your most senior managers. A very small pension in Petrotrin today is $15,000 a month. I work there, I know. And in the sugar industry, senior managers, only 17 of them will get $3,800. The rest of them will range between $21—$2,600. This is the great gift.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, again, the Member is misrepresenting what, in fact, is happening. We made the point already that Cabinet agreed to fund the daily-paid pension plan. I make the point also that one's pension is derived from one's contribution and years of employment, and so on, and the Member should take into consideration the fact that if the Caroni workers were given $1,000 pension, then that person will not qualify for old age pension. Whereas if the pension he receives from Caroni (1975) Limited is $650, that person would also qualify for the old age pension, which means the net effect is that he would then receive $1,650 a month and with the enhancement he now gets $150 more, whereas under the other system he would have received merely $1,000 a month.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am sure my hon. friend would have a chance to respond.

A gentleman came to my office this morning. The Old Age Pension Board said to him, "You cannot get old age pension because you are due a pension of $650 from Caroni." He is not receiving it. If you get no pension, you will get $1,000 a month old age pension. They are boasting about giving people $650 a month.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Valley: I want to advise the Member that if he cannot deal with such a constituent, he should send that constituent to me. I will make representation on that constituent's behalf to ensure that he gets old age pension.

Mr. K. Ramnath: It might eventually end up on his desk, if he is the minister of old age pension. He has been in so many ministries that I would not be surprised if his next promotion is to deal with old age pension and community development. If I were a senior minister in the Ministry of Finance and they bring some outsider and give her the State enterprises in front of me, I would certainly reconsider my position.

I read in the newspaper where the goodly lady said, "What I do, I do it well." I do not know what her nocturnal sojourns comprise, but I am sure that she does many things very well.

For daily–paid employees, 24 will get $11.41—these figures are not manufactured by me—109 will get $146 per month; 486 will get $937 a month. This is all under old age pension. You do not have to work in Trinidad to get $1,000 a month, but you have to work 40 years to get $943. Two hundred and ninety-nine employees will get $1,015 a month. You took the people's money and did not put it in the plan. It was not under–funded. It was a dishonest act. It was an illegal act for Caroni to deduct pensions and not pay them.

They behave as though the UNC had been in power from 1956. The contributions owed by the company have not been paid into the plan. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said that as far as he was aware, the Government had taken a decision to fund the plan. I ask the Minister: What will be the new pension arrangements based on that deficit which has been funded? I want him to deny that the Prime Minister in his capacity as Minister of Finance has not taken a note to Cabinet to dishonour the $1,000 a month which was recommended by the Hospedales Committee and substitute it with $650 a month. Do you notice how quiet they went? I challenge them to stand here and say that such a note did not go to Cabinet. The daily paid will get $650 a month. If you get $650 a month and $1,000 from National Insurance, you will not get any old age pension.

Mr. Valley: Members ought to know that the National Insurance is not counted with respect to the hurdle rate for old age pension. That is a fact. You can get $1,000 for NIB benefit, as well as $1,000 for old age pension. The qualification is $12,000 under the old system. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: One of the hazards in giving way is that you have to allow the Member. When other Members give way do not—

Mr. Valley: There was a recommendation to take the pension to $1,000. It was pointed out that if that was done, they would be worse off because they would get $1,000 a month and not qualify for old age pension. If they get $650 they would also qualify for old age pension. That is the reality.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am glad that I am eliciting a response. I want the hon. Minister to write to all the old age pension boards or the Prime Minister's Office to let them know that that is the policy. The policy that is now being implemented by the various old age pension boards in the country is that once you are earning national insurance plus whatsoever you are getting and it exceeds $1,000 income, you get no old age pension. That is my experience.

He is defending $650 a month for the daily-paid workers without telling me what they would have gotten if they had funded the deficit in the plan. You have done an actuarial review. How much money do you owe the plan? That is the first question. Do you know how much interest is owed to the plan? If you had done an actuarial review, would you not have been in a position to say what people are entitled to? They want to use the power of the government to determine how a pension plan should work. You should only do that if you are providing a subsidy over and above what the pension plan will provide an employee who contributes. It is a very dishonest approach. This issue has been dishonest because it was never intended to rationalize the sugar industry. It was intended to shut it down and that is what they have done.

The committee envisaged that you would have had a restructured Caroni Limited; there would have been business units; people who were severed from Caroni (1975) Limited would have been able to find employment in the various business units of the new restructured Caroni. We are being told that the Estate Management Committee will see about the management of lands and this Bill would allow the operational controls. The operations would now go to sugar manufacturing companies. The sugar manufacturing company is an absolute disaster. It is an organization with no controls in place. Look at the people running that company and various aspects of it such as the sugar industry team and the

people who are managing the scales. They are all the friends of the PNM. There is no professional and business structure in place. The sugar manufacturing company will have no future, as it exists today, if they continue to operate that way.

I am not surprised that the plan is to get rid of the sugarcane industry completely. That is why there is no structure in place. You must hear the stories about the kind of money being made by certain individuals who took severance and because of their political connections ended up with SMCL. Absolutely no wages and no conditions of work! The sugar loading terminal is given to one fellow. He decides whom he hires and fires in the morning. The scale is another one and employment at Usine Ste. Madeleine is another one. I am sure that if an audit is conducted with respect to EMBD they would find a whole set of irregularities, where Mr. Rau and his boys are having a wonderful time.

Every time I travel to Port of Spain or San Fernando from Couva, I see Mr. John Williams filling up the Caroni lands next to the highway. I think that he is going to open a gas station. When I go to Gilbert Park like my friend for Diego Martin, I am told that Mr. John-Williams has been given Gilbert Park and all the facilities. Gilbert Park is where your ancestors used to ride horses and kick black people. When I go to Sevilla, five of the houses have been given to Mr. John-Williams. If you traverse the sugar industry you will notice one thing in common. Before this Parliament can vest the assets in the Estate Management Committee, the committee has already given out lands.

I want the Minister to tell me if a judicial officer received four tractors and a number of acres of land in the La Gloria area. I want to find out if a former CEO of Caroni (1975) Limited has been in receipt of a large parcel of land. Do you know what this Estate Management Company does? It hires a set of irresponsible people known as security guards to go behind the homes of these people to cut their cassava and peas. Some people have been cultivating land behind their homes for over 30 or 40 years. These are not people who are encroaching on the lands of Caroni. They want to set an example using these defenceless workers, while they are giving the lands to their friends.

I want the Minister to tell me whether Mr. Washington Dumas did not visit the head of the Allied and Technical Workers Union to complain of a series of irregularities which are taking place now under the Estate Management Company. I do not know where they found Mr. Rau. It appears as though he is an expert. He has a licence to do what he wants with the land.

This Bill which is intended to give EMBD to manage is designed for the Cabinet to give EMBD the power to give lands on instructions of Cabinet. They have no power to give anything so the "fellas" are making use of the opportunities they have to give the lands to their friends. The Ministers do not know what happened. They are accepting what they hear. One of my colleagues raised the issue of the disappearance of the assets and equipment of Caroni (1975) Limited. If you went to the Montserrat section of Caroni (1975) Limited, there was not a single vehicle. Suddenly, I see scores of vehicles parked there such as jeeps, tractors and belt trailers. They are all damaged. Some have returned. There was a free for all in Caroni. All the cranes, trucks, tractors and jeeps simply disappeared. I understand that one person is selling the rail now. The people who have lost in this exercise are those who built this country with blood and sweat and who, today, no longer have jobs. According to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, they have done well by getting $40,000 and $50,000 VSEP. As far as he is concerned they do not deserve—it is a gift from the Government.

Why did they not implement the free manpower separation recommended by one of the committees? What has happened to the citrus estates in Todd's Road? There are thousands of acres of land under citrus cultivation. We have lost $30 million worth of citrus juice through the closure of the citrus plantations. If the Member for Diego Martin wants to find out, he can call Mr. Lyle Donawa or the Citrus Growers' Association. They will tell him that in La Gloria and Todd's Road, the fields have been abandoned. How will you rehabilitate those estates? To whom would these estates be given? We hear of the grandiose plans to give people two acres.

This country has no shortage of short-term crops. It has a shortage of proper agricultural support and advice. If you go to the market you would realize what great producers we are of short-term crops. They want to increase the number of people growing dasheen bush, cassava and peas on two acres of land, when they are abandoning thousand of acres of land under citrus cultivation. What has happened to Mora Valley, La Gloria, Mon Jaloux, the dairy herd and buffalypso? When you destroy the company, instead of taking the phased approach of rationalization, you have to start all over again. You do not give the Minister of Agriculture any money. I think that my budget as a manager in Petrotrin is more than his as a minister of government. You do not give him any money to carry out his programmes. You are giving him the responsibility because that is how it ends up in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to rehabilitate estates and develop new agro industries.

The committee envisaged that a restructured Caroni will have business units which would have taken into account, the citrus, dairy and beef industries and part of the sugar industry. The plan was one of annihilation. Scorched earth policy. Although these questions are raised from time to time we do not get any answers.

Mr. Hospedales made it clear in an interview if he were not misquoted, that there has been much disappearance of company's assets. He compared it with the total value of the 77,000 acres of land and all the assets. For those of us who live in Couva, Usine Ste. Madeleine, Esperanza and Dow Village, that is a big amount of money.

Having established that the VSEP was a failure and robbery with violence, this is the only voluntary separation programme I know that was not voluntary. According to Minister Rahael, you take it or we fire you. This is what they are doing to TSTT workers today. This is what they did to NBN workers. Why call it voluntary separation when you are telling people that you are volunteering them to separate, rather than they take the decision to go based on the conditions you have negotiated? I do not see any hope.

I want to make a point about alienating lands for heavy industry. The government never had a problem of alienating lands in Caroni for such activity. Point Lisas is one. I was on site when the soil was turned by the first prime minister for the erection of the steel mill. I do not know if the Member for San Fernando East was there. He might have been there. There has never been a problem to obtain Caroni lands to build any of those industries. There is no problem to put up an aluminium smelter in Chatham or the Port of Trinmar. This rationale given for restructuring Caroni lands has nothing to do with the unavailability of lands for light or heavy industry. You could have gone right ahead.

The problem is who will carry out these exercises? Certainly, not the Estate Management Company! This company has to act on behalf of the Government with respect to granting leases which Cabinet approves. Who will revitalize the dairy, beef, sugar, citrus and buffalypso industries? Who will be responsible for managing the industrialization projects which were supposed to employ a number of these people who have been displaced?

You have misled and deceived workers into believing that there will be a bright future for them and they will receive a lot of land whether or not they were first time owners. Many of those people eligible for land under the PNM policy might be people who never served any length of time in the industry. Those who

have been serving for any length of time in the industry, understanding the culture of these people would have owned their homes. This is bias against the old people.

The enhancement was based on a bell curve. If you had reached the age of 56 years and above, or below a certain age, you get no enhancement. The people in the middle age group, 66 per cent would have been getting maximum enhancement of 50 per cent. They would have been getting the land because they would not have been homeowners. What kind of package is that when you call it voluntary separation? If you worked for 40 years from digging "parra" grass 50 years ago to elevating yourself to cane cutter, you have to leave without any enhancement and a lot of land which you could have passed on to your children. You say that is the best arrangement that could have been made in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. I have never seen such a callous system and plan implemented.

My advice to the people who serve on these committees—I do not know what they are doing. It is better they take VSEP. They are: Mr. Hospedales, William, Daniel, Sandra, Warner, Jaggernauth, Soong, Hazel, Dwarika, Patrick, Samuel, Trevor Murray, Kusha Harracksingh, Brian Samlalsingh, William Washington and others. These are people who sat and conducted a comprehensive assessment of the fallout of the implications of this arrangement who are being told, "We do not want to listen to you." We now have a bright kid on the block; someone who does whatever she does very well; who has brought light to the PNM and walks the streets of Trinidad and Tobago extolling the virtues of the PNM. She comes to Couva and says, "The PNM is here to liberate you from the oppression of the sugar industry." Now she wants to go to Fyzabad.

The fight for Trinidad and Tobago is on the streets, not here. Nothing is going to happen here. The fight for Trinidad and Tobago has been and will be on the streets where people will have to decide whether what is being dished out to them by the Government is acceptable. I have no hope that this Government will implement any of the recommendations of the committees appointed to look at restructuring. We will hear a bunch of excuses. If you are getting $650 a month you will get old age pension, when nobody who gets $650 a month gets old age pension. We will hear that they will give some people lands to farm rice and a few friends a few acres of citrus. There would be no coordinated plan. Caroni should have been a major agro industry, the most viable agro industry in the whole of the Caribbean.

I went to Martinique last week to a conference and I was amazed at the level of development I saw in the infrastructure, culture and attitudes. I want to tell the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro that I am co-author of a paper that has been accepted and published in a reputable journal, on vulnerability assessments of the Godineau Swamps and the Chatham Estate to sea level rise. I have been instructed by the prime minister to discuss vulnerability assessment to tsunami waves on the east coast. If you need any help—I work for a state enterprise and I work very hard. What I do, I do it well. [I*nterruption*] You will be surprised.

When we hear excuses about how God does not like Trinidad and has imposed much rainfall on us, I want to assure him that there are others in the field who are researching these matters. You may want to consult me to get some professional advice.

3.30 p.m.

We can work on some of these emergency response issues. We need an emergency response issue with respect to the 10,000 persons in Caroni (1975) Limited, multiplied by six persons per family. Mr. Speaker, you have put 60,000 persons on the breadline. Mr. Speaker, no amount of training in Microsoft Word and Excel and so on, for two weeks, and a little carbon steel welding, making sugar cake and toolum are really going to impact on the unemployment rate in that region. All the moneys that were made available to contractors, supermarkets, the business community in Princes Town, San Fernando, Chaguanas, and in Couva are no longer available. You did not take into account the warnings of the committees of the economic impact on the sudden withdrawal of funding to the sugar industry.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine): Mr. Speaker, this is really an honour to speak now, coming after the Member for Couva South who was so eloquent. The first thing I want to address in this debate is that it seems as though there was an attack on our Minister in the Ministry of Finance from every speaker on that side. I am certain that has been the history of the UNC, in that, the hon. Members for Couva North and Couva South have had a history of how to deal with intelligent people, especially ladies, within the national community. Mr. Speaker, I say today Sen. Christine Sahadeo, apart from her education and her beauty, has been working very hard and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago appreciates that. [*Desk thumping*]

May I remind this Parliament that the party that the Member represents has five losers—including one who lost to me in Arouca North by about 9,000 votes—sitting in the Senate. Mr. Speaker, he spoke about "pick up a job by the wayside" but the Member must understand that the Senator was selected because of her ability to work. [*Desk thumping*] This Senator was selected because of our track record.

Dr. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: What number?

Dr. Nanan: Standing Order No. 43(1).

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no, please.

Hon. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, as usual, "pa ra digm" would not fail to do that. Mr. Speaker, the Leader of Opposition Business in the Upper House has never won a seat in any election. He tried to fight an election. The Member, however, comes here and criticizes this goodly lady of the Upper House. The Member spoke about the Member for St. Joseph but was he not a Senator when he was the Minister of Finance? [*Interruption*] The hon. Brian Keui Tung came in as a Senator. Mr. Speaker, then there was Sen. Gillette. You all forget these names. The Member for St. Joseph was what? [*Interruption*] Well, you do not talk, you replaced Hulsie Bhaggan; a lady who was damaged by the Leader of the Opposition; a lady who came into this Parliament—and the record of *Hansard* would show that—and she made good representation on behalf of her people. [*Interruption*] What goes around comes around. The point I am making is that our goodly Senator is a target for Members on the opposing side because they do not have the intelligence that she has. It is like sour grapes and, Mr. Speaker, one is not going to stone a mango tree that has no fruit. Ridiculing her would make no sense.

The Senator has made a name for herself in Caroni and everywhere she goes in Trinidad, and that is annoying. [*Desk thumping*] If the goodly Senator, as a true Member of Government, wishes to go to Fyzabad and help the people because the Member of Parliament has been doing nothing, then the people would welcome her every time she goes there. Mr. Speaker, it is a situation that the critics are there for the persons who are willing to give of themselves to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. May I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that the PNM is different. The PNM treats Members of Parliament and Senators and, in particular, the ladies in our party, with dignity and respect. [*Desk thumping*]

The last speaker spoke about training. I am certain that the Minister in the Ministry of Finance will give them the numbers because a number of persons have been trained. May I say, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has a monthly training programme which is advertised in all the newspapers, and that is common knowledge. Last year, we trained over 7,500 persons and out of that approximately 700 former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited were trained.

Mr. Speaker, not only is Caroni (1975) Limited training the former workers and $25 million was made available to them but also the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, in its normal training programme has been training former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited.

May I also say the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) has taken in, during the last two years, approximately 500 young persons from Caroni (1975) Limited. They went on a two-month training programme and from that they went on to a nine-month training programme; training in all aspects of agriculture management and computer training. That training was done by the ministry's staff—the people who have the experience, the extension officers. That training was done throughout Caroni, especially in the Edinburgh 500 area.

Mr. Speaker, the farmers in Caroni have accepted the YAPA students with open arms and they are willing to have the students every time there is a cycle. Apart from that type of training, we are even training the children of former Caroni (1975) Limited employees. The reason is that in some cases a former Caroni employee may not be able to go into agriculture production but their children and spouses are able to do so. They, too, are being trained to get into the industry. To say that they have no lands available, yes, that is true, but according to your agreement with the union we have been able to allocate two acres of land for the workers. That does not prevent them from applying for additional lands, those two acres are to satisfy the agreement with the trade union but that does not happen overnight. I will go on to speak about that as I get into the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I need to deal with a couple more matters, which were raised by the Member for Couva South, with respect to labour. The former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources said there was a situation with labour and, of course, the Member for Couva South said he had no proof and that he had no reasons for saying so. I would like to support my Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East by putting into the record a letter that I received from:

"Direct Delivery Cane Farmers Co-Operative Society Limited,

8 Cipero Street, San Fernando

10 January, 2005."

I brought this letter only as an example of the requests we received last year, because this is a renewed request this year.

"The Hon. Jarrette Narine,

Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources,

St. Clair, Port of Spain.

Dear Honourable Minister,

We refer to our letter dated 18th Nov. 2004 for which we are still awaiting a positive response.

1. To our Request for an Agricultural Exchange Programme for Farmers and Workers from Guyana."

This was raised with us last year and it was sent to the Minister of National Security. We can make recommendations to the Ministry of National Security, but why only Guyanese? There are other areas in the Caribbean, which must be included, if we have to do a programme like that. Guyanese are already coming here, but they are coming illegally. They work for the sugarcane crop. Some of them come through Piarco like insurance agents but they come to cut sugarcane. We know that! They stay on and get married and they fill rice lands in Central Trinidad. They are integrated into our society. In the village where I live we have three or four Guyanese families who came and settled there.

Mr. Speaker, when things are very difficult you find ways of getting around them. As I told the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in Jamaica last week, that we would like his workers to come here legally because they have been entering the country illegally.

Mr. Speaker, there was a second request:

"2. Two dollars increase in the cost of lifting and handling changes to take us on par…

3. …seeking an increase in the price of cane for the 2005 crop…"

I think that was well aired in the media last week.

"4. We also seek an urgent meeting to discuss other matter affecting us."

As a matter of fact, about two weeks ago I met with one of the four unions last week, the Cane Producers Association of Trinidad and Tobago (CPATT). I also met with the Direct Delivery Cane Farmers Co-operative Society Limited and they are very certain that this Government does not intend to close down the sugar industry. Mr. Speaker, that propaganda that has been spread to them, they were feeling depressed but I was able to lift their aspirations because the sugar industry has to be downstream, it is not only to sell sugar.

Mr. Speaker, they sat there for six years with so many plans and did nothing. They sat in government and saw the demise of the agriculture industry. Every aspect of agriculture went down. The former Minister came here and said that. Mr. Speaker, we have doubled cocoa production in Trinidad and Tobago! We have doubled rice production in Trinidad! They killed agriculture. I have a lot more to say but I am just saying this because the Member for Couva South was trying to say something else.

With respect to the separation package he spoke about the President of Trinidad Islandwide Cane Farmers' Association (TICFA). The President of TICFA was a Member of Parliament on that side. The President of TICFA is a forward-thinking person. The President of TICFA has formed a cooperative with his farmers and they are now looking at downstreaming the industry; taking their sugarcane and adding value to their products. This is the way to go, after all that is taking place with the European Union and the sugar regime where a 37 per cent decrease is coming. We cannot get away from that! It is a credit to this Government that we were able to take the initiative before the European Union and the sugarcane regime came into effect! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the separation package, this was negotiated by the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers Trade Union, the Honorary President, Basdeo Panday; President General, Rudranath Indarsingh. Mr. Speaker, they sat and negotiated and they signed agreements. Do you remember the famous tripartite agreement that the very President of that union, the Member for Couva North, signed and one week after said he did not sign and that he was not honouring his signature on that agreement? That is the propaganda they have been feeding to the people in Central and in the southern region. Mr. Speaker, today, however, the people are more intelligent because Dr. Williams made certain that our people were educated so they could understand.

The articles in the newspapers did not come by chance. They had an opportunity and they did nothing. They left it in abeyance until election 2001 but

within 10 months they had to leave office. They were not thinking about sugarcane workers or Caroni (1975) Limited, they were thinking about bigger areas like the terminal at Piarco, Desal, Inncogen, NREP, $2 billion. Today, Mr. Speaker, we have demonstrations and I am sorry for my colleague, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. After spending so much taxpayers' money to pave holes and landslips, the same holes that were paved four years ago are now impassable because nothing was done properly. They wasted the taxpayers' money. They spent $2 billion to pave one road and in six months' time the road started to decay because no planning was put into it. I am certain that my Minister of Works and Transport will not do that type of thing.

The Member for Couva South is probably in a better position than some of his constituents, in that he grew up in the sugar industry. As he said, they came from cutting grass to cutting cane and then supervising and so on. If one's salary was under $100 per day obviously one's package to go home would have been very small. Mr. Speaker, government daily-paid workers' gratuity and severance benefits in this country are about half of what the Caroni (1975) Limited workers got. Their enhanced package is well known to the people of Trinidad and Tobago which is between 30 and 50 per cent. Persons got enhanced packages and they were almost ready to go home. The younger ones got more. The situation with the labour, as I have just said, is that the very 10,000 workers that the Member for Couva South spoke about are nowhere around to work, hence they are asking for persons from Guyana to work in the industry. They have made themselves employable because of training; because of the money they received; because they had businesses going before they were sent home. Sugar workers were always like that. Obviously, those on the other side would not come here and say that because they are in Opposition. If they were in government they would say the same thing that we are saying.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, the sugarcane workers always had their sidelines going. They had other businesses. [*Interruption*] Yes, they are progressive people. They have bought lands in Valencia and other areas. They are self-employed and they were always part-time employees of Caroni (1975) Limited, although that was supposed to be their full-time employment. They had other things going so they are now able to enhance their business because of the funding they got from the Government through VSEP. They have been able to move on. You want to keep them down, as you did all those years for political reasons. Mr. Speaker, they cannot keep down people in this country as long as the PNM is in office. Today, January 24, is our birthday. Happy birthday to the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

We started 49 years ago and we have seen many political organizations like yours go by the wayside. We have seen many politicians try to revive themselves and have not been able to do so. They have gone into the wilderness. The results of the Tobago House of Assembly election have proven that the PNM is alive; the PNM is well and it is the strongest party in any part of this part of the world; the whole Western Hemisphere. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: The world.

Hon. J. Narine: If you want to say that, I would agree with you: In the world. "Forty nine years ent no little bit ah years, brother." Great is the PNM!

You speak about a pension plan, the severance package, and the salaries for workers that were negotiated by your leader. We paid the workers from a new agreement that we brought in 2003/2004. They received over $800 million. After receiving the $747 million, they received another $57 million or something like that. Mr. Speaker, to say that PNM treated them badly is just political propaganda. You have been losing your membership; they have been coming to the PNM and you have a problem with that. You have a problem with the goodly Senator because she has been walking your areas freely; areas that persons were afraid to walk 10 years ago. We can now walk freely and by the time next year when we celebrate 50 years as a political organization, you would have lost 50 per cent of your supporters.

Mr. Speaker, they also spoke about the scales. I can tell you that this union, through the Member for Couva North—who represented the workers for 30 years—is now crying crocodile tears because when we were discussing the Caroni (1975) Limited issue they were nowhere around. He was probably teeing off at Moka. Rain fell and flooded Trinidad while he was going off to Tobago in a helicopter to play golf, so he passed across and saw that. Another Member, the Member of Parliament for Naparima, said here that he would take Barrackpore and turn it into a water sports area where one could ski and run boats and so on. He was on this side when he said that. The Member for Tunapuna and I never forgot that because he was one of the eloquent speakers in this Parliament at the time. We were amazed, because while his Prime Minister at that time went to Tobago, he was saying that he was going to turn that around and make it a water sports area in Barrackpore. Mr. Speaker, that is the type of thing we were getting here but today they are saying something else.

As a matter of fact, the Member of Parliament for Couva South spoke about the scales. There are 42 scales and the operations of the scales are handled; we are

encouraging co-operatives. Last year only 13 scales were run by the Sugarcane Industry Team (SIT). Why? Because there was confusion. Mr. Speaker, you will remember that there are four different organizations representing sugar workers in this country. Every time you try to give one section of the farmers the scales, CPATT has a problem; Direct Delivery Cane Farmers Co-operative Society Limited has a problem. When TICFA has a majority of workers and you try to offer scales to a cooperatives, they, too, have a problem. Last year the scales, which caused a controversy, were operated by the Sugar Industry Team and those that did not have that problem were run by the farmers. This year they are asking for all the scales. Do you remember last year they said they did not want scales? They were, however, able to make a profit because they do not have to pay for cranes, maintenance and servicing of any of the equipment, all they have to do is to weigh the cane and get $10 per tonne. They made a profit last year, so this year they want all the scales. We are working out a system so that all the scales would work.

Mr. Speaker, as you are a person from the South land you will understand that the amount of cane harvested at that scale may not be that profitable; that is why the Direct Delivery Cane Farmers Co-operative Society Limited is asking for $2 additional. We are going to look at it to see if this year we can give them the $2 additional so that they could break even. A crane operator works for between $135 and $150 per day.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about labour but they do not pay NIS and Health Surcharge, which is illegal. I raised that with the unions last week and they agreed with me. But they are saying that if they pay the workers a certain amount they do not want any deductions. I told them they do not have to deduct; they just have to put that on. If we are giving them all those incentives and they went on television and said that they were working for $180 per tonne—Mr. Speaker, it is more like $275. I will show that to you before the tea break because I have the figures here.

With respect to the disappearance of Caroni (1975) Limited's assets, Mr. Speaker, that is so far from the truth. The working assets of Caroni (1975) Limited were taken for safekeeping at the Secondary Roads Company (SRC) in Wallerfield. The reason for that is that there is an army station up there, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, and there were also other security measures that were in place so that the good working equipment, which was able to be driven from Brechin Castle and other areas, went to Wallerfield. The Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of National Security and a number of other ministries were asking for the equipment of Caroni (1975) Limited. Everybody is

aware of that. Some of them were given out because they were good and the rest that could not move were then offered to farmers. The farmers took and repaired those pieces of equipment. I have a list here:

CFATT: They got 5 wheel tractors and 5 general transport; they did not get any mechanical cranes at that time; 1 crane hauler. The total equipment they received was 11 pieces.

Direct Delivery Cane Farmers Co-operative Society Limited: They got 12 wheel tractors, 1 general transport and 4 mechanical cranes because they were doing their own weighing and selling of the canes to the factory. The total equipment they received was 17 pieces.

Franz Jeeta, Jai Bharmal, Ralph Sawh and Sookhai Diesel were contractors who were contracted to cut Caroni (1975) Limited canes. In these instances, Mr. Jeeta—I do not know if it is one person—received 9 pieces of equipment; Jai Bharmal received 9; Ralph Sawh got 20 pieces of equipment and Sookhai Diesel Services got 19 pieces of equipment. TICFA got 7 wheel tractors, 5 mechanical cranes, 2 cane haulers; a total of 14 pieces. Mr. Speaker, this accounted for 99 pieces of equipment.

4.00 p.m.

Apart from this, we took the firefighting equipment and the tanks used to store water, to stop cane fires. We distributed them in certain areas where there would be on the lookout for fires. Cane fires are very detrimental to the sugarcane crop. When a cane fire starts it runs. You could imagine if we get two weeks of sun how dry that area will be. We have not been able to start this year's crop because of—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: The hon. Member would appreciate that, having regard to citrus—of which I have personal experience in the Todd's Road area, which is part of my constituency—it is overgrown with weeds. If we have two weeks of sun and a fire starts, it will destroy a crop 10—15 years old.

Hon. J. Narine: I am in agreement with you but we would be doing something about that when this Bill is passed. Last year the crop was sold to certain persons. It was auctioned. This year the same thing has been done, but the maintenance of the fields has started. Caroni (1975) Limited started this. When it comes to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources after today, it would not be five acres. The Member for Couva South did not read the document; he slept in Martinique for too long. We are proposing to plot out the La Gloria

and Todd's Road citrus fields into 50-acres plots. Those plots will be viable for anyone who gets them. It will be advertised in the newspapers. People will be able to apply. They will go through the interview process, which will be transparent. When the Members opposite were in government, they wanted to give out the 30,000 acres to one person. We are not going to do that. We will be giving it out in 50-acre plots to the workers and persons in Trinidad and Tobago who know the citrus industry. [*Interruption*]

We are aware of that, but trash is not part of the La Gloria Estate. We know if we get a long period of sunshine it will dry some of the other plants. In the meantime we are trying to bring the other fields under control. Mr. Jagroop has already indicated to us that he has started but, of course, the weather conditions have kept him back. As soon as we get sunshine that will be solved.

I was speaking about the vehicles. Farmers are very much happy to get some of the vehicles. They were able to repair them. They used them last year and are willing to use them again this year.

I spoke about citrus. The Member for Couva South said that citrus was making $30 million, imagine that. I have read all the Caroni (1975) Limited documents and not one year was citrus able to make more than $10 million. The Member for Couva South said we lost $30 million in citrus. I do not know where he got his figures from. I would not say what he told my former minister. He thrives on telling untruth. It may be reported in the news that we sold $30 million in citrus. That is not so. The citrus crop was sold last year and the year before that, to the highest bidder. It would be sold. We made money without spending any. We were putting out approximately $5,075,000,000 per year for Caroni (1975) Limited. How is it that they made a profit? Nothing made money in Caroni (1975) Limited. That is a fact that everybody knows. I will come to that. I have the records here. To say that $30 million was lost in a crop, that is not so.

Some of our citrus landed in the Caribbean. The lady who bought the citrus crops—remember when we had problems with Barbados they could not get their produce in and their containers were stored in holding bays, some of Caroni (1975) Limited produce was waiting to be delivered to Barbados : water melon and pumpkin. It will take days to speak about that. Some of the Members opposite know, but chose to say nothing about it.

However, the separation package paid to former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited was a severance payment in accordance with the collective agreement between Caroni (1975) Limited and the unions. The enhancement or the severance

to all workers was averaged at 30 per cent. Some received as much as 50 per cent—taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. There was an increased exemption from $100,000 to $300,000. There are workers in this country, when they retire or take VSEP from any government department, who would be required to pay at least 25 per cent tax. These workers who received as much as $300,000 did not pay taxes. That was another enhanced payment to take home.

I can remember when I worked with the Ministry of Agriculture in the 1960s, as much as 30 per cent tax was paid by persons going home. That is very high for a daily-paid worker anywhere. At that time, you were not allowed to claim for children. As a matter of fact, the tax situation is quite different. The pension was already negotiated. There was the provision of counselling and financial advisory services to all former employees. We provided retraining and retooling opportunities for former workers. There was priority to lease a lot of land to each former worker who, on January 01, 2003, did not own a house.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear. This company looked at who had housing on January 01, 2003. Of course, we must go to the various agencies. The Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee, which the PNM put in place to help Caroni (1975) Limited workers, get loans to purchase materials for the purpose of building a home, had records of persons who went for a loan to purchase a home and enhanced their homes. The company that did the investigation would have looked at that. There is a situation where everybody tries to beat the system. There are persons in Central Trinidad—who already have a house from Caroni (1975) Limited, have children and of course would not miss the opportunity—who gave their home to their children and said: "I will get one from Caroni (1975) Limited." That is the kind of thing. On January 01, 2003 they were living in the same area. We know of the extended families in Caroni, where three to four houses are built on one plot of land that should really have one. We have been very benevolent to the people in those circumstances, not only in Caroni, but all over Trinidad. That is very prevalent in the Tunapuna and Tacarigua constituencies. In such areas you may see various houses built in one yard, because the families normally stay together. If I can afford that I would keep all my family in one yard, but there is not enough room. Everyone would like to play with their grandchildren.

From the number of applications we received, I am certain that there may be workers who did not have a home at the time. They will qualify and certainly get that plot to build a home. It cannot be done overnight. We cannot put persons to live like squatters. If we are to give the workers a parcel of land to build a house,

we must put water, electricity, telephones, proper roads and drainage because, by the next year, those same persons will be burning tyres on the roadway and calling on the Minister of Works and Transport to pave the roads. We need to put the infrastructure in place, so that persons would be proud to live in those areas.

The same workers applied for agricultural land. They are allowed two acres and could apply for additional lands. We are going to provide the access roads and water management for the run off. We cannot put agricultural workers without designing the 17 areas we have identified for good agricultural lands in Trinidad, Caroni (1975) Limited lands in particular. We have started to design four areas from the 17 areas, which will satisfy many of the workers who have applied for lands. It will not take too long for the designs to be completed and start getting the surveyors in to give out the lands for agricultural purposes. I am hoping that by September/October this year, persons in Caroni (1975) Limited who were waiting for agricultural lands will start receiving the lands. We would not wait until all the plots are available. As plots become available, we would give them to the workers.

We are also working on a system. We would not take a former worker from Barrackpore and put him in Cunupia. We will have to work a system. The workers from the area have to know where they would like to get the agricultural lands. We have identified the 17 areas. If I live in Carapichaima I must say that I need lands in Carapichaima because I do not want to go far. I will have to get transport. You need lands where you are living, in order to do agriculture. Those persons have already been trained.

Former employees were also given the option to purchase company houses, which they occupied at that time. Members on that side put people who were not workers of Caroni (1975) Limited to live in those houses. That also takes time. [*Interruption*] I can call a name for you, but I will do so after. It is your good partner who is a classical artiste of renown. He lives in a house in Caroni. That has nothing to do with me. If he had qualified, yes. The houses will be given to those persons who occupied and had authority to do so on January 01, 2003. We are very certain about that. I do not want to say more, but houses will be given. There is priority for two acres of land.

They were also given the opportunity to invest in the UTC and the Agricultural Development Bank. The sum of $800 million circulated in Central Trinidad and we gave them the opportunity to add value to that; to get special treatment from both the UTC and the ADB. For a long while, the ADB made a profit last year. They

are now restructuring. They also have a strategic plan which we are looking at. We can do more things with agriculture. If you have to get a loan for agriculture and you do not have property, it is difficult. Ninety-seven per cent of the loans for agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago are given out by the ADB. The commercial banks gave 3 per cent. The 3 per cent who got loans from the commercial banks had to have lands that were valued much more than what they applied for.

Today we are in a situation where the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited were not treated in any manner. The Opposition said that the PNM ill-treats workers in this country. The type of package that was given to the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited, other workers in Trinidad and Tobago—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues. Because of the enhanced package that the Caroni (1975) Limited workers got; we are having difficulties handling VSEP with other workers in the country. They have been saying: "Give us the same like Caroni (1975) Limited." Remember the NBN workers? They have been saying that also. They went to court and said: "Hello, give us the same privilege you gave the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. We want their package." They want enhanced payment. They would have gone home with double the finances they were supposed to carry home. If they are entitled to land, and they apply, through transparency, we will give them land. We will advertise those lands. We are not going to give away the distillery and the lands of the citrus growers to one person; like what the Opposition did for Non Pareil Estate. That is for another debate. It was 1,800 acres of Non Pareil Estate. I am now investigating that. It was given away. The assets were valued for more than $25 million and were given away for $2.1 million.

The Member for Toco/Manzanilla had a number of persons who formed themselves into a cooperative and begged for lands to work. Up till now they have not lived up to the agreement. They are cutting down the forestry and selling them. They are valued much more than what was paid for them. My information is that by now they have made back more than three times the amount of money and the 1,800 acres are still there. That is the type of thing that the UNC did. We are not to do that.

One Member spoke about land-grabbing. Let me deal with that before I sit. I would like to read a letter from the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers Trade Union, which was signed by Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh and sent to Mr. Deosarran Jagroo, Chief Executive Officer (Acting), Caroni (1975) Limited. This was a test case, as you would realize when I go through this document. I quote:

> "We write on behalf of Mr. Haskett Wilson, former employee of Caroni (1975) Limited and subsequent discussions with your Mr. Castillo and our Anand Tiwari regarding the captioned and hereby advise that although permission was given to Mr. Wilson to utilise the said premises, a delegation of security officers attached to the Elite Security Company Limited and police officers were instructed to demolish goat pens erected by Mr. Wilson on Tuesday 19th October, 2004. This process was eventually aborted with the intervention of Mr. Tiwari, who resides in the area and incidentally was on site at the time.
>
> Further to this and subsequent to discussions with the Estate Management Business Development Co. Limited (EMBD), we were advised that the eviction notice was issued by the EMBD on the instructions of Caroni (1975) Limited, a directive we find difficult to understand since the land assets of Caroni (1975) Limited has not been vested to the EMBD."

Mr. Wilson applied. This was the letter that was returned. When they wrote this letter, they did not realize that the sugar industry team had a copy of the reply we sent to Mr. Wilson. He applied before that. Here is the reply:

> "Re: Application for a plot of land at Wyaby Road, Carapichaima
>
> We refer to your letter dated May 1, 2001 and advise that although the house to which you referred is in a dilapidated condition, the Company has not yet taken a decision to dispose of same. As such, all requests have been put on hold."

Mr. Indarsingh's letter had the same thing but because there was space after the last paragraph he put after the word "hold":

> "However, noting that the abovementioned name has been given permission to utilize the premises."

To what extent would the union and the land-grabbers in Caroni (1975) Limited go to use Mr. Wilson's name as a test?

Dr. Rowley: That is fraud!

Hon. J. Narine: It is. I think the matter was referred to the police. They talk about land-grabbers, but here is a test case, using an African person's name—I am not afraid to say that. Let us suppose he is a white man? Do you know if he is a white man? They used him as a test case. They used the company's letterhead and inserted words that he was given permission, when the company's letter said he had no permission. This letter was signed by Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh. Our letter was signed by Mr. Washington, Operations Manager. The Opposition likes to say things that are not true. If he had gotten through and we did not have a copy of that letter that was sent to Mr. Wilson, the floodgates would have been opened—tricks. I am very much ashamed. It is a disgraceful thing.

The Member for Couva South complained about the amount of money that was paid to the sugarcane farmers. The EU has signalled to the ACP that by 2005, it intends to reform the common agricultural policy, including the sugar regime. The reform will involve everything but arms (EBA). That means everything we are sending there, bananas and sugarcane. We were able to meet our quota last year, regardless of the nonsense that they talked. We have industrial problems and we had rain last year, like we are having this year but we met our quota. I must say hats off to the SMCL, a company that has just started. The Opposition paid $20 million for an 1837 Dhanpur Mill. We have spent $100 million to repair it, believe it or not. I will never forget my political leader speaking on the political platform. The sugarcane mill is like an old man, sucking cane and not going down; the juice just flying out on the other side. That is the type of thing that is happening. They went to Dhanpur, India and purchased an 1837 mill which was lined with bagasse. We are still trying to have it fixed.

Hon. Members: Who bought it?

Hon. J. Narine: A former Prime Minister, who went to India crying Hindi all over the place. Trinidad and Tobago has the highest cost of the ACP producers of sugarcane, averaging US $700 per tonne. Apart from the guaranteed price of $180, which totalled approximately $6.5 million, Government provided the following:— This is very interesting because the farmers went on the television and said that they got $180. We are supporting the cane farmers with a transport cost of $25 per tonne. The support for fertilizers is approximately 60 per cent. We gave five bags to an acre. Sixty per cent of the five bags goes and three bags are free. The fertilizers are subsidized by $340 per acre. Pest control is subsidized 100 per cent; aerial spray, 100 per cent; and weighing and handling, $10 per tonne. As I have said, they do not have to pay for the operations. The Members may speak about agricultural access roads, but we are not going to fix those roads until the weather

condition improves. We may fix them now and the floods will simply destroy them. The sum of $4 million has been given for the research support to farmers. We still have that research station at Carapichaima. Management of the area scales has received the sum of $2.5 million and $1.2 million for the maintenance of cranes. We are expanding the yard facilities so that there would no longer be lines on the sides of roads. We are supporting the farmer to the tune of $68 million. We will continue to do that. We are not losing $575 million per year. We can afford to put something towards the farmers.

What is worse is that it costs $180 per tonne, but the real cost is $275 per tonne, when the other support system is put in place. No other farmers in Trinidad and Tobago have been supported like cane farmers. We will continue to do the agricultural access roads and other things.

I dealt with the citrus matters. With respect to the rice lands, Caroni (1975) Limited owed WASA $17 million for surface water. That is the nice Caroni (1975) Limited that the Members opposite were talking about. They were in charge for six years and did nothing.

Mr. Singh: Is the Member aware that Petrotrin owes $35 million to WASA?

Mr. Bereaux: I happen to know about that. [*Interruption*] You do not worry about that! I am educated. I know about it. Do not worry!

Hon. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to wind up my contribution, but it seems that the Member for Caroni East did not understand. During their time, $17 million was owed to WASA for surface water. This Government has to write–off that? This Government has given 2,000 acres of land. One thousand acres have been given to the Caribbean Rice Association of Trinidad and Tobago and the Nariva Farms which were victimized when the Members opposite were in office. They were against them. They got half of the lands because they have equipment. They are not paying any surface water charges now.

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, before we took the tea break I was responding to some of the questions asked by the Member for Couva South. I spoke about the citrus groves at Todd's Road and La Gloria. Weather permitting, we are going to

clear those areas and have them surveyed, so that 50-acre plots would be advertised and distributed to citrus farmers of Trinidad and Tobago who will be able to work those areas on an economical basis. Less than 50 acres would not be viable for a citrus farmer.

With respect to the rice lands, I was explaining that 2,000 acres of land from Caroni (1975) Limited have already been distributed. At this point, the rice production is increasing because they have already planted and prepared the fields and are about to reap the first harvest.

In the budget debate, I indicated that rice production increased by 100 per cent. I am certain that by the next budget debate, rice production would have increased by more than 100 per cent for the ensuing term.

With respect to the dairy operations under their watch at Mon Jaloux, they imported a disease that affected the buffalypsoes, which is called "brucellosis." That disease is very rare. When it takes your herd you have to remove those that are not infected and clear the fields. This will take three dry seasons before you can transfer animals from that pasture. The buffalypso herd that was not infected at Mon Jaloux was transferred to Mora Valley. Presently, at the AIP Unit in Wallerfield, apart from the artificial insemination, we now have a lab that will do the other types of insemination so that we can transport our breed to Venezuela, which is far advanced, than Cuba. Over the six-year period, with the brucellosis, the animals were transferred to Mora Valley. We would now be able to transfer the buffalypso to Mon Jaloux. I am looking at Mon Jaloux with my technical officers. That area is within the Cunupia area. The area has become residential. We are looking at Mon Jaloux for small ruminants. When the buffalypso gets away it is difficult for people who are living in the surrounding areas. This happens often.

Persons may not know, but the mozzarella cheese that is used in pizza is made from buffalypso milk. We have a great future for buffalypso in Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Steve Bennett is the person who did the most research on buffalypsoes in the world. We are looking at that. Apart from the buffalypso which contacted brucellosis during their watch, we also have small ruminants in Trinidad and Tobago. We only produce 3 per cent of the meat production for small ruminants such as sheep and goats. I found that out a number of years ago; under their watch, the yoni disease came into being. Yoni is a disease where the animals take in the nutrition but nothing goes to the villi system. It goes in and out. The Ministers of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, under the UNC

were told that they needed to cull the animals and start a new breeding stock that will help the farmers. The livestock section at El Carmen intended to do that. When a farmer in Mayaro wanted to buy a new breeding animal, he or she would go there to buy the animal. Over the last four or five years we have not sold any animals. We are putting a system in place and once we know that certain holdings in the private sector have no yoni disease, we will introduce new animals to them. We have brought stock from Maryland. We bought many other breeds. Presently, we are experimenting.

The research unit at Centeno has been doing a great amount of work to build our small ruminants. Rabbit rearing is one of those which I spoke about in the last budget. With respect to La Gloria Estate, Windsor Park and Picton, we are going to distribute those lands according to the land distribution policy of Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to advertise and have interviews, which will be transparent. Now that we have a Commissioner of State Lands on board, that system will work very well and will be transferred into hundreds of farmers coming into the system.

As a matter of fact, we would now have 7,105 new farmers coming from Caroni (1975) Limited to the farming population to the 14,210 acres. Mr. Speaker, you will agree that it is not a simple exercise to locate 14,210 acres of land for 7,105 new persons and also put in infrastructure for that. This will take up 14, 210 acres. That is a massive exercise.

The housing exercise is a massive one. We are not house-padding. We are building houses for people in Trinidad and Tobago. Houses were not built for the past 10—15 years. During the 1986—1991 period, no houses were built. We are now backward. We have to build 10,000 houses per year to get the 100,000 houses we need. When we look at land distribution in Trinidad and Tobago, different types of houses would come in. There are apartment buildings which were taken by persons. Houses are being built in the Arouca North constituency. I do not have to voter pad; we won by 10,000 votes. The Members opposite spoke about land distribution and land grabbing. They are talking nonsense! By 2007, we may not have a UNC. They normally last a 10-year period. All the parties against us normally last 10 years. The Members opposite are coming very close to that. By that time, we will be well organized. [*Interruption*] I remember Club 88. They are overdue for breaking up. I am certain that will happen very soon.

Under the Comprehensive and Integrated Development Plan we can now say, with a measure of certainty, that the 7,000 and more persons who have applied for

agricultural lands will be given two acres each. That does not prevent them from applying for additional lands. This is to satisfy the agreement with the trade union.

Government has also agreed that the following assets should be transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I am certain that my staff, together with the EMBDC, has been working very hard to put the agricultural programme on stream. By the end of my term in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, I will be a happy man, if I have to go home at that time, to say that I have done something for agriculture. We have distributed lands and doubled production. We are now getting on stream.

I met with persons from the Dominican Republic this morning who are saying that they are willing to come to Trinidad and Tobago. The Dominican Republic is coming here because the greenhouse is where agriculture should go; not outside there where there are floods. Production would not increase and the diseases are rampant. That is the way to go. We need contained greenhouses that will produce hydroponics. In some areas in Mexico, they are getting 58 pounds to a square metre. That is only in tomatoes. We are well on our way to food security for Trinidad and Tobago before 2020. I can assure my Prime Minister that his vision for agriculture will be dealt with because of the amount of lands available from Caroni (1975) Limited.

This will also help to alleviate poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. The landless are the ones who will get the land to do something without much risk. The Ministry has a lot of brainpower and extension officers who visit. NAMDEVCO is now improving. They wanted to close down NAMDEVCO, ADB and CARIRI. CARIRI is the only entity in Trinidad and Tobago that does research and development. EKA has done tremendous amount of research on hot peppers. We are going to carry agriculture in this country. Because it is at a low, anything that I should do at this point in time would have been 100 per cent better than what the Members opposite did. I cannot do anything wrong. Lands will be distributed and advice will be given.

We are going to have the agro-processing zone, which the Prime Minister spoke about in the budget, for La Gloria. A feasibility study was done. We now have to go to Cabinet for the approval. Those persons on the outside, who look at Trinidad and Tobago as a viable country for investment, are now coming to Trinidad and Tobago. As I told you, the Spanish and Dominicans were here this morning and are elated with the type of conditions we have here; our humidity,

the sun-ripened fruits, hot peppers, water melons and other things that are grown in Trinidad and Tobago. Kernahan has been doubling its production in water melons, even in the rainy season. [*Interruption*] We do not worry about the votes; we worry about people. We are going to alleviate poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, if you follow the trend, we were used to getting one vote in Kernahan, but in the last election, we got 62 votes. We are improving. In Caroni, droves are leaving and joining the PNM. We have had 35,000 new members in the last year. They are coming to join the PNM because they feel that the PNM in office will help. In the UNC's time, there were never so much demonstrations because there was no hope. There is hope in the PNM. I could demonstrate today. I sat on a television programme and talked to Mr. Johnson on Morning Edition and we are sure that the Ministers will visit the people, whether they are in Macaulay, Caparo, Dibe, Penal or Barrackpore. The PNM is here and is willing to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerald Yetming (*St. Joseph*)**:** Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West started his contribution to this debate in October, he made reference to a point that he had made several times before in Parliament, that the UNC had a plan to shut down Caroni (1975) Limited. He gave authorship of that plan to me, as the then Minister of Finance. In fact, in his contribution in October, he spoke about having already placed on record, which he already did, the UNC's plan. He claimed that he quoted from a document. He did quote from a document. In his continued contribution today, he made reference to having produced documentary evidence that the UNC had a plan to shutdown Caroni (1975) Limited. At no time did the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Anns's West ever produce documentary evidence to support his allegations that the UNC had a plan to shut down Caroni (1975) Limited. He quoted from a document produced by the Divestment Secretariat, which was attached, in my time, to the Ministry of Finance.

I want to make a statement on the Divestment Secretariat. The Divestment Secretariat is headed by Mr. Jerry Hospedales that provided support to the PNM administration and the UNC administration. The time I was Minister of Finance, I enjoyed an excellent relationship with the Divestment Secretariat and Mr. Hospedales. I consider him and his team to be highly professional. They will give advice to whoever is in office, based on your requirements and requests and they will do what they are required to do.

They produced many reports, which I will come to. I think that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, in making the allegation of a UNC plan to shutdown Caroni (1975) Limited, misled his own colleague, including his own Prime Minister. I could recall the Prime Minister, in ending the budget debate before the last, made reference to the document and almost signalled to me across the floor that he will give me the opportunity to respond if I wanted to. I never took the opportunity to respond to any of the allegations because, on every occasion that it was raised, it was raised as a supplementary issue. It was not part of the focus of the debate. Today we are debating Caroni (1975) Limited and I will, therefore, take the opportunity to talk about the UNC's plan for Caroni (1975) Limited. Now is the time. [*Interruption*] It will unfold as I speak.

Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West that when you take a decision—particularly a brutal decision where, without human compassion, you brutalize 9,000 persons and their families and communities in Central and South Trinidad—you should stand by the decision like a man. To me, it is a most cowardly act; to take a decision like that and try to find a skirt or a sari to hide behind. It is a most cowardly act to take a decision like that and then fabricate a lie; a blatant untruth to hide behind. You took the decision and went ahead with it, stand like a man and say: "I have decided." Do not say: "I have decided because you were going to do it, too". That statement is a lie.

Mr. Speaker, if I had chosen to respond to the debate on another matter to the allegations, I would have had to beg for the speaker to give way and I probably would have had a minute to respond. I want to respond with fact, the truth and the evidence. [*Interruption*] That is why I am taking 75 minutes to respond. Mr. Speaker, I would beg your indulgence because I want to quote in full, a letter written to me on July 24, 2001. The letter was written to me by the Divestment Secretariat. It was signed by Mr. Jerry Hospedales, Ms. Hazel Dwarika, Ministry of Finance; Mr. Patrick Samuel, Ministry of Integrated Planning and Development; Dr. Thackwray Driver, Ministry of Food Production and Marine Resources; Mr. Joe Ramkissoon, Caroni (1975) Limited and Mr. William Washington, Caroni (1975) Limited. I quote:

> "As you are aware Cabinet, by Minute No. 1827 dated July 28 1999 established the PMT to oversee the execution of the Implementation Plan for the phased private sector participation in the operations of Caroni."

Cabinet, in 1999, took a decision to have the phased private sector participation in Caroni (1975) Limited and gave that responsibility to the Project Management Team, which was made up of technocrats from different ministries and Caroni (1975) Limited. It continues.

> "The PMT constituted the Rum Distillery, the Rice Operations and the Citrus Project respectively into wholly owned subsidiaries of Caroni—Rum Distillers of Trinidad and Tobago (RDTT), Rice Enterprises Limited (REL) and Jucit Enterprises Limited (Jucit).
>
> Subsequently, after a competitive bidding process managed by Citicorp Merchant Bank Limited (Citicorp), Cabinet by Minute No. 1032 dated May 31 2000 agreed that Angostura Limited (Angostura) be the preferred bidder for the purchase of 49 % of the shares of RDTT and that the PMT negotiate the sale of the said shares to Angostura. The PMT has concluded negotiations with Angostura and steps are being taken to execute the legal documentation subject to vetting by the Honourable Attorney General and the Minister of Legal Affairs."

I want to touch on this for a minute. This happened on July 24, 2001. It was at that time that the then Attorney General, to whom these documents were referred for vetting, was in discussion with the Members of the Opposition on the matter that eventually led to the removal of office of the UNC government. One of the bees in the bonnet of the then Attorney General involved the status of Mr. Carlos John in government and by extension his relationship with Mr. Lawrence Duprey. The then Attorney General went after the throats of Mr. John and Duprey and by extension, he went after the throats of the CL Financial Group. He objected to the documents to have effected the sale of the 49 per cent of the rum division to Angostura.

At the same time, there were many arguments on the value of the rum stock. It was bandied about by many, including the Opposition, that the rum stock which was valued at $1 billion, was being given away to Angostura for $35 million. I noticed in the Comprehensive and Integrated Development Plan for Caroni (1975) Limited, which was tabled in Parliament at the last session, reference was made to the fact that agreements have been prepared to transfer the assets of the rum division to the Rum Distillers of Trinidad and Tobago.

5.30 p.m.

I am awaiting the balance sheet for the Rum Distillers of Trinidad and Tobago when these assets have been transferred over, to see what those assets would be

valued at on the accounts. We would see. But that was an aside. I would continue quoting from the letter of July 24:

> "You will recall that after a process which did not secure equity investors for REL and Jucit, Cabinet by Minute No. 1960 dated October 11 2000 agreed that the Government/Caroni should lease the assets and facilities of the Citrus and Rice projects to suitable investors for a period of three (3) years with an option to acquire 49% of the equity of REL and Jucit upon completion of the initial term of the leases.
>
> Pursuant to Cabinet's mandate, the PMT subsequently identified as stand alone entitles the business units for Sugar Cane Cultivation, Sugar Processing, Sugar Refining and the Dairy and Beef Projects. The PMT is pleased to submit its report on the introduction of the private sector into the operations of the Sugar Cane Cultivation, Sugar Processing, Sugar Refining and the Dairy and Beef Projects. The Report also contains proposals for the introduction of the private sector into the Citrus and Rice projects.
>
> In summary, the report of the PMT submitted undercover hereof proposes that:
>
> (i) The PMT be authorised to incorporate the strategic business units of Sugar Cane Cultivation, Sugar Processing, Sugar Refining and the Dairy and Beef Projects;
>
> (ii) The PMT make the appropriate arrangements:
>
> (a) to secure private sector investors for the purchase of 49 per cent of the equity of one or more of the three (3) subsidiaries involved in Sugar Cane Cultivation, Sugar Process and Sugar Refining;
>
> (b) to secure private sector investors for the acquisition of 49% of the two subsidiaries involved in dairy production and beef production;
>
> (c) to lease the lands currently occupied in rice production to investors to produce agricultural crops including rice and short term crops;
>
> (d) to secure a lease operator for the citrus assets; and
>
> (e) for Caroni/PMT to engage Ernst & Young, the auditors of Caroni, to provide divestment advisory services.

(iii) The Ministry of Finance in consultation with Caroni incorporate Caroni Enterprise Development Company Limited (Cedco) with a mandate to stimulate and facilitate new business activity;"

Cedco is the name of the company that we are now hearing about by a different name—same purpose. I quote:

"(iv) The Ministry of Food Production and Marine Resources and the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs review the Agricultural Small Holdings Tenure Bill 1999 (ASHTB-1999);

(v) The Ministry of Finance provide funding of $10 million to meet the cost of advisory services for the divestment exercises with any funding requirements in excess of $10 million to be met from the proceeds of the divestment;

(vi) Government put in place the mechanisms for ensuring that the financial requirements for the six (6) year restructuring plan for Caroni be met with $594.0 million being required in the FY 2002;"

So we are talking here about a six-year restructuring plan for Caroni.

"(vii) Government take the appropriate steps in the event that private sector investors are not found for the joint venture companies involved in Sugar Cane Cultivation, Sugar Cane Processing and Sugar Refining to allow Caroni to continue in Sugar Cane Cultivation up to 2006 and to this end provide the annual subventions to Caroni on an ongoing basis with $218.0 million being required in FY 2002.

The full text of the report of the PMT is submitted herewith for your consideration."

I just want to add that this report—I will make the point afterwards. I want to quote two small sections from the report that accompanied this letter from the Divestment Secretariat. It said in one section:

> "Notwithstanding the decision to secure the participation of the private sector in the operations of Caroni, the PMT is of the view that steps should be taken immediately to establish a framework for managing the transition of a state enterprise from one which is totally reliant on State subsidies for its survival to another which becomes a hub of economic activity, creating wealth for its many stakeholders and generating sustainable development in rural communities."

No different from what is happening now. I continue to quote:

> "The PMT therefore proposes that a new company—Caroni Enterprise Development Company Limited (CEDCO)—be incorporated as a wholly-owned state enterprise with a mandate to stimulate and facilitate new business activity and where necessary to establish strategic alliances for the development and optimisation of its assets."

No problem. Same thing.

> "CEDCO should take steps either on its own or through joint venture arrangements to develop, maintain and operate estates—heavy industrial, light industrial and agricultural. CEDCO would also undertake the development of residential and commercial projects."

It goes on, and this is where the difference really is.

> "The PMT recognizes that CEDCO's operations would begin the process of creating job opportunities in the area identified by CEDCO for the different estates. The PMT also recognizes that the job creation programme will parallel the continuation of the sugar operation. Accordingly in order to ensure that the employees of Caroni are absorbed in the new jobs being created, CEDCO must take steps to put in place arrangements for an orderly movement of employees from the sugar operations to the new activities which become available on the estates."

There is a fundamental difference between what you are implementing now and what was being proposed to us at the time. The final section I will quote from this report.

> "The PMT considers that there is need to put in place a contingent plan of action, in the event that private sector investor(s) cannot be secured for the subsidiaries involved in sugar cane cultivation, sugar processing, sugar refining and beef and dairy production. Accordingly the PMT recommends that adoption of another approach to the restructuring of the operations of the three (3) subsidiaries involving sugar cane cultivation, sugar processing and sugar refining. This approach would entail:
>
> (i) the extension of the cane crop cultivation by Caroni to 2006;"

This report was prepared in 2001.

> "(ii) the reduction of sugar production to 80,000 tonnes by 2006.

(iii) the introduction of a cane quality payment system; and

(iv) the phased severance of Caroni employees down to 1500 to operate the new company with one (1) factory."

So what was being proposed at the time, say one factory, phase it down over the six years to 2006.

> "Accordingly in 2006 Government would re-evaluate the performance and outlook of the industry with a view to making a judgment with respect to its future."

Because it was recognized then, it is recognized now that the cost of sugar production in Trinidad and Tobago is about the highest in the world. We understand that. That we are about 2½ to three times higher than the lowest cost producers, and that there were a host of initiatives that had to be put in place to try to make sugar production in Trinidad competitive. One of which was you buy cane based on sucrose content and what have you. And I am going to touch on their plan for the Sugar Manufacturing Company in that context so that you cut back your production over the five/six-year period, you move it to one factory and you begin, through CEDCO, to create the industrial estates to try to attract heavy and light industry, to begin the process of distribution of agricultural lots so that you begin the process of the move of employees from Caroni (1975) Limited to these new areas while you are winding down or you are reducing sugar production.

Mr. Speaker, I became Minister of Finance, I think it was December of 2000, and within the first two weeks of January 2001, certain workers of Caroni (1975) Limited began a placard demonstration outside of Caroni (1975) Limited because they could not collect their wages. This was not a protest demonstration because they were protesting management's decision not to increase their salaries. They were protesting the fact that they had worked and having worked, they could not collect their salaries because Caroni (1975) Limited did not have any money. I thought that that was absolutely madness. This was in my first two weeks as Minister of Finance. I arranged for Caroni (1975) Limited to be called in and I asked what moneys would they require to the end of the year. They must go back and then come and tell me what moneys they wanted up to the end of the year.

What I was not prepared to deal with is a situation where, if, in January they have run out of money and could not pay salaries and the crop had just started, what would happen at the end of the year? I was not prepared to deal in isolation with the moneys that Caroni (1975) Limited needed just to pay those workers, but I wanted to know what it would take for them to go to the end of the year.

And I was determined, at least until the end of that year, never to be faced with another situation where I had to respond in crisis to a company wanting money for workers who had already worked.

At that time I had not been fully briefed on a number of issues although I would admit one thing, that one of many that I could give credit to the Divestment Secretariat for, on assuming office almost on the day that I landed, there was a thick report waiting. They had to brief me on all the matters they had before them.

I requested from the Divestment Secretariat, from then through the year, what could we do to expedite the process of the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited. Because apart from giving them the money to the end of the year, unless we accelerated whatever the plan was at that time to treat with Caroni (1975) Limited, then we would be faced with the same problem the following year and the following year.

One of the things I asked the Divestment Secretariat to do was re-examine all the options; and not only re-examine all the options, all the options including full closure of Caroni (1975) Limited. The Divestment Secretariat produced many reports; one including the full closure of Caroni (1975) Limited. So when the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West quoted from a document, he quoted, I am sure, from a legitimate and valid document from the Divestment Secretariat except that when that report was presented to me and we discussed the implications, it was recognized that there was no way that we could have proceeded with the plan as presented and, the Divestment Secretariat was directed to review other options to expedite the Caroni (1975) Limited matter which led to the report that I quoted from and to the letter that was sent to me on July 24, 2001.

The point is, and I will make a categorical statement, that at no time did the Minister of Finance at the time or the Minister of Trade and Industry make any recommendation to Cabinet for the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited; and I will make a categorical statement that at no time Cabinet ever received a Cabinet Note and neither would they find any Cabinet Minute with a decision to close down Caroni (1975) Limited. [*Desk thumping*]

When the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West quoted from a document, from a report, one of many produced by the Divestment Secretariat, it is a deliberate attempt to mislead the population, it is deliberate untruth not only to mislead the population, but mislead his own colleagues.

After I received this letter on July 24, 2001, on August 07, I wrote the hon. Mervyn Assam, Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs. I will not quote the entire letter but I will quote the relevant parts. The letter said on August, a week or two after I got the report from the Divestment Secretariat. It reads:

> "I attach for your consideration a Report of the Project Management Team (PMT) on the Introduction of the Private Sector into the Operations of Caroni (1975) Limited (Caroni)."

My letter to Minister Assam ended:

> "You may wish to consider the adoption of the approach recommended by the PMT and, subject to your agreement, the Team can be mandated to provide the technical framework for the job-creation exercise of CEDCO…"

Mr. Valley: Quote the whole letter.

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, I will quote the whole letter.

> "I attach for your consideration a Report of the Project Management Team (PMT) on the Introduction of the Private Sector into the Operations of Caroni (1975) Limited (Caroni). The Report of the Cabinet-appointed PMT sets out a strategy with two scenarios for introducing the private sector into the operations of Caroni in accordance with the mandate of Cabinet.
>
> The first scenario envisages that private sector investors can be secured for forty-nine percent (49.0%) of the equity of those subsidiaries of Caroni which are involved in sugarcane cultivation, sugar processing, sugar refining, beef and dairy production. In this scenario, through voluntary manpower separation exercises over the period 2002—2006, the workforce of Caroni could be reduced to 1500 with raw material for the processing operation coming only from farmers' canes.
>
> The second scenario involves a contingent plan of action in the event that private sector investors are not secured for the subsidiaries involved in sugarcane cultivation, sugar processing and sugar refining. The plan involves the extension of the sugarcane crop cultivation and an associated reduction of sugar production to 80,000 tonnes by 2006. As in scenario l, voluntary manpower separation exercises would also reduce the labour force to 1500.

> Both scenarios recommend that the process of reorganizing the financial liabilities of Caroni and the preparation of the environment for private sector involvement be initiated. In the latter case, Government would establish a new company—Caroni Enterprise Development Company Limited (CEDCO)—as a wholly-owned state enterprise with a mandate to stimulate and facilitate new business activity and where necessary establish strategic alliances for the development and optimization of its assets.
>
> You may wish to consider the adoption of the approach recommended by the PMT and, subject to your agreement, the Team can be mandated to provide the technical framework for the job-creation exercises of CEDCO,…"

In other words, job-creation was not taken as a given. We wanted to ensure that you had a plan.

> "…the work on which has been largely completed by the Working Group on Caroni established on February 12 2001. This new job-creation/job-loss exercise would need to be reconfigured in light of the downsizing of Caroni over a five (5) year period. Accordingly, the Working Group would share its work with the PMT.

Finally, I propose a meeting as early as possible to establish an approach to addressing the restructuring issues of Caroni."

I wrote Minister Assam on August 07 saying, look at this report, consider it, these are the options and get back to me so we can have a meeting as early as possible to establish an approach for the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Member could inform the honourable House whether Minister Assam's response at that time was that Caroni should be shut down, with which he agreed, and whether the Member instructed the Divestment Secretariat to prepare a report along that line, and whether that report was laid/leaked?

Mr. G. Yetming: This letter was sent on August 07, 2001. I presented a budget in Parliament on September 14, 2001. There was no meeting subsequent to this letter and I do not recall receiving a letter from Minister Assam. Certainly, there had been no correspondence following this letter between this date, and September 14, 2001 on Caroni (1975) Limited. If there was such a letter I am sure it is on file and you can produce it. But I am making a categorical statement,

no decision was taken either by Minister Assam or Minister Yetming at the time, no Note was ever presented to Cabinet to shut down Caroni (1975) Limited and Cabinet therefore had no decision to make.

I am saying that after I wrote Minister Assam this letter on August 07, 2001, there had been no further meetings on Caroni (1975) Limited because between August 06, 2001 and September 14, 2001 when I had to present the Budget to Parliament, l really did not have time at that time to deal with this. If there is such a letter, bring it but I have already made a categorical statement.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that unless the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, or anybody on the other side, could bring the evidence—the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West in continuing the debate today spoke about documentary evidence. These words are being used glibly without any substance to it, all meant to deceive.

I want to deal with the matter before us now just a bit. In the *'Post Caroni (1975) Limited: A Comprehensive and Integrated Development Plan'* which was tabled in Parliament a week ago, it states at section 4:

> "The principal objectives of the reform programme were to create employment-generating alternatives for workers in a declining industry and to reverse the economic waning of many communities which were dependent on that industry. The aim therefore, was to put the lives of the former employees of Caroni on a secure and sustainable basis."

The principal objectives were to put the lives of these former employees on a secure, sustainable basis. I am not sure—this report was dated January 2005 and the Voluntary Separation Programme took place more than a year ago. We now have the Vesting Bill before us and I am not sure whether these principal objectives of giving security and sustainability to the lives of these former employees are being met. And part of the problem is that the whole management of the transformation, the shutting down and doing all that you are required to do, to get these people's lives back on track and to get even the manufacturing company in operation, the whole process is being very badly handled.

I will give an example. In the report on page 3 section 10, we are dealing with the sugar manufacturing company. It says:

> "With a sugar production target of approximately 60,000 tonnes in 2004, the 4,000 private farmers were required to cultivate an additional 140,000 tonnes of sugarcane to supplement their projected harvest level of 610,000 tonnes of sugarcane in 2004."

It was recognized that in order to meet the production target of 60,000 tonnes that the tonnage of sugarcane produced by the private farmers was insufficient and that they had to cultivate an additional 140,000 tonnes of sugarcane, more than they were accustomed doing. The report goes on to say and I quote:

> "However, the transitional arrangements to a new mode of operations were considered to be less than adequate…"

And therefore, they had to make an alternative arrangement to harvest Caroni (1975) Limited sugarcane to be able to try to meet its 60,000 tonnes target.

It is instructive that the transitional arrangements to a new mode of operation was considerably less than adequate. It is an admission in this report by the technical people that the transitional arrangement where that particular aspect of it is concerned was inadequate but, I want to compare that to when the Minister piloted this Bill. When the Minister piloted this Bill this is what she had to say:

> "In 2004, in the milling period, sugar production target was 60,000 tonnes, while actual production was 42,835 tonnes."

Same as what is in the report.

She goes on to say:

> "Production was negatively affected because of adverse weather conditions, labour issues, and low syrup purity in the cane, and high volumes of extraneous matters."

6.00 p.m.

On the one hand, we have the Minister saying that they did not meet the 60,000 tonnes target because of weather conditions, extraneous matter in the cane, low syrup purity and so on, and the technical people saying that the reason that happened was that the transitional arrangements to the new mode of operation were considered to be less than adequate. We hear Members from the other side talking about who is lying and who is not lying. What is the truth?

However, that is not the issue. The issue is the transition—the approach that had been recommended to the UNC government in July 2001, which was to recognize that something had to be done to Caroni (1975) Limited, work it down over a five-year period, to 2006 in the first instance, create Caroni Enterprise Development Company Limited (CEDCO), this company, to deal with developing the industrial estate's light/heavy, move to develop the agricultural sector and begin the process of VSEP gradually. Meanwhile, CEDCO would do what it was

supposed to do in creating these estates and attracting industry; you would have moved people from Caroni (1975) Limited to other jobs, which is when the training that they boast about would have been most relevant because workers at Caroni would have been specifically trained for jobs that were due to be created and not trained in isolation hoping that one day a job would emerge that would meet their skills.

That approach was certainly the more humane approach. It would have cost more because we would have had to continue for a time, up to 2006. We would have reduced support to Caroni (1975) Limited, but we would not have had Caroni in such disarray as we have now.

We heard a lot today about the assets of Caroni (1975) Limited. We have a vesting bill before us that is supposed to vest all the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited in the State. The Bill, from a legal point of view, I assume, is adequate.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Yetming: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under real estate undertakings, in the description in the Bill, it says:

> "'real estate undertakings' means all the real estate holdings of Caroni and Orange Grove whatsoever and wheresoever situate and more particularly described in, but not limited to those set out in the First Schedule;"

So it recognizes that the First Schedule would not comprehensively deal with all the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited, I guess because of the amount of land involved. Some might have gone through the cracks and would not have been picked up by this Bill. The First Schedule attempts to list all the land, but the Bill makes provision for the fact that, I guess, if any is picked up at some subsequent time, the Minister, by Order, would amend the First Schedule.

It means, therefore, that if any piece or pieces of land were not picked up in the schedule, those pieces would still be vested in the State. That is fine, but when we come to the operational undertakings:

> "'operational undertakings' means the property of Caroni other than its real estate holdings, used for…sugar cane processing, sugar refining…and

more particularly described in, but not limited to that set out in the Second Schedule;"

The Second Schedule says no more than what was said in the description at the front of the Bill.

If there had been the gradual transformation of Caroni (1975) Limited over the six-year period to 2006, it would still be in operation and they could have gone through the process of the attempted divestment of the dairy side and we would not find ourselves in this situation today. It came out in the debate where there seem to be serious questions about the security of the assets of Caroni.

I do not know whether Caroni (1975) Limited has a proper fixed assets register and whether the Auditor General would make a check at some point as to what the assets are and where these assets could have gone. The Minister, by Order, can transfer or vest into the Sugar Manufacturing Company those assets that she believes would be required by the company for its business. What would happen to all the other assets after you take the land away from Caroni (1975) Limited and transfer them to the Sugar Manufacturing Company? This is where, I think, there is scope for tremendous disappearance of assets.

I think that somewhere in the comprehensive plan there is mention of a number of sporting facilities being transferred to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Someone else mentioned today some pavilion being transferred to some John-Williams. I am just saying what is being said.

The point is that the plan we were asked to consider by the Divestment Secretariat in July 2001, to me, not only would have been the more humane approach to an industry that had been around for many years and was the lifeblood of many communities in Trinidad and Tobago; it would have been more humane to the 9,000 employees of Caroni (1975) Limited and their families and would have seen an orderly transition for the workers because, as the state enterprise develops the industrial and agricultural estates, there would be a job creation/job transfer scenario taking place progressively, while Caroni reduces its sugar cane and sugar production; while additional cane farmers come on stream to produce all the cane required for the sugar target that you wanted to meet. All of this would have been so simple.

If I had taken the opportunity to review the plan, and if I had the opportunity to discuss Minister Assam's review of this plan, it certainly would have had a better chance of getting to Cabinet. My concern, in the plan that the Divestment Secretariat presented, was divesting 49 per cent of these companies to private

sector investors. I hold the view, which I openly conveyed at the time, that for the State to divest 49 per cent is a total and absolute waste of time. No serious private investor would take 49 per cent in a state entity. None! If they were serious about divesting, divest 60 per cent. Let the State own 40, if they consider it strategic. Left to me, once it was not considered strategic, I would sell 100 per cent, which was intended for a number of enterprises. We took the decision up to 2001. There was no other plan for Caroni (1975) Limited.

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, the Sugar Manufacturing Company has been in operation for, let us say, one year. They produced 43,000 tonnes of sugar out of the last crop. I think it would have been useful if the Second Schedule listed the assets that have been transferred from Caroni (1975) Limited to the Sugar Manufacturing Company. I would expect that there is an opening balance sheet for the Sugar Manufacturing Company somewhere around. I would expect that the Minister who, from assuming office, has preached the whole question of accounting, transparency and timeliness and so on, would have called for an opening balance sheet of the Sugar Manufacturing Company. I would expect that she would have called for a feasibility study and projections for the company. I do not believe that whether the Sugar Manufacturing Company operates at a profit or at substantial losses should be a guessing game for us right now. I would have expected that the feasibility for the company's three-year or five-year projection would be a part of this Post Caroni (1975) Limited Development Plan report.

I await the first audited report of the company because I would like to see the assets that have been transferred from Caroni (1975) Limited to the Sugar Manufacturing Company. However, that would be for another time. I simply hope that I have put to bed—unless they can come with hard evidence—the thought, the suggestion, the accusation, that they on the other side have made continually, that the UNC and, more specifically, the Member for St. Joseph, had a plan to shut down Caroni (1975) Limited.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, thank you. I wish to assure hon. Members that I would not be long because there is not much to respond to, but there are many contentious things to deal with.

Let me deal with some of the issues raised by the Member for St. Joseph. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West had introduced into this House the issue of a report that spoke about the immediate closure of Caroni (1975) Limited. The Member for St. Joseph has been at pains to deny this report; to deny whether it was a final report, whether it was a real report, whether it went to

Cabinet, whatever. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this report exists and the information that we have on this side is that the Divestment Secretariat, when the Member for St. Joseph was Minister of Finance, prepared a report with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited, which outlined a plan for it. That report was presented to the Member for St. Joseph, the then Minister of Finance, in the company of the then—he had such a long title then—Minister of Trade, Industry, Enterprise, Tourism. The then Minister of Finance was presented with a report by the Divestment Secretariat, which recommended a phased reduction in the operations of Caroni (1975) Limited. That is the information we have.

On receipt of this report, the Member for St. Joseph and his colleague instructed the Divestment Secretariat to prepare a plan dealing with the immediate closure of Caroni (1975) Limited. They were not happy with the company at the time; they were not comfortable with the way it was managed; the losses were mounting. That is the information that we have. The Divestment Secretariat, therefore, prepared a report recommending the immediate closure of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, that report, which was based on instructions given by the Member for St. Joseph, the then Minister of Finance, subsequently found its way into the public domain and, of course, with such an embarrassing report finding its way into the public domain, they were like Peter—they started to deny. Me! I do not know about that report! That is the information we have.

But let us not argue about whether that report was fully accepted by the Member for St. Joseph or not. The fact is that the question of closing Caroni (1975) Limited, scaling it down, reducing the operations—all of that—engaged the attention of the former administration and reports were produced, based on their instruction, one of which was a report to just close it down. It was giving too much trouble; taking too much money; they were not managing it properly; we cannot take it; close it down!

The fact is that this was an option prepared at the request of the hon. Members opposite. They spent six years just playing around with this. They knew inside themselves what should be done. The Member for St. Joseph is a former banker. He knows about income and expenditure and what was recoverable and what was not; what was a going concern and what was not. He knows very well that if he had been allowed to, he would have found himself in the same position that we are in today. But all of that is semantics, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that Caroni (1975) Limited had lost hundreds of millions of dollars for many, many years. The last time I checked, it averaged $500 million or $600 million. When you add up everything, that is the subsidy. Caroni (1975) Limited maintained a lot of recreation grounds and other facilities, schools, medical facilities, roads—all of that was part of Caroni's expenditure.

There was a subsidy of the actual sugar cane production. When you add it all up, Caroni (1975) Limited was losing about $500 million. Let us leave it at that. Let us not say $400 million or $600 million. The way it is calculated, it could lead to different conclusions. That was going on for years and years, including the six years the other side was in office. So over the six-year period, we are talking about $3,000 million or thereabouts that was lost as a result of the operations of Caroni (1975) Limited. That is a fact. Prior to that hundreds of millions of dollars were being lost on an annual basis.

I recall when the tripartite plan was submitted to this House by the then Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West. I am going back in time now. I think that was about 12 or 13 years ago—1992 or 1993. When the tripartite plan was submitted to this House, the accumulated losses of Caroni (1975) Limited at that time was about $2,000 million or $3,000 million. The losses were written off. Caroni (1975) Limited was put on a path but continued to lose money. The other side came in and they lost more money. We are looking at an enterprise which, let us just take the last 15 years, has lost over $7,000 million or $8,000 million.

These are facts and I really do not think that Members should be arguing about these things. When they were in government, this is the information they received in their Cabinet documents. They would have seen all this when they saw the reports on the state enterprises and Caroni (1975) Limited in particular; when they received requests from Caroni (1975) Limited, as we did, for subsidies, for additional funding and when they were told that the subvention was inadequate. I am certain that during that six-year period when hon. Members were in Cabinet, from time to time a Cabinet Note would come indicating that Caroni's subvention was inadequate and that they required more funds for whatever reason; whether it was froghopper, bad weather or the factory breaking down. They would have received Cabinet Notes telling them that Caroni (1975) Limited needed an additional amount of money. This is the reality!

We had a situation where over a 10 to 15-year period, an enterprise was losing millions of dollars. When you looked at what was happening all over the world,

you saw that the type of sugar production carried out in Trinidad was being phased out. When you saw that the concessionary arrangements that Trinidad and Tobago had in Europe in terms of prices were all going—in 2008, the concessionary prices under Lomé and whatever else would all be going—that would mean that the losses of Caroni (1975) Limited would no longer be $500 million, it would go to $600 or $800 million because you were no longer getting the kind of concessionary prices and the kind of guaranteed sales that you got for so much years before.

The Government took a decision to deal with the Caroni (1975) Limited situation and that is where we are at today. The Bill before the House just deals with the vesting of Caroni (1975) Limited's assets into the Estate Management Business Development Company. Basically, that is it.

A number of issues have been raised by the Member for St. Joseph with which I would like to deal. [*Interruption*] I do not intend to speak for 75 minutes; I will deal with him very quickly. The Member for St. Joseph spoke about operational undertakings and he complained—that is my word—that there was not enough information; that perhaps there should have been a list of all the rolling stuff attached to the Bill, so that Members of this House would have a proper appreciation of what the assets of Caroni (1975) Limited were. He demonstrated that he had not read the document *Post Caroni (1975) Limited A Comprehensive Integrated Development Plan* or, if he had read it, he had not remembered it.

Mr. Speaker, on page 18, section D deals with the disposal of the assets of Caroni and it is explicit. There is no ambiguity. It says, at section 79(viii):

> "in accordance with the Consent Order pursuant to IRO No. 9 of 2003, former daily-paid employees would be granted first priority to purchase field equipment, and to the extent that that initiative proves unsuccessful, the remaining Rolling Stock should be disposed of through an open auction process;"

The plan clearly articulates what is to be done with the field. It is to be offered to the former employees.

The next paragraph says—[*Interruption*] You said you wanted to know what was going on and I am telling you. In (ix), it says:

> "the plant and machinery of the four (4) closed sugar factories…would be sold as a scrap material through public tender…"

It speaks about the disposal of buildings. It says that the Transport and Field

Engineering Departments as well as the Information Systems Department would be transferred to the Ministry of Science and Technology. It also indicated very clearly, which is opposite to the mischief that the Member for Couva South put in the *Hansard* record, that six groups of assets would be transferred to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs which are Ste. Madeline Staff Club Golf Course, Sevilla Staff Club Golf Course, Gilbert Park Sports Club, Wanderers Cricket Ground, Woodford Lodge Sports Club, Usine Ste. Madeline Sports Club and Dubisson Park. The report tells us that all of these recreational facilities would be transferred to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. It is in there.

Why would the Member for Couva South say that he understands that Gilbert Park has been given to John-Williams? Why? It is in the plan. This is the problem I have with the contributions of some of the Members opposite. Some of them try to make an honest contribution, but some want to put untruths into the record. The plan clearly states what will happen to the recreation grounds. There is no question of it being given to some "pardner" or some friends as implied by the Member for Couva South. It is all there.

In terms of the operational undertakings, the non real estate, the plan states very clearly what would happen, for example, to the Brechin Castle factory. A consultant would be engaged to sell those assets and so on. A number of parcels of land would also be given. There is also a clear statement on what will be done with the citrus groves, the rice operations, the dairy and livestock operations and so on. Everything is in the plan.

They have read the plan. They have had it for more than a week. They have had it for about nine days or longer. All their questions are answered in here. One can only conclude that the statements put into the public record are calculated to achieve a particular purpose. I am not here referring to the Member for St. Joseph because I do not accept his denial. The fact is that something had to be done about Caroni (1975) Limited. We are talking about Members such as the hon. Members for Couva South who said that persons who are in receipt of the Caroni pension have been told that they could not get NIS pension and they could not get the old age pension, without a shred of evidence.

I have to assume that he is going into the cane areas and telling people that this wicked Government would make sure that they could not get old age pension. I can only assume that is what he is doing because he knows better. The Member for Chaguanas was a Minister who had responsibility at some time for pension. He could have told him, as the Member for Diego Martin Central has pointed out, that NIS benefits are not counted in the calculations. That is public knowledge.

6.30 p.m

Mr. Speaker, for a Member of Parliament to be going out there and telling people that this wicked Government is making sure that employees cannot get NIS and old age pension is a deliberate mischief, but the employees know better. They are not stupid. There are lines of communication among the employees and the Minister of Finance, Divestment Secretariat, the old Caroni (1975) Limited and various units that are being put in place to deal with the transition from the old way of doing things into the new system. The employees can find out for themselves. They do not need a propagandist like the Member for Couva South, to tell them that they are not eligible for pension. They are not taking that. They will go to the Divestment Secretariat; they will go to Caroni (1975) Limited; and they will go to the various offices and so forth and find out for themselves.

I am sure that the employees know that they will be eligible for old age pension. This has been done in a particular way to make sure that employees will get Caroni (1975) Limited pension, NIS pension and old age pension. This is the way this matter has been approached. The people are not stupid. Maybe the Member could catch one or two persons, but we are talking about money here, and no one is going to allow a Member of Parliament—a mischievous Member of Parliament—to deny them from receiving their proper benefits. People are not foolish in this country. I see the Member for Oropouche is laughing. The Member knows that what I am saying is true. Mr. Speaker, no Caroni (1975) Limited worker, who is a pension recipient, is taking on what the Member for Couva South is saying.

With regard to the pension, the fact of the matter is that the Government has guaranteed to make up any shortfall in all of the pension plans. Whatever is the shortfall, the Government has guaranteed to make up that shortfall and, therefore, those pension plans are secured; whatever pension benefits that former employees are entitled to, they are going to receive them; and whatever money is required to put into the plan—whether the plan is funded or not—it will be addressed by the Government. So there is no question of employees not receiving their pensions and there is no question with respect to them losing out on old age pension.

I have to repeat a point made by the hon. Member for Arouca North. There is a perennial complaint coming from the other side that the pensions are too low. Who is responsible for that? The pensions are paid based on a collective agreement. That is how it is. It is an agreement between the trade union and the employer, Caroni (1975) Limited.

With respect to the terms and conditions—including pension benefits—these agreements were negotiated by the Member for Couva North; every single one of them. So that whatever was in those collective agreements is the direct response to the intellectual work of the Member for Couva North. He came up with all of that because he was in charge of the union, and he agreed with the employer with respect to what the pension benefit should be. So, therefore, the quantum of benefits flows directly from the work done by the Member for Couva North.

With respect to this side, we are not taking any blame for the poor negotiations and the incompetent work of the Member for Couva North. We are not taking that. If the Member was unwilling, unable or just not interested in trying to negotiate better pension arrangements for his workers; we are bound by the rule of law. There are laws in this country. There is a collective agreement and we have to follow the collective agreement. We have enhanced the benefits. That is something that we have done. As the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has pointed out, I think we have enhanced the pension by an average of 30 per cent. We have done a lot.

In addition to the separation benefits that they have received, we are also giving them land. Which other worker in Trinidad and Tobago is getting land as part of his or her separation package? None! When I hear what Members on the other side are saying and I match that with what is real and what I know to be true, there are no workers that I know in this country who received a separation package that was enhanced by 30 per cent. These workers are also getting a residential plot which is valuable land, at 50 per cent of the market value; they are also getting a couple acres of agricultural land; and the residential plot that they will be getting, after five years, they can dispose of it. This is the reality!

Mr. Speaker, they did not give the port workers a piece of crane when they were going; they did not give the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) workers a piece of chassis when they were leaving; and they did not give the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) workers a pump when they were leaving WASA. The fact of the matter is that if one is objective—I know it is hard for Members on the other side to be objective, so they have to be subjective—one will see that what Caroni (1975) Limited workers have received, there are few workers, if any, who have received that kind of package. They have received their separation benefits and they have received land.

Mr. Speaker, this was a conscious decision of this Government to proceed with this matter along those lines. There are some persons in this country who are

not very happy about that. It begs the question: why should there be an arrangement of this nature with this particular group of workers and not with other groups? Now, I know that the argument is historical, cultural and so forth. That is the argument. Can that argument stand the test of scrutiny? Can that argument withstand a proper test that workers should get their financial benefits, plus enhancement, plus residential land, plus agricultural land, plus first option to buy the field equipment, and plus the first option to buy the rolling stock? Look at what has been done for this particular group of individuals!

I do not think that it is necessary to say anymore with respect to this matter. We may be subjected to rhetoric and hysteria by Members on the other side, but when you ground this in reality, the fact is that this particular group of individuals has received benefits which no other group of individuals in this country has ever received. That is a fact! The other side could make as much noise as they want, but they cannot get away from the reality.

The Member for St. Joseph made a point that the training was done in a vacuum. There have been a number of employers' surveys done by the National Training Agency, which is being run by some friends of Members opposite. They know them well. One of them is the secretary of the UNC, and one used to be the chairman of the UNC Couva North Constituency. They have been producing national employers' surveys for a number of years. These surveys are telling us where the demand for jobs is in particular industries, in particular sectors and even in particular companies. The training that is being done is matched to the results of these employers' surveys. At the present time, we are doing a national survey, so that we will get a complete perspective of the country and see where are the job vacancies; where is the demand for work; and where is the demand for skills and so forth. So, we are not operating in a vacuum. This is the complete opposite. We are basing our training programmes on actual information that has been picked up in the system, in terms of where the demand is for jobs. This was not a "vaps" thing. I am certain that a significant number of these workers—with the kind of training that they are doing—will be able to pick up other areas of employment.

In fact, from the basic information that we have with respect to employment levels, one of the farmers' unions had indicated that there was a shortage of labour, and they were having a difficulty in attracting workers into the sugar operations. What does that tell you? Are these workers home sleeping? If employment is being offered to these former Caroni (1975) Limited workers—probably better terms than what they enjoyed when they were at Caroni (1975)

Limited—and are not accepting the jobs then, clearly, they are doing something else. Clearly, they have moved on to a more attractive area of employment. In everything there is change. Change is never easy. This had to be done. The fundamental change had to be made to reorient this group to different areas of economic activity. The evidence tells us that this is what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding any anecdotal evidence that we may hear from the other side—a story about this one and that one—the macro picture will not support this anecdotal evidence they may wish to give. If there was a shortage of labour in the sugar industry, then clearly the former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited are doing other work that is paying them more than what they were being paid in the sugar industry. I do not think that there is any need to say anything more about the training programmes and what is going on with these workers.

I do not think that there is anything else that I need to respond to that was raised by the Member for St. Joseph. When we look at the matter that is before this House, this Bill seeks to vest the operational undertakings of Caroni (1975) Limited in another company and vest the real estate undertakings of Caroni (1975) Limited and Orange Grove and to provide for the management and development of those real estate undertakings.

I must tell Members that a lot of debate went into this plan. It took a long time because the Government wanted to be absolutely certain that everyone understood what they were doing. In any matter like this, you are going to have interpretations. There will always be a number of different interpretations of the Government's policy as to how this policy should be implemented; what kind of lease do you issue to Caroni (1975) Limited workers, in terms of residential and agricultural lands; what should be the terms and conditions of these leases; how are we going to go about disposing of the assets and so forth; what portion of the land should be kept for agricultural purposes; what portion of the land should be used for housing; what portion of the land should go into industry; and what portion of the land should be left to preserve the environment and so forth. We debated this matter for months, and what you are seeing here is the distillation of those debates.

Mr. Speaker, for example, if one looks at the arrangement with respect to the land; one will see that the workers will be getting residential lots at a percentage of the market value; one sees that they can transfer that land after five years, if they have erected a building on the land. A lot of discussion went into this matter. We did not want any misunderstanding. We also wanted to make it absolutely

clear that this benefit would be available to those workers who did not have a house. There must be some policy that informs these matters. If a worker already has two houses, why should that worker benefit from a measure like this? If there is a situation where a worker needs accommodation, then that worker will get through. That is why the screening process was done by the Divestment Secretariat of the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, there were about 6,000 or 7,000 applications that were received, and there are about 1,000, in round numbers, with queries. They have picked up a mortgage in a person's name; a bank loan for a property somewhere; or a title deed for a property somewhere. That is what will put up the red flag, where someone has told you that they do not own any land; they do not own any house and they do not have any property, but when a search is done on the records, you will see a deed or a mortgage or something like that in the person's name.

Presently, these queries are being processed by the Ministry of Finance to determine whether there is any truth with respect to these issues that have come up, and to really boil this down to persons who really need the land. We had a lot of discussion on the matter as to whether we should just be carte blanche and give everybody a piece of residential land. Eventually, after a lot of debate, we said that it was not practical and we will give the land to persons who do not have a house or who do not have accommodation and so forth.

With respect to agricultural plots, we did not want to lease out agricultural land that would suddenly be turned into industrial estates. If one looks at the Aranguez Estate, along the highway in the constituency of the Member for St. Joseph, one will see a lot of industrial activity taking place there. There is a scrap yard on the highway, a booming scrap yard, and there is a lot of industrial activity that is taking place on other agricultural lands. We did not want a situation where we lease a vast acreage of land to persons, and then within a year or two years, we start seeing industrial activity taking place on the land that was zoned for agricultural purposes, and where the rent for the lease is based on agricultural use.

Again, when one looks at the terms of the agricultural lease, one sees that you could only erect a building for the storage of chemicals and for other agricultural purposes. We do not want people to build houses and factories on agricultural lands. This may seem simple, but you will be surprised of the loopholes that people can manipulate and exploit, in terms of these undertakings. We sorted out the agricultural lots and said that the building must be used for agricultural purposes to store chemicals and so forth.

With respect to the residential plots, we said that after five years, once a house was built on the land, you could dispose of that house. That is how we dealt with that matter.

We looked at the actual land utilization of Caroni (1975) Limited. What does one do with 77,000 acres of Caroni (1975) Limited land? Apart from Petrotrin, I believe that Caroni (1975) Limited is the largest land owner in the country. I have always heard that statement. I cannot tell you, with any certainty, whether Petrotrin has more land than Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, this land was previously under the control of a state enterprise, and it is no longer under the control of that state enterprise, so what are we going to do with the land? There was an arrangement in place and the Estate Management Business Development Company was set up. There is also a land use plan designating certain areas for residential, agricultural, industrial and housing projects. There is a large portion of land that is going to be left that will be initially designated for agricultural purpose. In other words, that is the initial thought, but if later down the road, a case is made to use a part of that land for a new industrial estate or something like that, then the land will evolve into another use but, initially, based on the current land use plan, we would have this large portion of land available for agricultural purposes, but not specific. That is what this is all about.

The Members on the other side could carry on if they want; they could make noise about the management of the Estate Management Business Development Company, because they are entitled to do that. Those are operational issues. They could quarrel about who is running the company; they could quarrel about this or that; they are entitled to do that. They are entitled to make noise and say that they do not like this or they do not like that.

In terms of the Government's policy, having taken the decision that we were going to restructure Caroni (1975) Limited, with 77,000 acres of land now available, we had to do something with the land. I think after the product of all those months of debates within the Government's system, we have come up with an excellent plan. That is my view. [*Desk thumping*] The challenge is now for the Government—I am not fooling myself—to manage those 77,000 acres of land properly. There will be challenges associated with this like squatting and persons trying to grab land and that kind of thing. There will also be challenges in terms of monitoring what is being done with the land—land that was leased for agricultural and residential purposes and so forth. There may be issues there, in

terms of what is being done with the land. I do not think any reasonable person could argue with this matter. We may have a difference of opinion as to whether we should have scaled it down, phased it down or shut it down, but that is a matter of opinion.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that for six years that was an issue that confounded the Members on the other side. They did not know what to do. Every year you would hear—whoever the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources was at the time, because they had changed Ministers regularly in that Ministry. That matter confounded them—them saying that they have a plan for Caroni (1975) Limited, and that year would pass and Caroni (1975) Limited would lose $600 million, and then they would come and say that they have another plan for Caroni (1975) Limited and then another year would pass and so forth. For the six years that they were in Government that matter confounded them. They did not know what to do. We have done something, and only time will tell whether the decision that was taken was appropriate.

We believe that was the correct decision; we believe that this decision will ensure the sustainability and viability of the sugar industry; and we believe that the systems that we have put in place will allow us to manage the real estate holdings and the assets of Caroni (1975) Limited effectively. That is basically it. The things that were said by some Members on the other side were just "ol' talk"—mischief about pensions and that we give Gilbert Park to John-Williams. That is only foolish talk. The real issue here is whether the decision that was taken by this administration was the correct decision, in terms of the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited. I believe that was the correct decision and time will tell whether we were right.

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

Mr. Winston Dookeran (*St. Augustine*)**:** Mr. Speaker, I think the Member for Diego Martin East ended on a relevant question. Is this the correct plan for Caroni (1975) Limited? We have heard the Member for Couva South putting the case of the people and the peoples' responses to the adjustment process. He raised a number of legitimate concerns that persons have raised at the constituency level. Notwithstanding the remarks made by the Member for Diego Martin East, there are some telling inequities that the Member for Couva South raised in his contribution and the Parliament should take note of this.

We then had the Member for St. Joseph, with a very clinical contribution, outlining the process of decision-making, as to how the options were arrived at.

This amounted to two things: either we phase down Caroni (1975) Limited over a period of time to allow for the adjustment process to take its course or to close it down. At the time, the Member argued that the government took a deliberate decision to consider the phasing down over a period of five or six years.

I believe that it was Lloyd Best who once said on a debate with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited, that the options facing this country are either to open it up or close it down. This debate has been going on for the last 25 years. He argued then that the choice facing the national community in Caroni was to either get rid of it or to open it up. What did he really mean by that?

We have argued and the Government has argued that the international climate is such that we cannot expect the competitiveness of the industry to be maintained. It is true that with respect to events that are taking place in the global arena, we are faced with some threatening scenarios. At this point in time, there is a challenge to the preferential arrangement in Europe, Brazil and other sugar producing countries. Although, within recent times, the appreciation of the Euro has been substantial, it is providing well needed revenue for the new company that is not seen as a permanent revenue stream. There is no doubt that the assumption of the international arena is clear. We on this side of the House never argued against a reformation programme.

The second basis upon which this argument is being based is that there is a fiscal deficit, and this fiscal deficit was onerous. The social returns of that benefit were small in relation to the financial cost. There is where we had some points of disagreement. The question is whether you put this matter in the hands of accountants, statisticians, IMF technocrats or development economists, the nation builder, the one who is seeking to provide a dynamic opportunity for the future. Those were the two choices that we were faced with.

Mr. Speaker, whether we become imprisoned by the arguments of the accountants, the arguments of the statisticians, or the arguments of the IMF technocrats who see adjustments purely in terms of fiscal adjustments, regardless of social cost—even when they define social cost, they define it only in terms of the workers and the immediate beneficiaries, and not the society as a whole. That is a fundamental flaw of this plan. This plan has defined the framework within which to operate in a very narrow context.

The third assumption which is outlined in the document before us that is called *Post Caroni (1975) Limited, A Comprehensive and Integrated Plan* says that Caroni (1975) Limited is a non-strategic industry and, therefore, this is one

reason why it ought to be restructured. What is really a non-strategic industry? This is an industry which involves a large number of persons; a large number of communities, and not one that must be viewed as strategic, and from the point of view that its removal will affect the entire society. Those are the three basic assumptions upon which the Government has outlined this plan. This is really a turning point for Caroni (1975) Limited and this country, the international arena, the fiscal arena and the non-strategic arena.

I think this is why it would have been appropriate for the Government to look more closely at a report that was produced by a group of mainly university persons. I believe that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West made reference to the fact that they had considered the University Position Paper. I tried to compare the University Position Paper with the *Post Caroni (1975) Limited, A Comprehensive and Integrated Plan* and the first point that I have noted is that what we have in the Government's plan is really the administrative component of a development plan, and not a development plan per se. This is an administrative component.

This document deals with the Sugar Manufacturing Company which was established; it deals with the Rum Distillers of Trinidad and Tobago being set aside; it deals with the Estate Management and Business Development Company which was established; it deals with the light industry sector and the Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprises Development Company Limited (eTecK) which was established; and it deals with the reallocation of large responsibilities in social welfare, housing and education to the Government sector. To some extent, this is the eye of a colonial mind, to simply take Caroni (1975) Limited and replace it in the public apparatus. This is an administrative component; this is not a development plan. The fact of the matter is that there were ideas of a development plan available to the Government. I want to use the opportunity here to point out some of these ideas.

There was, in fact, this University Position Paper available to the Government, which is quite different from this development plan. As I said, this plan is only an administrative plan. It tells you the institutional framework that will be put into place, and it does not tell us what are the development processes. In a matter as important as this, and in a turning point in the history of the sugar economy, we cannot make that fundamental error. I think this is what I will like to argue here today.

The persons to whom I have made reference started off by saying this document proposes a number of guidelines on how a process of reconstruction may begin. It

proposes the reformation of outlook and it proposes a method of strategic interventions. These words are very important. It was in that frame within which a number of proposals were outlined.

So, when I argue that what we have here is a limited administrative plan, we are making a fundamental conceptualization error, and what we really need is a development plan. This is what the paper says with respect to an alternative perspective for development:

> "The Caroni Transformation Process is being governed by the assumptions of two plans: the first, the Total Separation Enhancement Plan (TSEP) and the second, the Future Direction of Caroni Ltd. Both are government plans...
>
> - It was economistic rather than developmental. It gave pre-eminent value to saving costs rather than using the assets of the Company for…or national development.
> - It placed an inordinate reliance on externally-appointed market driven factors to rescue Caroni and bring unprofitable sectors to profitability. It did not consider the Caroni human resource base as a source for enterprise formations."

It went on to say:

> - "Its plans for agriculture were ill-devised. It did not sufficiently consider the array of pre-conditions, for example soil enhancement, irrigation, agricultural skills base, and feasibile management systems, as preconditions for competitive successful agriculture."

Mr. Speaker, what the University Position Paper is saying is that this is an opportunity to open up Caroni (1975) Limited. This is not an opportunity to close it down and set up the administrative structures for its closure—I am not talking only about the workers; I am not talking only about dealing with those persons who are affected directly—and for the dismantling of the assets. I am talking here about the development process.

Mr. Speaker, let me just go further. It starts here by saying that an application for an alternative perspective to Caroni (1975) Limited process suggests:

> "The national assets of Caroni lands should be used, in the main, for national reconstruction, for developing projects that assist the nation as a whole. In the current Caroni Transformation Process the State has broken the flow of wealth

> between the land and ten thousand Caroni workers; it is in the process of re-connecting this flow to private capital. Whilst it should be using the national assets of Caroni to build national assets, it is using them to enrich private property. It may be argued that private capital alone has the assets required for reconstruction. This is far from a factual. Lease income from lucrative port lands could be used to fund a number of national projects. A Lease Income Funding Enterprise (LIFE) system may be established to offer loans to Caroni workers, or others, to establish small or medium sized enterprises. Income from ninety-nine year leases could guarantee long-term developmental funding for the national projects proposed in Chapter Six."

These projects were outlined in this document:

> "A Botanical Plan, a Model Education Plan, a Model Community Plan, a Buffalo Reconstruction Programme, A Food Park Plan, and a Sugar Industrial Diversification Plan could all be funded by a lease income project."

What is being proposed here is a dynamic process by which development could take place, and not a static process that simply reallocates the asset. This is of such importance to the development of this country, especially in light of our need to have non-oil and non-energy sectors development taking place. This is an opportunity to be able to set in motion a programme to effect the non-energy and non-oil sectors transformation of the economy. This is the opportunity that is being missed by this particular plan.

I do not think that it is appropriate to call this plan a comprehensive and integrated development plan. It might be more appropriate to call it an administrative plan for the development of Caroni (1975) Limited. The document to which I am making reference, and which the Member for Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West said that he had taken into consideration, is quite a different document. It is dynamic in objective rather than static. At this stage, we are making a fundamental error with not capturing that moment of diversification.

Mr. Speaker, I will not go into the details and this is not the appropriate time to do so. A detailed outline has been given on the botanical plan and how it can be developed; the lease arrangements that can be put into place; the products that could be produced; a model education plan; the use of Brechin Castle; the model community plan; recognizing the need to maintain the strategic relationship between the community and the enterprise; a buffalo reconstruction programme; and a food park plan.

I heard the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources talking about food production. He talked about food production without really understanding how we can develop the incentive structure for food production to take place within the sugar industrial diversification plan.

Mr. Speaker, I am raising these issues because I think they are appropriate to put on the record, so that in future if students of economic history were to look at what this Parliament has done, they would have seen the opportunities that were available to us.

We have no problem with the administrative component of the plan. The figures that have been outlined, I have no problems with them. I assume that these figures are based on the necessary land use planning that has been claimed in the report, but it disconnects the present production with future production. In that sense, the plan deals with asset control rather than wealth creation. That is the only way that I can say it. Throughout the proposals one would see that has been the focal point and that is why I said this was done with a colonial mind rather than a development mind.

Mr. Speaker, the report goes on to say:

> "The health, education, spiritual and social well being of children must be taken into account in all modes of development. It is paradoxical, that those who have the most interest in securing the future do not have the knowledge base or the experience to lobby for it. Though children may be substantially different from each other, their needs are basically the same. The urban, village, street and "squatter" child will all move off with one another into the future. Inequalities spawned today will be surely addressed with vengeance in the future. It is therefore essential that the state use the Caroni Lands for the development of shared educational spaces, shared social spaces, and shared health and leisure spaces. It is an accepted idea that the solutions of today are the problems of the future. Careful planning will make it less likely that future generations will suffer future shock; having to battle their way out of imbroglios which the current generation has created."

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this is in Chapter 6 Proposals:

"Opportunities for Development"

Many opportunities for development have been identified in this report. It goes on to talk about:

> "…building of a model school, with a primary and a secondary sector, on the Caroni lands. Instead of offering the Brechin Castle houses and administrative buildings for sale on the open market, the campus could be developed there. This Model School will visibly illustrate, to a population largely caught in the conceptual trap of the old colonial model, what is possible in primary and secondary school education. From single units of primary and secondary schools, cluster formations may develop to create a generation of citizens equipped to build problem-solving systems and technologies."

In other words, it is talking of a wider vision and therefore it requires the substantial support.

Many years ago when I was involved in the formulation of a plan for Caroni, it became clear to us that if there was not enough financial resources backing the whole process of diversification, that it would just be a paper plan, and at that time we had to negotiate with the World Bank for $100 million in order to support the diversification effort. We see no reference to resources that would be utilized.

Mr. Valley: What did you do with the $100 million?

Mr. W. Dookeran: It never came to pass, because we needed the resources to back it up. Today we are in a situation where you have these resources. You have a lot of resources, so much so, that there is no problem in allocating resources. This is an opportunity for us to have allocated the resources to back up the infrastructure and development needs of a Caroni plan. What we have here is a limited approach to the problem.

Mr. Speaker, the report from which I am quoting is a study that was done as late as July, 2003, a *Framework for National Development Caroni Transformation Process* and I do not see any evidence of the thinking of that study in the development plan as pointed out by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. They talk about a north-south corridor or what might be called a north-south plateau that can be developed in Trinidad and Tobago, and developed in a dynamic sense in the outline of this study, Mr. Speaker. They pointed out guidelines for the Caroni transformation process. They pointed out the five pre-conditions for development. They pointed out opportunities for development. They talked about building new clusters. They talked about strategic interventions. They talked so much about strategic continuity and it does

this as a response to the vesting public policy issue or, where do we go, what is the most appropriate plan.

The question that was raised by the Member for Diego Martin East as to what is the appropriate plan is really the most relevant question here. In the document before us, we have some reference to the creation of growth poles on Caroni land. The proposals for built development, proposals for agricultural development, proposed re-configuration of Caroni lands, in terms of housing, in terms of agriculture, in terms of industrial development. But it does not suggest the processes by which these things could in fact happen, either in terms of public sector support on one hand, or in terms of how the markets would work on the other hand.

So, I am suggesting to this honourable House that perhaps we are missing the opportunity to develop a serious developmental plan. That means the winners and the losers are going to be different. We talked today about many of the losers in this game. Who are going to be the winners and who are going to be the losers? Is it really going to provide food security for the nation? These are some of the questions that we must ask. Would it really tackle the problems of poverty? Would it make the situation of income distribution worse? Would it improve production or would it bring about social decay? Those are some of the effects that we need to look at, in order to see whether or not what we are putting in place is, in fact, something that the future generation can feel comfortable with.

When we last debated this issue—I believe it was sometime in 2003—we talked then about the issue of the credibility of the process. Today, we still have questions about that credibility, because in order to have that land that is distributed on two acre plots convert itself into food production in a serious way, there is need to establish a whole system of satellite farms. So that there would be demonstration farms, and satellite farms would be a dynamic approach. If you allow these things to simply go into the open market with a dynamic element, you are not likely to get the production you are talking about. So the credibility of the proposals would still be at stake, Mr. Speaker.

Twenty five million dollars has been allocated to training and consultancy. I ask the question, is that sufficient? I think the Member for St. Joseph raised the issue of whether the training is training for a specific set of employment opportunities, or just general training? Or whether or not, if you had worked a system where you were creating opportunities while you were displacing the workers, that might not have been the better one?

The document before us which forms the basis for the Vesting Act, is in fact an advance to where we were. It does provide us with some more information as to the institutional set-up, which will be used for the development of Caroni. But it leaves a lot to be said and to be identified and how this can actually be implemented. We cannot talk about setting up an Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprise Development Company. What are the resources available to that company? What are the criteria that would be used by that company, in order to foster development? What are the incentives that would be available, in order to encourage investment? I am just worried that this might become a paper plan, and there is not the driving force to make it work.

We talked in this plan that the Land Settlement Agency should utilize the lands from Caroni for housing purposes. But we know that the Land Settlement Agency is in a state or inertia, and is unlikely to deal with its present responsibilities much more for further responsibilities. This is what I meant when I said we are not sure whether this plan can in fact be implemented. We talked about the Estate Management and Business Development Company as a real estate company, trying to deal with the leases, not necessarily dealing with production.

This plan talks about the allocation to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources of citrus groves of Todd's Road and La Gloria, dairy operations at Mon Jaloux, life-time operations at Mon Jaloux and Mora Valley, life-time operations at La Gloria, Windsor Park and Picton. Once you transfer these things to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources you are transferring them to institutions that are not likely to be dynamic and produce products. They have their own responsibilities which they cannot handle at this stage. And that is why I am saying it is an administrative plan, to simply put the things in place, but we do not have developmental thrust.

Now this is important from the point of view that it would be the future generation who would be the losers. I talked about winners and losers. It is the future generation who are likely to be the losers in this situation. There is consensus for change, but what change, is really what the issue is all about. I wanted to make this point in support of the need, perhaps still possible, for the Government to look at a developmental plan for Caroni, to look at the models that have been outlined in education, in village development; the models that have been outlined for ethanol production in the sugar industry; the models that have been outlined in the field of light industry, that have been identified, the leasing arrangements that have been put into place, have been proposed. Look at them in

that context, so that we can make sure that the Parliament would have at least, put in motion, a dynamic plan. Instead of closing down Caroni and setting up the administrative structures in order to handle the closure, we should really open it up. Open it up to a new dynamic, and to a new development thrust. I think that it is only then we would be able to do service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

A recent report—big money for the sugar company—that was published in one of the newspapers, talked about the gross income of over $237 million that this company would earn in 2005. I raised the issue about the price of cane, in the context of that gross, over that gross revenue. We heard the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources on television saying he would not agree to any increase in the price of cane. Am I right? Yet, you are having a revenue of $237 million in 2005, and the cane farmers have been calling for an increase to beat their own cost. They have been talking about rising costs in a number of different areas. But this has not been considered as legitimate.

Are we saying, therefore, that the sugar manufacturing company is itself, on a path that it may not be viable in the not too distant future? And someone mentioned to us during the debate, that perhaps that too may have to close in the not too distant future. Is it even sugar production for the local market totally out? These are some of the issues that I would have hoped that the overall development plan would have raised. It has left a lot still to be done. The whole future of sugar is not any more secure as a result of the plan that has been laid in this House and there are still many issues to be discussed.

Rather than deal with the fundamental development issues, we are in fact, inviting other Prime Ministers to lead our FTAA delegations. That is not true? That was a false report, then? I was totally astonished when I read that. I wondered what the Minister of Foreign Affairs or what the Minister of Finance would think, that here you would have the Prime Minister of another country leading your national delegation.

Mr. Valley: It is not a national delegation, it is a Caricom effort.

Mr. W. Dookeran: The newspapers said it was a national effort to secure the headquarters for the FTAA. And there has been no denial of it, no clarification of it. What we do know is that this whole development plan, this whole Caroni thrust, has been done with a lot of public relations.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we look at the process of implementation—and I would like the hon. Minister to respond to the implementation process. There has been a lot of newspaper advertisements on this issue, all promoting very positive images of the change process. But is this really a change process taking place? When I go into the Caroni area, Mr. Speaker, I do not sense it at all. I do not know what the Minister senses. When I go into the Caroni area, you do not get that feeling of the beginning of a new dawn and a new horizon, which is what we see so often in the newspaper ads.

There is so much public relations in this matter, so much creation of images, that the substance of change, you do not see the evidence of that, rather, you hear stories of gloom and doom. You hear of families whose enhanced incomes, as they call it, have now been depleted and they do not know which way to turn. You hear stories of children not being able to go to school because of cost factors. You hear stories of a loss of confidence in people, and this has opened up a whole new area for social decay. That is why I am saying, if that is the situation, then we need something broader to deal with it. I think the whole approach of Caroni has been too narrow, has been focusing only on the immediate adjustments that were required, without looking at the bigger adjustments that are required in society. It is in fact, a dramatic experience for people who have had generations of tradition in the history of sugar, to have found themselves in this plight. They want to work somewhere.

Mr. Speaker, I merely wanted to point out that we are perhaps missing a bigger opportunity. I hope the Minister in the Ministry of Finance would consider broadening the frame, taking, seriously, proposals for the leasing company, looking at these broader issues, so that she can impose that onto the administrative plan that has been laid before this Parliament, and so create a real opportunity for the people of the sub-region. In fact the sugar industry, according to the documents before us, extends all the way from Point Fortin up to St. Augustine and St. Joseph. It is an area as large as Tobago. It is not something to be dealt with administratively; it is something to be dealt with holistically and developmentally. It is planning for almost the size of a whole country, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, it was necessary to look at all the different dimensions to the problem; not to simply look at the fact that the price of sugar has dropped, or that the fiscal burden is too high, but to look at it in a broader context.

We have come a long way, because there was a time we could not have discussed the issue of change at all. Fortunately, there is a new consensus that has emerged in the country, and the consensus is that there is need for that change. The question is, would we grasp the opportunity to use this moment to bring about real change, or would we—with a colonial mind—transfer the assets of Caroni into the State and say that there would be a dynamic change taking place. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, not only in this country, in any country, that if that process of just transferring the control to the State—which is what this Bill before us is all about—is all that we do, we will not be able to create that dynamism.

Today, we should be feeling a great sense of euphoria that we have overcome some of the problems and we have been able to build some consensus. We have not been able to generate that new enthusiasm, because there is really no basis to be too enthusiastic. There is no basis at all. All these different institutions will go into play and then they would simply move into various states of inertia. When a development plan was put before us, I was looking for those things. I was looking more for the dynamics that would flow, so that the opportunities would be created, so that the society would feel comfortable and confident. We would use our present wealth that we have in the country in order to finance this process of change; so that the oil sector would be able to finance the non oil sector. We would have a financing component to this plan, so that we would have outlined clearly how we would finance all the requirements of this plan. There is absolutely no word on the financing aspect of this plan. And any plan without a financing or implementation aspect is not really a plan, it is a document. It is a document in response to the fiscal deficit; it is an accountant at work. It is not looking at the social benefits, Mr. Speaker; it is not looking at the developmental impacts. It is not looking at the children and how we deal with that; children who are now growing up with less opportunities before them.

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we want a true plan. There was enough evidence, enough homework done; that is what is bothering me the most. There was enough homework done to assist the Government technocrats. I did not go through the details here today, but there was a detailed document on a genuine development plan that was outlined. I have told you only the elements of the plan that was outlined, about how we go about setting it up. This was available to the Government. Yet we come back here with an International Monetary Fund (IMF) inspired document that deals with the fiscal deficit, the asset control and the institutions that we will, in fact, put into place.

I repeat these points because they are important. This was a time to open up Caroni; I see that it is, perhaps, still possible to do so. It is still possible to develop a genuine developmental plan to build into this administrative framework; to redirect the Estate Management and Development Company from a real estate function to a developmental function. We once talked about a development authority. I do not know whether this is still relevant; I am trying to work with what you have. If you have established the Estate Management and Development Company, perhaps, that is the group you need to work on, instead of doing something else. When we discussed this the last time around, we talked about the Caroni Development Authority that would look at the problem in a broader context, that would look at the situation, so that the winners would be the next generation.

As we pass this Bill before us, it is significant that we take note in this Parliament of the options that were available to us to open up Caroni (1975) Limited; that we do not confine this to a non-strategic approach; that we make it a strategic intervention in the development process in Trinidad and Tobago; that we provide a sense of security to the cane farming community and deal with all the opportunities for development which have been outlined. Or am I to understand that community is not likely to have a long life?

I thank you.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House continues to sit until the completion of this matter.

Question put and agreed to.

CARONI (1975) LIMITED AND ORANGE GROVE

NATIONAL COMPANY LIMITED

(DIVESTMENT AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT) BILL

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my own observation on this very important proposal before the House, because it is out of a sense of duty and for the record that I need to comment on some of what has transpired, especially since, at one time, I had the responsibility of being the Minister responsible for Caroni (1975) Limited. Today, we are at the point in the Parliament where we are approving the process and the administrative arrangements by which the sugar industry would take on a new face and the rest

of the assets would form a different, though integral, part of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. It may be a good time to reflect on what Caroni (1975) Limited was.

Over the years the term "Caroni" has become a term that engenders all kinds of things and it is more emotion when one speaks of Caroni (1975) Limited, especially my colleagues on the other side. When they say Caroni (1975) Limited one could see a certain amount of emotion in what they say, describing it in a context other than a state farm, because if we are to be objective, that is what Caroni (1975) Limited is: a state farm. It came into being when the private sector, those who used to be the farmers on those lands, did not wish to continue in the farming enterprise in which they were engaged for many generations, and the State intervened and became the new farmer. However we want to put it, that is the naked, unvarnished truth: Caroni (1975) Limited is a state farm.

If one is to talk in the context of colonial and administrative—and I heard my colleague from St. Augustine describe this very well distilled document as "just an administrative document" and not a plan—well, if you want to maintain the colonialness, maintain what existed there under Caroni (1975) Limited, because that is what it was: a state farm coming out of colonialism in which the Government intervened and pretty much kept going—and if I might add—at great expense to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I think he has got it wrong; this is the plan.

His idea is the neo-colonial idea to maintain the status quo. There is one thing that is clear to all of us, because with the effluxion of time, we were able to see it at play—whatever you thought the PNM, the UNC or the NAR were going to do—at the end of the day we can now look back and see who did what. The one thing we agreed on, the PNM has a position, which is what we have put forward to the House and the country and what we have done. From listening to my colleagues, the politicians on the other side, I am not hearing the average person in Caroni saying what they are saying; it is the politicians who have a problem. Clearly, the sugar industry had a political complexion and that complexion is changing.

When they talk about Caroni (1975) Limited in the way they do—and today the Member talked about this being an administrative document and not a plan—one needs to look back a little. Caroni (1975) Limited, that state farm, was an administration to grow and cut cane, boil cane juice and make sugar. It had been changing long before the Government owned the industry; changing in terms of the number of factories, the amount of land under cane, the price of sugar and

who was involved. The one good thing about it, fortunately, is that unlike some other places in the world, new generations came out of Caroni (1975) Limited and went somewhere else in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. We were not bogged down by circumstances that we had to remain: father, grandfather, grandson; that time was the colonial time. The post colonial era saw the new generation walking away from the industry, because the industry's future was always in question.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it was the very question of the industry's future that brought Caroni (1975) Limited into being. It was because the industry had this very uncertain future why the original owners sought to get out of it. Even while the Government owned it from day one, from 1975 onwards, there were changes and those changes were constrictions. That is why when we were in Opposition during the period 1986 to 1991, this intractable problem was still there. My colleagues from Diego Martin West, Diego Martin East and some others spent a lot of time in Opposition trying to figure out how we would deal with this national situation and we were very clear in our manifesto as to how we would approach Caroni (1975) Limited. At that time, there was still some bit of hope that the external market would have provided a raison d'être to keep the industry going. Our quotas in the English Caribbean and the United States could have justified the scale of the industry. So we said that we would work within those confines; however, even that parameter has changed in the interim.

Just from a credibility standpoint, when one hears the emotive outpourings from our colleagues on the other side, especially my friend, the Member for St. Augustine, one has to ask oneself, "Is this real or is it just a Sankey to make it sound as though they care for the people involved or affected and we do not care?" Because that is the argument! I grew up knowing about the Member for St. Joseph in his banking background. I am sure that before he came into the political arena, in the way that he is now, if we were having a conversation on this whole question of Caroni (1975) Limited as an exercise and enterprise, he probably would have said something different. But he is a Member of Parliament (MP) for an area where there is sugar interest and politics, so I do not hold it against any of them, because, maybe, if I was an MP for a sugar area like that, I might have said the same thing too, but I am not doing that.

I was the Minister responsible. I came into government in 1992. The PNM government then, by July of 1992, had what we called the Tripartite Agreement. At that time, the Tripartite sought to obtain two things at Caroni (1975) Limited: viability and profitability—notwithstanding what my eminent colleague, the

Member for St. Augustine had to say: that economy and bottom line do not matter. That was not an accountant counting marbles; that was not a bean counter approach; that was taking into account the issue he was trying to raise: there are social and economic conditions, but they cannot stand on their own.

As I listened to him, I wondered if he heard himself trying to separate from viability and profitability, the whole issue of what to do, because people are involved. What he was really saying was that since people were involved in the industry, you could not do anything that would affect these people, because if you did, you are an accountant, you are a bean counter; you have a document but no plan. That is the same argument that keeps coca production in Colombia and heroin production in Afghanistan, because people like him get up and ask, "How do you destroy this industry, when all these people depend on it; that is all they know; that was all their grandfathers did?" I sat here in amazement and listened to him, who somehow managed, in this country, to get the label of an intellectual attached to him, and he makes that kind of intellectual argument in this type of debate.

Mr. Speaker, I am not so sure that when they talk, they do so from being in or outside of politics. My grandfather was a sugar producer; he owned a sugar mill. My father was an employee of Usine Ste. Madeleine, but I do not go around saying that I am the grandson of a sugar producer, therefore, sugar cane is my life and my navel string is buried there; no, no. The bottom line is that times have changed; the economy has changed. The people who are attached to the economy have changed. The young people who have come up, they have changed; so to hold on to this thing and try to make it look as though the PNM has destroyed the lives of people in Central Trinidad, is not correct.

Towards the end of his speech, the Member conceded that there is some consensus in the country that change has to come. I take that as a compliment, because this Government was able to grasp the nettle that other governments did not grasp. [*Desk thumping*] It makes me wonder what would have happened if this nettle was grasped 20 years ago. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: As a member of the PNM, it is not everything the party does that I am 100 per cent in agreement with. I have a family; I have a wife and two children in my house and there are times we disagree, but, of course, we do not do certain things. The PNM shut down the railway and, as far as I am concerned, a mass transit replacement, equal to railway transport, was not put in

this country and we will have to do that. We are not talking about that many years later. The PNM bought Caroni (1975) Limited and operated it as a state farm. I ask myself, "Suppose it did not do that, but had spent those billions, in the interim, doing something else, putting those lands into a different arrangement with a different kind of support base; is it possible that we might have been in a different position today?" [*Crosstalk*] I am only asking these questions. The bottom line is that the PNM did not do that, but it is something we can reflect upon.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: What is painful, Mr. Speaker, is that one of our colleagues on the other side tried to make us feel that we had done something so horribly wrong and he tried to make the rest of the world feel that we are vindictive, spiteful, discriminatory, racial and whatever else, because it is always there. You ask yourself, "What happened to other people who were involved in this same industry, who did not have the luxury of invoking that kind of description?" There was a sugar industry in St. Vincent, doing the same thing we were doing here in Caroni; Caroni (1975) Limited was no different. St. Vincent was a sugar producer. I was there when they had the last crop; it was not even harvested, it was grazed by cattle and that was the end of the sugar industry in St. Vincent. There was no one there to raise an emotive argument about us versus them. It was the reality they had to face.

In Barbados there is a sugar industry; they have to face the banks; the Government does not own it. From time to time, when they cannot pay the banks, what happens in Barbados? The industry closes its doors until they can find the economics to grow the cane again. In St. Kitts there is a sugar industry. I am not sure that there is still one; the last time I saw it, it was limping along making cane juice and selling fresh cane juice. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Government owned the company and that exposed it to the kinds of accusations that you hear from some of our colleagues. I have no doubt that some of them know otherwise, because when we did the Tripartite Agreement in 1992, the then government, and I, who was the Minister responsible, were able to get the Leader of the Opposition to sign onto that plan, to make Caroni viable and, eventually, profitable, and the economics were important then.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the plan said? The basis of that Tripartite Agreement, on which there was consensus, was that we would try to save this industry, at that time, under the circumstances, using only the resources that were

available to produce a particular volume of sugar. By consensus I mean that the Sugar Workers' Union and all the unions, the government and all the stakeholders signed on to the plan. So if we wanted 6,000 workers to produce the 120,000 tonnes of sugar, then the industry would be reduced to that size; that was the agreement; it is written there. Interestingly enough, not one speaker on the other side made reference to that.

Mr. Speaker, even more interesting is that my colleague from St. Augustine, a member of a government that came before the PNM Government of 1992, was the Minister responsible for the planning; all that planning he talked about. He had responsibility for coming up with a plan to restructure the industry and save it. He came up with a name, "neemakharam". While the PNM is able to present a comprehensive, well thought out plan here for Caroni (1975) Limited's restructure and life after, his plan ended up with him being ridiculed, across the board, in the most ignominious way, because the plan also involved significant changes to the lives of the people in the sugar industry then. Nobody accused him then of being administrative, racial or punitive to Caroni people. They accused him of being on the wrong side of the political divide.

Caroni (1975) Limited, as an issue in this country, has always been about politics; it was politics that prevailed. That is why he got the name "Neemakharam" in the political arena. That is why his colleagues today, who were his enemies then, could not absorb him, because he was on the wrong side of their politics. The minute he came back on the right side of the politics, "ah hear dey offer yuh the party" or what is left of it. [*Laughter*] One has to understand that. That is why I do not feel any sense of bitterness. I feel that some of my good time in 1992 was wasted. I still think if that approach was followed through to completion, we might have had a less traumatic kind of end to Caroni (1975) Limited, but so be it. The bottom line is not that they do not know what has to be done, but it has always been politically too difficult to do.

The PNM faced those same challenges in our political strongholds. The difference between us and the UNC is that we took the political risks to make the kinds of adjustments the country required. They used to call the Port of Spain port, "Party Group No. 1", because the whole country knew that persons there came from areas of solid PNM support in any local or general election, but the port had excess workers and was costing this country too much money that we could save to do other things. The PNM took a decision to deal with that. We might have paid a political price, somewhere along the line, but the country did what had to be done at the port. So when port workers were sent home, because there

were so many of them that there was a system where people could stay at home and get paid or stayed at home and got overtime. Remember those days? You stayed home and got overtime at the port in Port of Spain. We put an end to that and some people did not like it. But when you are governing a country, you have to go beyond the immediacy of politics.

It was the same thing at the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC), running 100 buses with too many workers. So whatever plan we looked at for the PTSC, the plan had a component: it was over-staffed, and we dealt with that. It was the same thing with the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA). When it came to Caroni (1975) Limited, politicians from South/Central Trinidad take the position that there is something different about it. There is something special about Caroni, but it is not different. It was the same issue. As we deal with it, it is in that context that we see what we have done.

I was a student in England in 1974. At that time, the strength of the Labour Party was the unions. The unions had their power in the coal industry. The heart of the coal industry was in the Welsh coal mines, the labour stronghold, but the coal industry was dying in the new world. You had the dilemma that Michael Foote, who was the labour spokesman, and in line to become leader of the party, had to go to Wales in front of 40,000 coal miners to tell them what government had to do about closure of coal mines in Wales. It was something to behold; 40,000 people gathered to listen to the future of their industry. Do you know what their reaction was when he was announced? They could not call him racial; they could not call him whatever, because they were all of the same race, but they had to do something, because this was not what the people wanted. They booed him for 10 minutes before he said one word; they were angry and bitter, because they felt they were being betrayed by labour.

I watched Michael Foote stand there for 10 minutes, not being able to say a word and eventually they got tired and he spoke to them for about an hour and a half. When he was finished, they cheered him. He did not have the option to say that it was someone else's fault. Nobody said that they were doing this to you because you were of a different race or class; it was a straight case of what was happening with coal; what was happening with Europe and what the government of the day had to do. I am sure today, if you go to Wales, as a booming part of the European Union, there are very few people who would tell you that the coal industry would have offered a better life to the people of Wales as they exist today. If there was some means of keeping them where they were in the coal

fields and coalmines, they could have justifiably accused you of being colonial, tying them to the coal mines; those were the issues, but we take it for what it is.

It falls to us, as the Government, to make certain decisions and we have made them without fear, favour, malice or ill will; in fact, with tremendous goodwill and caring. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know how I know that? My colleagues from Diego Martin East and Arouca North intervened in this debate and we tried to point out to our colleagues how the Voluntary Separation of Employment Plan (VSEP) that we offered the workers was different and improved; they pooh poohed it. My friend, the Member for Couva South, talked about the actual dollar value, but we had contract arrangements in place offering a certain amount of money for VSEP. We enhanced it to give them more and we also gave other things that were not part of the package.

Do you know how I know that we did better than we could have done, according to the contracts? When my friend, the Member for St. Joseph, got up to respond to my friend from Diego Martin East, he said, "I heard him talk about what was given to the workers, but there were still certain inequalities". I made a note of that, because I wanted to respond to the inequalities. I know the number of hours that the Cabinet and the subcommittees spent trying to make sure that there was no inequality and that there was an extra hand going out to these people, because we empathized with them. He spoke for the full period of his time and could not mention one inequality. Having said very blandly and boldly, "but there are some inequalities", he could not mention one. That tells me that the PNM stands guilty of being caring and empathizing with the people affected by this action. [*Desk thumping*]

The politicians of the other side would try to have a different story. They would hope to have a different story, because it is more politically useful to have a different story, because the real story is not in their favour. Take for example the whole question of pensions. You heard them talk about pension, pension and pension. When I became a PNM minister in 1991, the pension for the Caroni worker was $350. It was under my term with Chairman Kusha Haracksingh, that straight off the bat we raised the pension to $500; we got no credit for it. Instead, you get people trying to give the impression that the PNM, somehow, is anti-sugar worker, anti-Indian, anti-Hindu, anti-this and anti-that; that is political talk; you hear it from politicians.

My friend from Diego Martin East is right: What they say here that they think is in the Bill that is not there, they go out and tell people that they are the purveyors of those stories. [*Crosstalk*] But it is not only in Trinidad you get that

talk. I was in Tobago the other day for the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) elections and there were people trying to convince me, a member of the Cabinet, that salaries and wages in Trinidad are different from those in Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Well, they cannot evoke race, because we are all of the same race; they have to evoke something else. Mr. Speaker, would you believe that there are people in Tobago who will not believe me when I say that is not true; they believe the liar who says to them that you are getting X dollars in Tobago for this job, but in Trinidad they are getting more for it, so vote against the PNM. That is what politicians do and that is why they have a bad name; I am sad to say. I am a geologist. [*Laughter*] Unfortunately, when our colleagues make their political interventions, they evoke that sensitive issue, subliminally or otherwise, of race.

It came to the point where it was shameful today to see my colleague from Couva South trying to insult the Minister, just for doing her job. If she did not do it, I would have. If she did not bring it; he would have brought it; it does not matter that she brought it. He called her all kinds of names; trying to give her the impression that she is not worthy, but she has the strength of character to deal with that; she is brighter and smarter than him. [*Desk thumping*]

As if the history of this country is not written, he invokes the experience of Kamaluddin Mohammed in the PNM, as something that she should observe to be careful in her term in the PNM. I will tell my colleague, Mrs. Sahadeo, that if she lasts as long as Kamal in the PNM, she would break a record in the world, because the same Kamaluddin Mohammed, for those who do not know, in the same PNM that was being bad-mouthed in that way, served for 30 years as a minister of government, the longest serving member in the Commonwealth, in a PNM government. [*Desk thumping*] While he was doing yeoman service, there was not a day that passed when they did not call him "tief", corrupt or whatever, but when it suited their politics, they embraced him to their bosoms. So I tell you, Mr. Speaker, it is always the politicians and their politics.

It was the same thing with Errol Mahabir; as another deputy leader of the PNM, he served this country in a number of ministries, did outstanding service. While he was doing that, he was never an exemplar to them, because, as far as they are concerned, if you are not with their politics, you have somehow forfeited the right to your culture, race and religion; that is their politics. I have seen some of the insulting letters they write and heard some of the insulting statements they make, but as hon. Members in this House, it was pitiful today to hear the experienced Member for Couva South refer to a member of the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in the way he has done. He has done himself no justice and

he has done this House no honour; but we are accustomed to that. As long as we have a job to do, we will do it without fear or favour.

It brings one to think: How could you raise Kamal's and Errol Mahabir's tenure in the PNM as a warning to her? Look at us; we have been in government for how many years without Kamal and the others. They had a party in government; remember something called the UNC? They had one election in the party and they elected Carlos John as deputy leader. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Party mash up!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Nomination, in fact. He was not elected. The leader nominated him as deputy leader, "party mash up". The slogan was, "We come too far to turn black now", party mash up! But Kamal was here for 30 years. I served under him as deputy leader and I am proud to say that. That is the PNM's record; that is the country's record. [*Desk thumping*] So my colleague, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, you are in good hands, in a solid political party in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Just to show you how politics play in this Caroni (1975) Limited matter, the Caroni politics and the emotional emotive to Caroni: Caroni is supposed to be agricultural lands for farmers and this Government is taking farmers' lands for housing. I had to answer a question which was filed about the Oropune housing development going on right now. We are being accused of taking—as they put it—prime agricultural lands to build houses. What are the facts? When we were in Opposition, with no authority over Caroni lands, they took 150 acres of Caroni land at Orange Grove and set aside for housing. They started building the houses; they built, I think, 149 houses, some of which they had little difficulties with. The bottom line is that houses were built on a portion of the land. They lost office and we came in as Government and continued to build on the other 100 acres of land.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that they are now telling the country, telling the world, telling their friends in Canada that we are so anti-farmer, anti-Indian, anti-worker that we have taken away the prime land from the poor farmers to build houses to voter-pad in St. Augustine? When it was their decision to take that piece of land for housing and they started the programme; all we are doing is continuing it. If you did not know that, you might believe them, because they say those things in the full knowledge that it is not true, but it is good politics, as far as they are concerned, not to speak the truth. We see it everyday and Caroni (1975) Limited is a prime example.

My friend from St. Augustine, there are two words that whenever I hear them, whether I am in the deepest sleep, my mind goes immediately to Mr. Dookeran; one is "diversification" and the other is "mechanism". I think he patented the phrase about "putting mechanisms in place".

When the sugar industry failed and it was clear to all of us that something had to be done, that growing cane, grinding cane, boiling cane juice and making sugar did not have a long-term future for these people involved in the sugar industry, I think there was general consensus, to the point of fashion, to talk about diversification; that was the panaceaic word, diversification. For the whole period of government, in which the Minister, the Member for St. Augustine, was the Minister of Planning, diversification was the magic word. What does the business school tell you? You do not have to go to Harvard Business School to know this. If your core business is failing, peripheral business cannot save you; that is a fundamental principle in business school. Your core business is failing, has no economic future; your peripheral business will fail you.

What did Caroni (1975) Limited do? It diversified; it went into cattle, rice, cocoa, coffee, cassava, growing Malaysian prawns and tilapia; all of that before I became a minister. When I became the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, I met Caroni (1975) Limited. What was the story? Every single one of these saviours had become a millstone on the neck of the core business. Instead after saving Caroni's sugar business, the sugar business had to subsidize every single one of these failures. In fact, rice was a big failure, being subsidized in a big way; cocoa and coffee never got off the ground; Government workers milking cows, picking oranges. I mean to say, this is Trinidad; needless to say, the produce got to the market; the owner did not get the money. The bottom line is that this whole thing about diversification—without even mentioning the bagasse plant—Remember the bagasse plant? That went on until the recent incarnation of the UNC, when they said, in an attempt to hoodwink the country in the desalination scam, they raised the prospect of diversification of Caroni (1975) Limited again.

There was supposed to be a glass plant, a particle board plant, a ceramics plant or whatever; all that in the context of diversification. Instead of diversifying to strengthen Caroni (1975) Limited, do you know what happened? It only greased the wheel for the desal deal and today we are stuck with a desal plant that is costing us almost $300 million a year; water, water everywhere. Water up your waist across the country; desalination costing us $300 million a year, and that was sold on the altar of diversification of Caroni (1975) Limited. Until eventually, the

scam artist came out publicly and said that there was never any plan for any plant; after the desal deal was struck. [*Crosstalk*]

This is the story; the bottom line is, as I said earlier, Caroni is a state farm growing cane and making sugar.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: When we did this so-called diversification, all we did was broaden the state farm tentacles, so we now have, instead of a state farm with cane and sugar, we had a state farm with cow and milk, sheep and mutton, coffee and cocoa. If you want to be colonial; that was colonial; that was the old colonial economy. When they realized the extent to which this was a failure, policy was espoused from their quarters; the policy now was tourism. So we will bring tourists to see the cane flower; we will offer a 1,000-room hotel, a golf course and water birds in lakes. Of course, none of those things materialized, because they were all just patent nonsense; but those were the days. [*Crosstalk*]

My friend from St. Augustine made a speech here tonight. I do not have much money in my pocket, but I can put my wallet on this table now and ask you, Mr. Speaker, or anybody who wants anything inside of it to take everything and tell me what the Member said tonight. [*Laughter*] [*Hon. Dr. Rowley put wallet on the desk*] Tell me what he said. Absolutely nothing! Do you know why? Because he had difficulty even making a normal statement saying, "Look, we have a problem in this country with sugar; we have had it for quite a while; we have had endless reports; I think between Caroni (1975) Limited and the CDA, we have had enough reports for the rest of the season, but we had differences of opinions as to how we should proceed; I do not agree with what you have done; I think…," he could not go along that route. So what did he do? He went around the route of gobbledygook. [*Crosstalk*]

I do not want to be unkind to him, Mr. Speaker. I was coming to speak after him and I wanted to respond to what he was saying. In fact, I could not find anything to respond to, because all he did was make clichés and read some university report. I do not know if he had anything to do with the report, because he did not declare that, but it sounded like the kinds of things he would say: a lot of long words where short words would do and phrases that did not mean anything. We had many reports on Caroni (1975) Limited. We had many governments trying to grapple with Caroni (1975) Limited and, according to him, they were all wrong; everything they did was wrong; UNC was wrong; PNM was wrong; NAR was wrong. But two "fellas" in the university, notorious for not

doing anything useful in Trinidad and Tobago, would do the plan and say, "Ah magic; that is it; the university plan." What university plan?

When I was Minister I offered the Cabinet the appointment of Dr. Ranjitsingh as Caroni (1975) Limited's Chairman; you cannot get more university than that; he did a good job, and he came out of the university. But Dr. Ranjitsingh did not bring any magic wand to wave in Caroni. In fact, they fired him within 24 hours of them getting into office; so I do not know what is this university label that he was belabouring here this afternoon. My grandfather always told me that it is good to be educated, but do not be a fool, because the worse fool is an educated fool. [*Laughter*] So saying "university" does not impress me, it is what they are saying. The Member went through the university plan and through all of it colleagues, tell me, honestly, what he said about the university plan. Throwing "nasties" at my friend from St. Ann's East, trying to insult him for his race; talking foolishness about who was kicking who and riding horse; that is nonsense talk; that has been going on for years in this country.

We are at the confluence now; this is decision time. All that kind of "ol' talk" done. If you are vex that you are not doing it, too bad; you had your chance and you did not do it. It falls to us now to take responsibility for what we are doing and we will take that responsibility. We are prepared to take that responsibility, because we know that with the passage of time, our good intentions and the good outcome of what we are doing will vindicate our actions. [*Desk thumping*] He talked about opening up Caroni (1975) Limited. He quoted Lloyd Best; simplistic Trinidad and Tobago. A complex country like ours, Lloyd Best has a simple solution: either open it up or close it down. They call that the sensitive plant reaction: either you open or you close. What utter foolishness! What does that mean? You say that you are an intellectual and you come here to quote Lloyd Best about either you open it up or close it? We have always opened up Trinidad and Tobago; this country is the most open. Do not tell us about being open.

We had, for a time, the negative list and closed borders. When we chose to open the economy, not one of them had one good thing to say about it. They said that was the end of Trinidad and Tobago; it will crash, but we had measured our actions; we had thought it out and then took a decision to do certain things, to open up the economy. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Diego Martin West has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for the extension, I will not be much longer. I want to make one point again on the absence of political honesty and just to point out how, even in the face of logic, reason and document, a primary school child confronted with this, would come to a conclusion that it is not so.

You have those who appointed themselves spokespersons for the community of Central Trinidad, even as we had the document in front of us, who tried to make us feel that what is printed here is not what is there. We are saying that arising out of the restructuring of the industry we are going to take certain actions. What are those actions? The actions are largely geared toward a redirection of the assets under new management. What are the assets? Cattle rearing—those lands will go to farmers. Many of those farmers are going to be people who were farming under the Caroni umbrella. They will get preference to go back to those lands, but as owners; their own bosses. So if we give Mr. X 20 acres of land to rear cattle; he is not rearing cattle for Caroni (1975) Limited or the Government; it is his business. He might fail, but he might succeed. How, in the face of that kind of development, my colleague from St. Augustine could come here tonight and repeat over and over that this is an administrative document where we are transferring Caroni assets to the State? That is naked silly politics.

Mr. Speaker, they have been telling their people and friends that what the PNM has set out to do is not to fix this intractable problem of decades, but we are trying to give PNM supporters Caroni lands. How puerile! They very well know that insofar as political support is concerned, the majority of people who would get these assets, if one looks at election results of the area—and I do not know how individuals voted—but you will see that the recipients are not likely to be PNM supporters, but they are Trinidad and Tobago citizens in this industry—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: What is bothering them is that they are fearful that the traditional absence of support might change and this development might make these people PNM supporters, but as of now, it is quite silly to say that we are giving State assets to PNM supporters. Their major spokesman got up and said

that we are taking the assets of the State. In fact, I thought he would have said that we are distributing the assets. [*Crosstalk*] Who got the rice fields?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Before this plan, the State was growing rice. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Dookeran: I thank the Member for giving way. Is that not precisely what the Bill is about, transferring the assets to the State? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We are not transferring it to the State; Caroni (1975) Limited is 100 per cent state-owned.

Mr. Imbert: It belongs to the State.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The State managed it under a company, under the Companies Act, but Caroni (1975) Limited is state-owned. Maybe because you did not accept that, that is why you kept supporting this saying about Caroni lands belonging to Caroni workers. Caroni is state land, like Petrotrin lands, like the Water and Sewerage Authority lands, but in this arrangement we are passing some of these state lands to former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited who will now own and operate on those lands for themselves; so we move them from an employee class to an owner class. You came here today and talked about taking state land; absolute, abject nonsense, because the State already owns it. What the State is doing now is making it available to some people who have been displaced and who, we believe, could make a new life by using these lands differently. [*Crosstalk*]

We said what we are going to do with the citrus groves. We are not going to give land to plant citrus, because that is not economical. You get one crop from citrus; after the crop there is nothing to come until the next crop, so it has to be a large enough parcel that the return from the crop would be such that it could sustain you. We have come up with parcels of 50 acres or thereabouts and one farmer will get that and make a living doing his citrus farming. He could, probably, run some sheep under his citrus and so on and so on. How could you call that taking land out of the State? We are doing the opposite.

Mr. Dookeran: Vesting it.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am going to ignore him. We are changing state farming—instead of people picking oranges for the State, with all that goes with it—we are now going to create genuine citrus farmers. That is one component.

Where they were growing prawns in Orange Grove, we are going to advertise that for some entrepreneur, if one exists, to come forward and lease the farm. Maybe under a different arrangement it might be successful. Under Caroni (1975) Limited's arrangement, growing prawns for the State has been a disaster; that does not mean that prawn growing is a disaster, but, Mr. Speaker, you know and I know. Maybe I will ask my friend from Tunapuna to give us the story about the bull that worked for himself and was then asked to work for the Government. You know what happened then?

Mr. Imbert: "It ded!" [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We are now going to put that entity out for entrepreneurship; it might succeed beyond our wildest dreams. The same thing applies with the livestock and rice areas. The rice farmers are already operating. I do not hear them making all these kinds of allegations. [*Crosstalk*] Of course I know them very well; I put them out of the Nariva Swamp. Contrary to the lies you all were telling people; I went to court. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj was the lawyer and I went to court, as the Minister, because I was sued for putting them out of Nariva. People like you have been telling people all kinds of disgraceful things about me. You think I did not know? I sat in the box to be cross-examined for having declared the Nariva Swamp a protected area. Those are the facts: I declared Nariva Swamp a protected area and the rice farmers protested and took me to court. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, do you know what they told people in this country? That I was on the payroll of the rice farmers and they were bribing me; taking bribes; that is what they do; nasty politics. But I survived that; I can deal with that, because the record will show that I declared Nariva Swamp a protected area and expelled the rice farmers. Today, they are on land that Caroni used as a state farm and I have not heard any complaints from them, but they say no news is good news. [*Desk thumping*]

We did better. We said that we would change the rules and give those farmers free water. Because the returns are of such, we know that making it work would require some help from the Government, so rather than making them pay for water that the Water and Sewerage Authority is not putting out any money on, we told them that if they used water from the stream they would get it at no cost. They accuse us of all manner of evil, Mr. Speaker, rather than recognize that this is a major development in the country: allowing farmers to have water at no cost. No thanks for that. You do not hear about that, but you hear the complaints and

the misrepresentations of those who have an axe to grind. They come and tell us that we are taking land onto the State. We are putting state lands into the hands of private entrepreneurs, farmers; that is what this plan is doing. [*Desk thumping*] The Member said that this was an administrative document; a document which says that we are putting lands into the hands of experienced rice farmers using mechanical harvesters to harvest their rice, so that the economic cost would be better, economies of scale and so on. Do you think they do not know that? My friend from St. Augustine is an economist. My friend from St. Joseph is a banker; they know that. My friend from Tabaquite, temporarily, is a lawyer; they know that. [*Laughter*] But it is not good Opposition politics to support good Government action.

[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Valley: And they voted for the Bill!

8.45 p.m.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, you will hear more about Caroni (1975) Limited's lands as we go along because they will not stop. The Government has embarked upon the construction of a large number of houses across the country to treat with a problem which, again, we cannot deny exists and that is a shortage of housing units.

Some of Caroni (1975) Limited's lands will be brought into housing and as we do that, we expect to hear the inane murmur from those opposite—and like the Member for Chaguanas—of voter padding and house padding. I want to give him the assurance that we intend to ignore it absolutely. We are dealing with the issue of providing houses for people across the country.

In the national housing programme, there are about 17 areas that we have identified; class four soils, class five soils, and the odd piece of class three that will come into the housing programme. In fact, we are currently engaged in looking at building two or three new communities in areas, and by new communities I mean starting from scratch and building a whole new town somewhere in Central Trinidad because of where the land is to put probably 15,000—20,000 persons when everything is acquired. We cannot do that in Diego Martin, St. Joseph, or in San Fernando.

Mr. Speaker, we are not going to be like our colleagues who know what to do and would not do it and spend their time making the kinds of mumblings that we hear over there. They had the authority of Government to do it, the problems and

possibilities were there, these challenges are not from last night, last month or last year, they were there for quite some time. They spent six years in office and did other things and not this. It falls to us now to do it on behalf of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and while we respect their input and listen to what they have to say, at the end of the day the PNM Government will do what it thinks is in the best interest of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So when I come here in the not too distant future to ask for the House's support on the Housing Development Corporation Bill—I will give some more information afterwards—about what we are going to be doing with respect to the use of some of the Caroni (1975) Limited's lands for housing. After all the lands have gone into rice, housing and cocoa, at the end of the day we still have 32,000 acres of unallocated lands that would remain with the State for the time being.

What I thought I would have heard from you I did not. We are doing all these things, you do not agree with them, yet you have not given us a single idea as to what to do with one acre of the 32,000 acres of unallocated lands. Did we hear that? We told them we have allocated sugar, rice whatever, and we have 32,000 acres left, the debate is drawing to a close and we have not heard one suggestion from any of them to use one acre of that unallocated part. Instead we hear inane comments about pseudo intellectualism, and of it being administrative and not a plan. What does that really mean?

Mr. Dookeran: Perhaps the Member did not hear the point when I outlined the number of different proposals which can be utilized for land development.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Caroni (1975) Limited has had plans going way back like the "Spence Plan", the "Dookeran Plan", all kinds of plans. What it was missing was the political will to treat with the problem. [*Desk thumping*] And as we are doing that now, you are coming to tell me it is not a plan, it is an administrative document and I am saying that does not make sense. If you say I do not agree with your plan, I do not agree with your proposals or your actions, I can understand that, but how is it possible to separate it from the actions we are taking and say it is administrative? We are distributing assets; that is not administration, that is action.

You say you walk through Caroni and you do not feel anything. I do not know what your radar is like, but I am sure when we distribute housing lots, as we will, and I am part of the Cabinet and I know the number of hours my colleague worked with a team to come to the point where I can say to you now that in the not too distant future we will be distributing 6,000 housing plots in Caroni, and in

South/Central Trinidad, maybe then when you pass through you will feel the difference. When we distribute the farm lands to the farmers and they are running their own farms and they are not Caroni (1975) Limited's employees under union domination you will feel that; when we build industrial estates in Caroni and you see industries there and workers going to work in the industries, you will feel that; but now all we are doing is showing you the road map, saying this is the structure, this is our commitment we have promised you, and we have delivered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*)**:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with something that was said this evening which shows that hon. Members on that side have misled this nation. I want to talk about the Member for Diego Martin Central when he mentioned that there is some authority which exempts National Insurance Pension in the calculation of income for the purpose of qualification for old age pension.

Mr. Speaker, I went through the Laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Old Age Pensions Act, Chap. 32:02 says:

> "3(1) A person whose total income does not exceed the sum of four thousand five hundred dollars a year or such other sum that may be specified by Order of the Minister shall, if he satisfies the statutory conditions specified in section 4, be paid a pension at the monthly rate…"

When one looks at the three main areas where a person qualifies for old age pension it says:

> "4. (a) the person must have attained the age of sixty-five years;
>
> (b) the person must have been ordinarily resident in Trinidad and Tobago for the twenty years…"

I think it is 10 years now.

> "(c) the person must satisfy the Local Board that his total annual income does not exceed the amount referred to in section 3(1)."

Mr. Speaker, I will be the happiest person in Trinidad and Tobago if what the Member said is true, but it is totally untrue and I am putting it on record that the statute of our country is what I just read and the income when added together is called the income ceiling.

When one applies for pension, the first thing after filling in the form, one is asked for a certificate from the National Insurance Board. I would like the hon.

Minister to make a press release in the morning and let the country know—or maybe I will go on the radio in the morning and ask all these people who have been refused old age pension because of their national insurance contributions.

I will do that because we are tired in this House of people misleading the public and using their strength and brawn and shouting at people to get people to be afraid of them. The Member for Diego Martin West is a classic example of that. When he mentioned words like vindictive, spiteful, racial and discriminatory, this is what the PNM is about and they cannot tell me anything except that is why they destroyed the sugar industry. The Member mentioned the change of name and it does not mean anything, then why do it? Why not use Caroni (1975) Limited to distribute the lands? Why are you setting up two companies? There must be a reason for it.

When we look at the Bill before us, an "Act to provide for the vesting of the operational undertakings of Caroni (1975) Limited in another company and the vesting of the real estate undertakings of Caroni (1975) Limited and Orange Grove National Company Limited in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and to provide for the management of and for the development of those real estate undertakings", and when one looks at the definition of "appointed day" it means the day on which this Act comes into operation in accordance with section 3.

Mr. Speaker, for the last three years, the country has been confused and as a Member of Parliament people come to me for advice. They hear certain pronouncements made and want to know who they should go to. When they go to Caroni (1975) Limited, there is no such place; they are told it is shut down, there is no board, and when they go to the Estate Management Company they do not know what is going on and people are running to and fro in this country. And, today, we are debating the formation of these two companies.

Why mislead the country over the last few years? As far as I am concerned the appointed day has not yet come that this other company will replace Caroni (1975) Limited. Why did the Government mislead the people? Why did they not do like Michael Foote and talk to the people, and not put their foot in their mouths. Talk to the people and let them understand what is taking place. Nobody in this country knows what is happening to Caroni (1975) Limited, and we speak for the masses who come to us.

Mr. Speaker, what has happened here is something I will never forget. I was born and I grew up in Caroni and I understand what the people went through. When VSEP was being mooted and we had the hon. Member for Port of Spain

North/St. Ann's West telling people if they do not accept it they will be sent home, anyway.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh and I addressed hundreds of workers in Felicity and there were women who came with their children and they wanted to understand what the union was talking about. I asked them if they understood what VSEP is about, and told them if they accepted it, according to Rudy Indarsingh, it would be like accepting their death warrant, and it is like being fired. They cheered, but at the end of the meeting, people came to us in small groups and somebody from one of the groups asked me if he does not accept the VSEP and is fired if I would see about him and his children. Do you understand the fear that Government put our people through? They must never be forgiven for that.

Mr. Speaker, this is a reality and the people who have been sent home and are suffering are of the East Indian race and we have to talk about it. My friend from Laventille East/Morvant shouted across the floor saying: "If Mr. Rao was not a Indian we woulda bawl race." The Member for San Fernando East and his cohorts are like they are on a war. I want to put on record that East Indians and Mr. Rahael—I do not know where he belongs— are used to destroy the livelihood of the Indian people living in Central Trinidad. They did not use one of the other Ministers who are in the majority in the party, they used the Indians and this is something that is hurting the people.

It is like a big wake in Central and this "mamaguism" about people being happy is a total untruth. This is not the reality. The Member again misled this House about salaries and that they were offering people $150 a day and they did not accept.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you live close to the sugar industry and you know that is impossible and it is not true. Cane farmers—and I was one—pay by the tonnes to load and cut canes and take them out of the field. You know that very well, and to say they are paid $150 a day is totally untrue. Who will not work for $150 a day? CEPEP workers are paid $75 a day, how would someone work for $75 and not $150? That is because their information is inaccurate and they are trying to feed this country with inaccuracy and this must be stopped.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I go back to Caroni (1975) Limited, I want to answer the Member for Arouca North when he attacked us for appointing Senators when we were in office because I have been doing some examination of that issue. Why did the PNM not appoint candidates who lost their seats as

Senators? Do you know why? The candidates who lost were all East Indians. [*Interruption*] That is a fact. They were from Caroni East, Chaguanas, Tabaquite and St. Augustine. They had no need for them.

As a matter of fact, do you know there were no government-built schools south of Caroni? The denominational boards were the ones that built schools. The Canadian Mission for Indians (CMI) came to the assistance of the sugar workers and they were the ones mainly responsible for educating the people in Central and South Trinidad.

The point I am making is that the discrimination as admitted by the Member for Diego Martin West; vindictive, spiteful, racial and discriminatory could never have been said at a more opportune time and that is why we are angry with our hon. Minister. She is being used to destroy what remains of the people in Central Trinidad and that is why people are angry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I went to a calypso show and when they sang about "pitnaa" it made the original "pitnaa" look bad, or "good", because this is what the country has come to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, do not use that word, and I will tell you why, I—

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact is that the word "neemakharam" is in our handout as a word that is unparliamentary and the hon. Member for Diego Martin West used that word twice. [*Crosstalk*]

I was talking about the art form and Trinidad and Tobago calypso is an art form. Last Carnival season I quoted Cro Cro's calypso and mentioned the merits of his calypso, his racial divide, and this year I attended the opening of the tent and most of the calypsos were focused on hon. Ministers and we did not write the calypsos for them; that is the truth and the reality out there. So when Members say that Caroni (1975) Limited's former workers are happy, they are not speaking the truth. The fact is that they received $50,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what can one do with $50,000 today when there is no other income? The money will fritter away in a couple of weeks. People are now looking for work but the average age of former Caroni (1975) Limited's workers is well beyond 50. When last did Caroni (1975) Limited hire workers? That must have been 30 years ago because they had VSEP, people were going home, and when staff retired they were never replaced because they were cutting down on the labour cost and so on. So the average age of these people is over 50 and even

if they are trained in computer or what have you, the fact is, they will not return to the sugar cane fields.

When Dr. Eric Williams wrote his book he described what happened in the sugar industry in the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries when, after the abolition of slavery, the former slaves who were tired of the sugar cane industry moved into Port of Spain and the small towns and left the hard work for the immigrants: Indians, Portuguese, Chinese, because they were needed in the sugar industry. So we must respect the heritage.

When the East Indians were brought into this country, they chose to remain in the sugar industry, they did not do like the others and run away, they stayed and fought it out. Do you know that this Government encourages incompetence? This is so sad. People worked hard. All 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock they would take their children to the fields; they walked to work, cut the canes, loaded the carts and returned home. They were industrious people. They bought land and built their houses, and now this Government is penalizing these people for being able to own a house. And I can challenge anybody that over 90 per cent of sugar workers own their houses, so that lacuna is about something else, and when it happens you will see what I am talking about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am emotional about it because I know about it, and my parents passed through that and if they were alive, they would not have qualified for another piece of land from the Sugar Industry and Labour Welfare Company. They would have had six children who had assisted them in cutting cane and they would not have qualified, because as I mentioned before Caroni (1975) Limited did not hire workers for about 30 years. So this is the discrimination, this is the spite, race and vindictiveness of the PNM. I agree with Dr. Rowley; this is what the PNM stands for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want you to remember this and if the Government will apologize and say it will look at the land distribution in another way I will agree, but we cannot agree that Caroni (1975) Limited land should be given to rice farmers. Who are these people? Was there a distribution plan? Was a land use policy laid in this House? That is why we are angry. If you had done like Michael Foote and explained to the people, we would appreciate that, but nothing like that happened. Instead you are coming piecemeal with this and when we talk, it is said we are racial, we are this, we are that, but we have to defend the people who need our representation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe if this sort of language in Parliament does not stop we are going to reap some really ugly rewards. When the Member for

Laventille East/Morvant can say if Rao was not an Indian we would have shouted race, that had me thinking, and my mind ran on the former people who lost the election in Caroni East and Caroni Central and were never made Senators. They were used election after election and I remember Indar Persad and the others were never on a board but every five years they would throw their hat in the ring hoping to win. The fact is they lost each time and the leaders of the PNM never saw it fit to make them Senators and I am proud that our leader nominated persons from the East-West Corridor—who would appear not to have been traditional UNC Members of Parliament—into the Senate to give it a balance and they were angry because they could not do the same.

When one reads the Indian Diaspora of Trinidad and Tobago, it is recorded where it was a deliberate ploy to keep the East Indians out of the politics of the country. History has recorded that, and we must stop these people in their tracks now. Look at the fallout of not having Caroni (1975) Limited, and this is a dilemma. Is there a Caroni (1975) Limited or is there not, who is responsible for what? To whom must we turn?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the sugar cane fields close to the rural districts have not been cleaned or taken care of over the last three years. There is a mosquito problem as never before all over Central Trinidad, there are sand flies in droves as the sun goes down, cockroaches, rodents; we are seeing the return of scorpions and centipedes all because of dirty drains, and the Minister of Works and Transport comes here to talk. It is the sins of the PNM, by not cleaning these drains the water settles and does not enter the Gulf of Paria as it is supposed to.

We understand the fallout of Caroni (1975) Limited and we talk the truth and we are not sour grapes. If the truth offends, so be it. I make no apologies because this Government is bent on destroying the people and the Member for Diego Martin West said it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have people coming to this Parliament and misleading the public. I would like to ask this Government to treat the people like humans; let us not forget that we are responsible for the people. There are diseases in this country, such as dengue and when we look at what is taking place with the neglect of the former Caroni (1975) Limited lands, it is cause for concern.

Miss Seukeran: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I simply want to ask the Member for Chaguanas two questions: firstly, he said something to the effect of which I understood to mean that the word “neemakharam” had been deemed unparliamentary language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is unparliamentary to use it.

Miss Seukeran: Could I ask why Sir, since the word "neemakharam" means one to whom salt is forbidden?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member—

Miss Seukeran: May I ask the second question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, go to the second question. It is listed as unparliamentary in the book.

Miss Seukeran: It means one to whom salt is forbidden, and therefore it should not be unparliamentary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know what it means.

Miss Seukeran: Secondly, does the Member for Chaguanas mean that the rats, mosquitoes, cockroaches and the blocked drains that exist in San Fernando West are to be deemed and called by other names since he is saying that they only apply in particular areas which he was talking about are predominantly East Indian areas? And because they exist in San Fernando West, Diego Martin, or in Port of Spain they must be called by another name? Is that what I understand him to be saying?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to go back to what was said prior to our coming here today and I quote from the *Daily Express* December 24, 2004.

> "President General of the All Trinidad General and Sugar Workers Union (AT&TGWU) Rudranath Indarsingh, yesterday warned ex-workers of Caroni (1975) Ltd to be wary of promises made by the Minister in the Finance Ministry, Christine Sahadeo."

9.15 p.m.

> "Indarsingh was responding to comments by Sahadeo that before the end of the year…"

That is last year.

> "former workers of Caroni (1975) Ltd would receive correspondence about lands they would receive as part of their enhanced Voluntary Separation of Employment Package (VSEP).
>
> Sahadeo said within the first half of next year, distribution of the agricultural lands would begin.

> She said within the next two years the residential, plots would also be distributed. When Caroni closed on August 2003, 4,766 workers applied for residential plots while 7,105 applied for land to use for agricultural purposes.
>
> Indarsingh said he had a meeting with the chairman of the Caroni board, Jerry Hospedales, and its acting chief executive officer (CEO) Deosaran Jagdeo on Tuesday.
>
> He said when he asked them about matters relating to the distribution of lands they had no information.
>
> Indarsingh said his union wanted to know exactly when the ex-workers could actually move into the lands and what were the duration and cost of the leases?
>
> He therefore warned the ex-workers of Caroni 'to be wary in this Yuletide season of people pretending to be Santa Clause and go ho, ho, ho."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what I am speaking about. Whom do we believe? Here we have Jerry Hospedales and his team, not knowing of the promises made by the hon. Minister, and this has been going on, to and fro, for the last three years. The hon. Minister came into the constituency of Chaguanas and attempted to walk about, but it was aborted because people were asking questions. I made a press release on the matter and in this press release I asked the question to the hon. Minister: What is this I have been reading about? It was the same article that the Minister promised for the end of the year. I asked: Which year? Is it 2004, 2005, 2006? Because this end-of-the-year thing has been recurring for the last few years.

Why are we treating the formers workers of Caroni (1975) Limited as puppets? In the document that was circulated, they had the temerity to publish the refusal of people who applied for land. They said they did not qualify; they have to re-apply. Are we taking these people for pawns? The Member for Diego Martin West said, "this is political and we are treating it because we are politically hurt". That is not the truth. The truth is that you are not treating the people as human beings. When you could look at every clause in this and you could speak about it for hours—because there is no truth; you are not levelling with the people; you are talking about housing schemes; about land to be developed for a village; a community. Where? How?

I want to put on record that I have no problem with that. People need houses, fine. They need plots of land, fine. But who are these people? You have already disqualified former Caroni (1975) Limited workers, because if they own a house, they would not be getting another plot of land. Where are these people coming from? Are they coming from St. Vincent and the Grenadines? Where are they coming from? Are they coming from Guyana? I am concerned, because it happened before. History has recorded that after the 1958 federal election when the PNM was soundly beaten, what did the then Premier do? He imported voters into Laventille, Point Fortin and La Brea, and they are now the second generation of Grenadians and St. Vincentians. This could happen again! You are talking about a whole new community in Chaguanas. Yes, we have land there, and we are not worried about that. You have to bring many communities to win seats there. But what is going to happen when you bring these people there?

You have misled the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers, because common sense would tell you that the people who are homeless and landless in this country are people who live in the slums that were created by the PNM, whether it is Maloney or Laventille. They created the slums! The PNM is guilty of that, and I make no apology for saying that. They keep their people in a handout syndrome: "I would give you a CEPEP job paying $70 a day or a URP job paying $60 a day and I would keep you there on a leash and at election time I would unleash you and you go and vote for the PNM." That is their legacy! They treat their people terribly, and we would not stand by and let our supporters be treated like that. You are penalizing people for their competence and allowing people who are incompetent to benefit from the state resources.

When you look at the pension system, you would see that people who have worked are being penalized because they get less money than the people who never worked and qualify for old age pension. This Government is about giving handouts to our people and they want this country to develop? If this Government does not wake up and try to treat people as they ought to be treated, there will be problems. I am sorry for the Member for San Fernando West. Maybe she was expecting me to attack her, but I would not. She is a harmless politician in the scheme of things. But that question about mosquitoes, I live in Chaguanas and I am the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas and I blame the neglect of the cane fields, and so on, for the mosquitoes. But if it is a national problem, then she should be speaking to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, her colleague, the Minister of Health. What is he doing to deal with the mosquitoes in San Fernando West?

Miss Seukeran: No, it is the rain.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Does it rain all the time?

Mr. Singh: It is the ozone layer.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: You blame everybody else. You play a blame game. You blame everybody else for your incompetence. We would not sit here and allow this to go unchallenged.

We talk about sport, and I want to put on the record that when these so-called communities are being built, I would like to see—the Member was a little presumptuous. Yes, the Government will win. It has the majority. They would bulldoze their way through the Parliament. Whatever we say, as the Member for Diego Martin West alluded to, is of no consequence. They will go ahead; will pass the legislation; form their companies. The management of all the resources will now go to their friends. The Member for Diego Martin West accepted that; he knows that. He said that when they come back here to build hundreds of houses, he hopes that the Parliament would support them. Yes, we will support, but we want to know where these houses are going to be built. Who will be the recipients? Will it be planned properly, not like La Horquetta, and so on? Are we going to have playgrounds, recreational space for our people? These are the questions we must ask.

The hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is grumbling, but he has perpetrated an act of assault on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and they would never forgive him for that. [*Desk thumping*] I know! You get up here and boast—and I want to repeat it for him as he is here—$50,000, as read by my colleague, $20,000—big money. He earns that in his stores maybe on a daily basis so he does not understand the plight of the poor people. You and I understand it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we came from very humble backgrounds and we understand what poverty is.

It was said at a function recently, where the principal of Presentation College reminded us that there are still children—and this would not happen in Port of Spain, but it happened in Central Trinidad—who come to school who still cannot buy books and he was asking people who were listening to him to sponsor a child to the tune of $1,000. You were there, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I do not want to bring you in the debate, but you were there. It showed that the people of Chaguanas—and I know it is new because I meet with the principal very regularly and this is the first time he mentioned it for a long time. Maybe when we were young, this happened. But it is happening again because of the way you have

treated with the people from Caroni (1975) Limited. This would continue to get worse and worse by the day, because there is nothing for them. [*Interruption*]

I want to repeat and do not charge me for repeating, because he again opened his mouth. I could bet him $1 million to $1—his $1 million to my $1—that the reason there are no sugar workers is because it is not true that they are getting $150 a day. It is not true! Your agents, Raffique Shah and others, are saying that for you to hear, but sugar workers are paid by the tonnage. How could you say $150 a day? The Member for Arouca North cannot cut three tonnes of cane a day to make $150. I just used him as an example. But there are people there who cannot do that. And it is $50 a day now to cut a tonne of cane, and with the kind of cane that this Government is allowing people to produce—there is no help, no froghopper assistance; no drainage; the canes are now weak. Somebody alluded to it earlier in the debate. You have to cut, maybe 200 feet, of cane to get one tonne. So people will not go there. This is the reality of the situation and you have to understand the sugar industry and what is taking place.

I want to put on record again—and I hope that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West would not say—well, they could, because they are accustomed to misleading people; I almost used the word "lie", but I know it is unparliamentary—that the government of the United National Congress never, as a Cabinet, agreed to close down Caroni (1975) Limited. There was a proposal made to us—and we have the chairman of the committee there—but it never reached to Cabinet. There could be 100 proposals. As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I know you were a minister for a short while—we got proposals on a daily basis. I do not know if the Member for Diego Martin Central would get. Is that not true, Minister? We get information from everybody out there who believes that they have good ideas.

Mr. Valley: But the proposals came from that area.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: That is all right. I do not know if they run your Government, but they definitely did not run the UNC. A proposal was made, yes. Government set up many committees. If you go into all the ministries, there are thousands of reports by a thousand committees; commissions of enquiry, you name them. Was any action taken by the PNM on these commissions of enquiry? What has happened? Maybe one out of 100 was reacted upon.

So maybe it is the same thing here. Maybe we would have acted, we do not know. But the fact is that we did not act. Then everything happened in such a quick time. You all know the demise of the UNC coincided with that, and nothing

happened after that. That is history. We cannot change it. Maybe we would have liked to change it but we just cannot, and that is why the country will now be told the truth.

I have recommended that the speech by the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph be published for the people to see the quality of what was said here this evening, because this was the truth that came out. Again, I know the national media would not publish a word from the Member of St. Joseph. They would not, because you control the media, or what is left of it. You destroyed NBN. This country is going downhill quickly and we on this side will not sit by and allow that to happen.

Another thing that is happening—and I would like to ask—well, I do not know who to ask; somebody in charge of what we are forming here. Since I was a little boy I have seen poor families go on the river edges and plant peas, corn, some eddoes, cassava and so on, and they would just use that for their subsistence. Do you know, this Government encouraged somebody claiming to work for the Estate Management and Business Development Company, which is not yet formed, which is here before us—the appointed day has not yet come. They claimed they were guards from this company, and you a lawyer, understand what we are talking. These are illegal acts. These people claimed to represent this company which is not yet born. What did they do? They went into the poor communities and cut down cassava trees, peas trees, corn trees, and have poor women crying.

Why are you doing this to us? We have been doing this for 20—30 years. It was not as though they went into Caroni (1975) Limited land. In the case of my constituency, they were along the banks of the river. They went in there and cut down these trees. People called me, crying. Unfortunately it was a Friday and I was here in Parliament and I did not visit them until the next day. But the fact is that these are the acts that people are becoming fed-up of in Central Trinidad. They are being terrorized, so to speak.

Whether we like it or not, Caroni (1975) Limited has been part of us. It was alluded to by the Member for Diego Martin West. We grew up living around Caroni (1975) Limited. As a matter of fact, we learnt the rules of not stealing people's cane because of the estate constables in those days. They were very strict men. You could not do anything.

The point I am making is that we cannot wipe that from our history, and to come now and treat the people as callously as they are doing, something is wrong.

I am not talking about the VSEP. That has gone. I am talking about the future. I want the Cabinet to rethink that situation about the land going to the people, where they say if you owned a house before. That is not fair. Do you know what would happen? We have 4,000 applications and only 1,000 qualify, because the other 3,000 would have a house. So you have to bring in 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000 from elsewhere.

Who would they bring? This is the question that I am asking. As I said, one thing I am going to do tomorrow morning is to announce on the radio stations that everybody whose application for old age pension has been refused because they receive national insurance pensions—and I am asking all my colleagues to call radio stations—to let these people go tomorrow morning and the other days to have their pensions given to them. If they are turned away, I am holding the Members on that side responsible. Two people spoke and both of them said the same thing—the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin Central. This is why they have this country in such jeopardy.

The Member for Diego Martin West spoke about 1975. They did the country a favour by accepting the reins of Caroni (1975) Limited. Was the Government of the day forced to do that? Were they held at gunpoint? Why did they do it? And why now, just 29 years later, they come and dismantle it? I will tell you why. I want to correct the untruths that this Government is telling people, and I want to warn them that you cannot compare Caroni (1975) Limited with, let us say, VSEP. While we admit that Caroni (1975) Limited received sums of money every year—I am not saying it is right—at least they used to have by-products. Trinidad and Tobago exported sugar. It sustained the rum industry; it sustained agriculture because of the fact that they used bagasse to do a little reboxing; and the other industries that are tied to the sugar industry. At least there was some input by the sugar industry.

Now we have CEPEP, which is not the same and more money is being spent on CEPEP on an annual basis. But what do we have to show for it? If the CEPEP does not come out for a week, it is as if Trinidad and Tobago never had a CEPEP gang, because what they are doing is not sustainable. They clean the mountain edges. I came in this Parliament and I put it on record that what CEPEP workers are doing, we would pay for it. I reported an incident here. I am sure the Member for Arouca North would remember. I went to Caura in April. The sun was very hot and I saw CEPEP workers cleaning about 30 feet up the mountainside. Friends in my car heckled me and said: "Ah, boy, you see PNM fellas doing good work." I explained to them—and I came to this House and gave the same explanation—that after

April and May the sun would dry up the dirt; make it very porous and sandy, and when the first rains come, it would create floods. So said, so done. But they would not learn. The same thing has happened, going up to Santa Cruz and elsewhere. You cannot interfere with the terrain. They had the mountain edge as clean as that table. Everything was cut; all the shrubs. They shaved it, and when the rains came, it created that landslide. They have been warned. They have done the same to the sugarcane fields.

I want to tell you something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I believe you went to a good school. When cane is planted, it does not matter how much it rains, the sugarcane fields would act as brakes for the water. It would brake the volume of water—I owned cane lands; I cut cane; I did everything with cane and we hardly had floods—and that water would stay there for days and then it would trickle into the rivers.

What has happened now? They destroyed the cane. You try all kinds of craziness, and now the water would come and just cascade and cause the floods. They say it is too far to go back now, but the fact is that if we encourage this kind of behaviour—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. A. Nanan*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I would like to spend a few more minutes talking about the social decay of our communities by the action of the Government as far as the dismantling of Caroni (1975) Limited is concerned. No matter what they tell us, they misled this country. I remember in August 2001, when the then Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj and Raffique Shah, misled this country. They said the rum at Caroni (1975) Limited was worth $1 billion. I worked at Caroni (1975) Limited as an excise officer and when that rumour was being bandied about, I met the customs officer who was stationed at the Caroni (1975) Limited distillery and, being a Minister, I requested through the Comptroller of Customs that they do a stocktaking exercise. I did this on my own. I asked for a favour and they did it. They would have the cask, and what we did as customs officers was to dip and calculate the quantity of rum in each cask. If you know about the rum industry you would know that if there is a slight leak, the cask will run dry. There were

about 1,000 or more casks. Thirty per cent were dry, some with very small volumes. When the calculation was made, it was just over $290,000 worth of rum.

When people are fed these lies, these innuendoes, these half-truths, and they believe that, we would say it is politics, and all is fair in politics, but when you destroy the integrity of a country—it might be the UNC, the PNM; it might be anybody—once you destroy institutions, you get people to lose confidence in the system and the country would suffer.

I am warning this Government—as the Member for Diego Martin West boasted about Michael Foote—let us level with our people. Let them know what is taking place. I am sure that had this Government and the particular Minister levelled with the people and said, "Look, this is what is going to happen and we ask for your support", they might have had it even from the Opposition. But up to this day we are not sure of what is happening. Where is the land use policy? Where are the houses going to be built? What is going to happen with the land? We do not know.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a point that I find very amusing. I read the Bill before us and it states:

> "'Minister' means the Minister to whom responsibility for the Manager is assigned;
>
> 'Manager' means Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited…
>
> 'Company' means Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited…"

So who is the Minister responsible for Caroni (1975) Limited as it is now?

Mr. Rahael: The hon. Senator.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Then how is it that the Member for Arouca North was negotiating cane prices with the unions? [*Interruption*] But it is here!

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, through you, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources receives the subvention for the farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is responsible for paying the cane farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is responsible for paying for 60 per cent of the fertilizer. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is responsible for paying 100 per cent of froghopper control.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is responsible for the scales. We pay for transport—$25 per tonne; $10 per tonne weighing charges. We do agricultural access roads—$5 million.

So if it is that he really wants to know what I am responsible for, I am responsible for the cane farmers.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, this is getting "curiouser" and "curiouser". We have no Caroni (1975) Limited; we have an Estate Management Company; we have the Sugar Manufacturing Company, and then you come to this Parliament and debate and ask for support and then blame people when we ask questions.

The Member for Diego Martin West got up and pontificated that he was Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; that he was in charge of Caroni (1975) Limited. I feel he was sending a message to the Government, you know. When he started, I thought he was very remorseful, as if he regretted what has happened to Caroni (1975) Limited. He talked about emotions, and so on. But today what do we have? We have a Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who has no ministry; we have the ministry in charge of Caroni (1975) Limited, as was decreed by the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. This is the whole reason for the country not moving forward.

This is not the first time I have to come to this Parliament and ask who is responsible for what, because the country would like to know. If, as the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas, people come to me and ask me to direct a letter—that is why sometimes when we write questions to the Speaker, we just put "Minister", because we do not know what is going on. We do not know who is in charge of what. It is confusing.

So we have the hon. Minister who is getting all the reputation for destroying Caroni (1975) Limited, yet the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources claims that he is responsible for Caroni (1975) Limited canes. What is the difference? He said he was responsible for cane. I hope that was not used as obscene language.

The fact is that we do not know. Who grinds the cane?

Mr. Rahael: The Sugar Manufacturing Company.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It is getting "curiouser" and "curiouser". So one man is responsible for the cane, the next one for grinding it, the next one is seeing about froghopper and the next one is seeing about dismantling Caroni (1975) Limited.

That is the confusion that is taking place in this country and that is what is passing for governance.

I do not want to be too long again, but I want to talk to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. I have seen that facilities are granted to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and I have no problem with that at all, but from my previous knowledge—I do not know which one of the Ministers now; if it is Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; if it is the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West; if it is the hon. Senator—I understand that the cricket ground at Gilbert Park on which I played many a cricket game, has been given as a lease to Mr. John-Williams, and five bungalows owned by Caroni (1975) Limited. I have no problem with that, but if you are giving the resources, be equitable.

I want to say that Mr. John-Williams has done a good job with the Wanderers Cricket Club—I put that on record—but all I am asking for is equity. If you could give Mr. John-Williams and we have 16 other clubs, they, too, should be given some sort of equity in treatment. Maybe we cannot get five bungalows, but, at least Preysal is nearby. Out of the five, you could give Preysal one. What is happening in the country right now, you might be aware that we have many professionals from the islands playing cricket in Trinidad and Tobago, and when they come to a particular club, that club would have to find housing, and so on. So if the Government or the Estate Management Company could assist, I would like to see equity in treatment.

I have played and frequented these venues: Ste. Madeleine staff club, which is in a terrible state; that could be refurbished and given to some responsible club. The Civilians Staff Club, the same golf course, tennis court and swimming pool, I believe that if these are divested—to use that word—we could have better quality facilities in the country.

When you look at this document before us, you would notice that in various constituencies—for example, when I look at my own constituency, I see Endeavour is going to have two malls. I am very worried when I hear that in Endeavour, which is north of the Divali Nagar site, two malls would be built. I want the Minister to tell me who will own these malls. Is it the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West?

Mr. Rahael: You would have a chance to bid for it.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Again, the whole question of arrogance. I am just asking a question, because I know you like the place. I understand that there is going to be seven cinemas built there. I am the Member of Parliament, I would know.

These seven cinemas will be built north of the Divali Nagar site, by a famous company that is owned by the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Rahael: You should be happy—

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Yes, I got the money; I got $40,000 a day!

This is Government resources; this is Government property, as said by the Member for Diego Martin West. These are state resources and when two malls will be built in the constituency of Chaguanas, at least the Member of Parliament should know who would be building these malls. The community that the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about is also going to be built in the Chaguanas constituency. I firmly believe that we have to look at what is taking place in our constituencies.

I am sure you would have read in yesterday's newspaper that the Roopnarine family has migrated. I came to this Parliament and I spoke about it. With all the money that we have in this country, we cannot have law and order. Why? Because of the same callous way in which they treat with the problems, and come before this Parliament and treat with them as if everything you do—the Government could talk, the Opposition could talk, and you would have your way and you would continue to mislead this country.

Maybe it is a dream, but I, personally, would support any government that would improve the quality of life of people in this country; but do it with equity and let people know what is taking place. If you read this document, they are going to build houses all over the place. I have no problem with that, but I repeat, is there a land use plan that was brought to this Parliament that I do not know about? How would Caroni (1975) Limited lands be distributed? Was it said here and I do not know about it? Is this a document that is official?

Mr. Valley: Yes.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: How do we know? You could lay anything in Parliament. Was this debated?

Mr. Valley: We are doing that now.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: This is what passes for government and the incompetence of this Government that is creating problems in this country. What we have here is a Post-Caroni (1975) Limited, a Comprehensive and Integrated Development

Plan. Is this the policy of the Government? Would the junior Minister of Finance care to make a statement that this is an official document?

Mr. Valley: Of course, it is an official document.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: All right, I take your word for it.

Mr. Valley: Yes, this is an official document; it is Cabinet-approved; it is the plan; it is laid in the Parliament; it is official.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: So this would be made public. I am glad the Member has put his mouth into it and claimed it as official policy, because when you look at this, there are many areas that could be debated here. For example, four sites providing 2,042 upper- and middle income residential lots to be developed by the EMBD at Caroni Savannah Road in the constituency of Chaguanas; Egypt Village, the constituency of Chaguanas; Waterloo and Beaucarro Road. I do not believe it!

Mr. Valley: You do not believe it?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: No, I do not.

Mr. Valley: Why?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: You have to convince me. You have to tell me what you are doing.

The point I am making is that when you read this document, it is far-fetched. This is, again, to mislead the population, and I am putting it on the record that this would never happen. I want to take my seat now, but I want to let the hon. Minister, who was used to pilot this Bill—as I said before, as a good general, the Prime Minister—I do not know if the Member for Diego Martin Central had anything to do with it; it was a good manoeuvre. They used the likes of Mr. Jarrette Narine, the Member for Arouca North, Mrs. Christine Sahadeo and Mr. John Rahael, to destroy the lives of thousands of people in Central Trinidad—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, let me just say—

Mr. Speaker: Are you giving way?

Mr. Valley: Yes, I asked him to give way.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I did not hear that.

Mr. Valley: I am asking you now. Let me just say that before I left the investment portfolio, I was involved in this.

Mr. Sharma: Not before you left, before you were removed.

Mr. Valley: Whatever. Before I was removed from the investment portfolio I was involved with this with my colleague, Minister Rahael. So your whole thesis is incorrect. As a matter of fact, Mr. Indarsingh would tell you that I am his very good friend, because he knew from the beginning that we were on a good track.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: You know, I do not want to believe because I never saw this in public. Well, I am glad that people are sharing the responsibility for this, because in my mind and the minds of the people who support us in Central Trinidad, we believe that the Prime Minister has used people of Indian and other origins, not the mainstay of the PNM—because whether we like it or not, the country is divided and polarized by politics. We have the Afro-Trinidadians on one side and the Indo-Trinidadians on the other side, with a sprinkling here and there, and we have—

Mr. Valley: That is what you must not encourage and you as a responsible leader—

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It is the history of the country.

Mr. Valley: But you have to change that. That is your responsibility. Whenever you get up here and talk about race, you are doing injustice—

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Why was somebody else not used? I might be wrong but I firmly believe—

Mr. Valley: I just told you I was involved.

Mr. R. Ramsaran: It is the first time you are saying it in public. I do not buy that. So I am putting it on the record that the hon. Leader of Government Business said that the hon. Minister has been used to betray the people from Central Trinidad. I would like to add my voice to that and to let people be careful of "mammagism". For example, when the Minister for Diego Martin West said he was in good company, when people would fall for this—not that I am saying that people of Indian origin should not join the PNM and vice versa, what I am saying is that, do not allow yourselves to be used. When this happens, history will record what you have done, and this is something that we must be very wary of.

I am warning the hon. Minister to be careful and to think twice. Not that we are threatening anybody, but when she came to Chaguanas I know it was a very rough ride that she had in Felicity. It was not planned at all by any politician, and I would like to put on record, after we heard what we heard today and we go to

the public meetings and inform the people of what has happened, I do not know what could happen.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*)**:** Mr. Speaker, it is the first time when we are sitting so late that dinner would be served at 10 o'clock. I hope it was not a plan by the PNM to get us hungry and cause us to leave, because in the defence of the people we will stay here with or without food.

As I listened to colleagues on both sides, I could not help but question some of the contributions made. I think sometimes when one is forced to speak that person may say things that he or she had not intended to. I picked up that from the Member for Diego Martin East. The Member for Diego Martin East asked the question a few times: Why are the workers at Caroni (1975) Limited being treated differently? Why are they being given land, house, extra money, et cetera? Then this was followed by the Member for Diego Martin West, who went on to talk about anti-Indian, anti-Shiva, anti-Hindu. He began to talk about Christine Sahadeo, a Senator, the Minister who moved this Bill, pretending to indicate that the PNM loves Indians.

Why is that? In fact, it is on public record that the black caucus within the PNM has been fighting the three "S's"—one being Christine Sahadeo, Satish and, I think, Saith might have been the other one. Why did that come out? Why did a senior government minister have to bring that up this evening? It was because the Caroni issue demonstrates without a doubt, the racist agenda of the PNM. That cannot be hidden.

Looking at this matter in front of us today, one has to reflect a little: How did we come into this country? The Africans came to work on the slave plantations as slaves and they were followed by the East Indians who came under a similar arrangement, so that the sugar plantations are very important to both races in the country and equally important to the economy of the country. In fact, as I listened to the Member for Diego Martin West talking about the Indians in the PNM—Kamaluddin Mohammed, whom they professed was a great minister, but was never suitable to act as Prime Minister of this country; his only fault was being Indian. For 2001, 2002, 2003, Christine Sahadeo and the likes, could not be found. There was no room for Indians. In 2004, when the racist agenda started to be crystal clear, Christine Sahadeo was found.

Hon. Sahadeo: If the Member would give way. I would like to state that I took up office in early 2003—just for the record.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Minister indicated she was found a little earlier. But again, it was to satisfy the racist agenda for absolutely nothing. Because when you look at it, Indians could not be found. When you look opposite, where are the Indian candidates? When will you see an Indian fighting St. Ann's East or Laventille West, or Diego Martin? Indians do not live in Port of Spain?

You see, the PNM played this game tonight, hoping that when they talk about Caroni, the Indian element will arise. Because look at where they have placed the Indians. The Members for Diego Martin West and East brought it out tonight. It was very instructive. They brought it out to show that the PNM loves Indians, too. But look at the treatment. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of WASA was removed, a Commonwealth scholarship winner; his only fault being Indian. The appointment of the person at the Estate Management Company is an Indian because this is Caroni. The advertisements of Trinidad and Tobago paid for by the State do not carry any Indian, but do you know when they were advertising Caroni, they found one? So you want to "lick up" the Indian, and then the PNM wants to play the race card: "You see them across there, we will get them to talk race. We will not feed them in the night; get them to talk race." But in the PNM, they found Occah Seapaul, made her Speaker of this House. Her only qualification was Indian, to strike a balance, and months after, she was locked up. Ralph Maraj followed.

So you see, when the Members on that side are in the PNM, they are great. When Dr. Vincent Lasse left, all kinds of nasty stories were said about him by the PNM. He sold out for two "doubles" and a "Li'l Boy". Li'l Boy was a soft drink made by Solo, because Solo identifies with Indians. They did not say Pepsi or Coca Cola—that is too international—they had to go with Solo.

Selwyn Richardson was with the PNM. You see, the Member for Diego Martin East was not carded to speak, but he had to get up in defence. He talked about his grandfather in the plantations and his father worked. But suddenly you see the Member for Diego Martin West very rich. Where did the richness come from? The lifestyle of half of the Members opposite has changed. It is the Treasury at work, working for them; getting their hands on it on every occasion.

Karl Hudson-Phillips, a member of the PNM, where is he today? Why did he leave the PNM? Selwyn Richardson was murdered. Was he murdered by agents of the PNM?

Mr. Speaker: I think we have heard that point already. Could you return now to the Bill, please?

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Diego Martin West spoke, there was no intervention by you, and he said the same thing 14 times.

Mr. Speaker: Please, stop. I am telling you, either you come back to the Bill or I will have to rule. You spent about—let us see—

Mr. C. Sharma: Four minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Not quite four minutes; six minutes. And I think you have made the point. Move on.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, on that side it is one rule and on this side it is another rule. I will go with the ruling but I am making my point—it is the first time I have spoken about Karl Hudson-Phillips, one time I have spoken about Selwyn Richardson and I have not yet spoken about ANR Robinson. I cannot make the points that you want me to make, you know. I have points that I wish to make, and if I am going to be told—

Mr. Speaker: And I am here to determine whether you are relevant or irrelevant, and if I find you are irrelevant, I would ask you to take your seat. So I am asking you, please, to come back to the Bill before us.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to obtain your courtesy to speak in this House. Secondly, if I am responding to what Members said, how will I determine? When will I know when I am supposed to make four points to a point made opposite, or six points? I do not understand it!

The Member for Diego Martin East talked about workers at Caroni (1975) Limited being treated differently and I am suggesting the reason they made it an issue was to show that the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited who were largely of East Indian stock, have been treated nicely. But that is not true. The Member for Diego Martin West indicated that we only mean Indian, but we do not. Whoever the workers are, the children of Caroni, whether East Indians, Africans, Chinese, White—and look at what is happening today. Of all the programmes the Minister indicated, they are not benefiting.

When you look at CEPEP, no Caroni worker got a contract from CEPEP. The Member for Diego Martin West talked about the port. Hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted there. No retrenchment. No Caroni treatment. And the workers are not the children of Caroni. He spoke about WASA. Hundreds of millions of dollars are going down the drain. Again, the workers are not representing the children of Caroni. He spoke about the Public Transport Service Corporation. Again, it does not represent the children of Caroni.

Let us see how they treated with Caroni (1975) workers. We are seeing people in Caroni, having worked for 30—40 years, getting a pension of less than $300 per year, which is equivalent to $25 per month. The Member for Diego Martin West indicated that those were negotiated. You see, workers in Caroni (1975) Limited are treated differently from every other state sector. The same does not obtain in Petrotrin, WASA, T&TEC, Port Authority, because there are less children from Caroni at these institutions.

Again, it is a clear act of discrimination. We saw another group of workers, $187; another group, $453; another group, $167. In fact, the highest annual pension for the Caroni worker is $46,000 per annum. When a Minister throws a party, it cost him more than $46,000—a drink-up to fool people, costing more than $50,000, and here the annual pension is $46,000.

Mr. Valley: What is your pension?

Mr. C. Sharma: My pension is not important. With the PNM, I "ain't go" live to enjoy it. With the PNM many of us would not live to enjoy it.

Caroni (1975) Limited has done many things in this country. One of their great success stories is in the area of housing. The PNM is using the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited to carry out a number of housing projects, but one of Caroni's strengths was in the area of housing, through the Sugar Welfare Industry Board and not a single contract was given to them; not a single parcel of land under this new plan has been given to them. In fact, the housing did not come under the Sugar Welfare Industry, you know, it came many years before the origins of the PNM.

So here it is, that you are getting rid of Caroni (1975) Limited, and the point has been made that the only reason you have gotten rid of Caroni (1975) Limited is to satisfy your racial agenda, that is, to "lick" up the Indian base so they would have control—no other reason. In another place with 15 workers, you caused a licence to be issued overnight. In all the other industries—in LIAT we have just pumped $110 million; in BWIA, millions of dollars, and here it is, where you have 100,000 persons involved directly and indirectly—[*Interruption*] Do not pretend you do not know the meaning of it. It means that for every Caroni worker, he has a family, a spouse, children, grandchildren.

Mr. Valley: Ninety thousand.

Mr. C. Sharma: Ninety thousand; kill me for 10,000.

So in 1952 loans started for the housing. In that period it was $1,000 and many families built their homes. Then it increased over the years up to a maximum of, I think, $70,000. What did we get for it? In 2000, for instance, there were 69 loans valued at $5 million-plus; in 2001, 103 loans, valued at $7.3 million; in 2002, 115 loans, valued at $6 million-plus and in 2003, with the PNM in Government, it dropped to 30 loans with a dollar value of $2.3 million. Why is that so? Here it is, you are destroying the Caroni workers' future and you are also taking away from them their housing. The Minister, in her contribution—and the Ministers who spoke after—has not indicated what moneys are going to be put in this fund.

In fact, if the Sugar Welfare Committee was so successful with their housing, why did the Government not see it fit to encourage that? So here it is, you are getting rid of 9,000 workers and the Minister has indicated a number of them have been trained, which was really cosmetic training; some for two, three and four weeks and a lot of it not relevant to the area of training. On the one hand, the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is saying if your core business is failing, the others will fail in the same way. So here you have a Caroni worker who has been doing something for over 30—40 years and you are going to train him in a totally new school of thought—cake-making, welding, for two, three, four weeks. It does not prepare him for the industry. But he has expertise, and the area he has expertise in, you do not pump anything. It is a calculated effort to frustrate him and to get rid of him eventually.

In 1961, in Tacarigua, 43 lots were developed. Houses were built under this particular thing. There were two housing settlements that are identified; 15,000 fully serviceable lots. In California, there were 366 lots, which is in the Couva area. In Orange Field, there were 161 lots. In Brothers Road, Williamsville, 135; in Orange Field Road, 39; Bien Venue in La Romain, 20-plus. The point that is being made, you have a system of more than 50 years of success of building low-cost housing.

In fact, when you look at what the NHA builds a house for today under the same scheme—low-cost housing—it is three, four and five times more than what the sugar workers would have built it for. And the Government has turned a totally blind eye. There is no assistance; no intention to continue it and definitely no commitment; not a cent indicated.

The other areas that Caroni has in a large area, is project management. Over the years a number of people have developed that and you see no intention to utilize it—absolutely none. Then you have social development which is very

important for communities. Again, based on everything that the Minister has said and all that the Government has presented thus far, there is no intention to use it. The collective technical knowledge, thousands of years of it available, and there is no intention to apply it, nowhere. Because when you look across the board, in the last one year, two years, three years, everything has been done to frustrate the Caroni—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give way. If what the Member is saying is correct, I would suggest that the Member or his colleagues, attempt to organize these people with their skills and bring them to our attention. There is no reason anyone would want to discriminate. As a matter of fact, if they have the skills, we would want to use it. So your job is to try to organize them and bring them, if we have missed them.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good approach, but you are doing it too late. For instance, when you were getting rid of Caroni (1975) Limited workers, did your technical people not sit; as a Government, did you not establish a policy and say, "Listen, we have to get rid of Caroni, but we are going to utilize what obtains?" They have 50 years of building of houses, from $1,000—very nice houses. You live in Couva; you are familiar with it. It is nothing new.

Mr. Valley: You must do some work in your constituency.

Mr. C. Sharma: No, no. Do not blame the Opposition. Is it everything you blame the Opposition for? Be serious.

We see flooding in the country and I have to tell you that Caroni has the expertise to assist. They may not have all the answers. Food security is a major concern all over the world. In fact, in the tsunami experience more people died after the event because there was no food available, no medication, no networking, no collective approach to do things. One of the major concerns in the Caribbean—and Trinidad and Tobago is no exception—is the question of food security, and you could have utilized the sugar workers in a number of areas, because in addition to doing sugar, they have experience in citrus, other fruits, vegetables, root crops, grains, livestock, fisheries. There were a number of areas in which you could have utilized them. But why are you suffering the people?

Everybody has ideas of different kinds. Some are correct, some are less correct, but what is going to happen is that you are going to cause people to rise up one day. You are telling us to go and organize them, but when we go and talk to them, they are telling us of their frustrations, and the people who are frustrated

are not UNC people; it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When hunger comes, it does not come to a UNC belly, it goes to a PNM belly too, to an NAR belly, a DAC belly.

10.15 p.m.

The Government has to start levelling with the people. The responsibility of Members of Parliament on both sides of the House is to ensure that the resources of the country reach as many people as possible. You are taking away from one group. The group is not an Indian group. You are not giving it to an African group. You are giving it to people who support the PNM more than anybody else. There would come a time when that would explode and with it would come bloodshed and death.

The crime rate in the country is largely as a result of PNM's mismanagement; playing politics with the emotions of people. What do you say to 9,000 workers after you get rid of them? Some have committed suicide; some have become alcoholics and diabetics; they are unable to take care of themselves and some have migrated. They are not happy. How can you tell people after 30 or 40 years that their gratuities would be $30,000 or $40,000? Is that fair? It cannot be fair.

Why do Indian people in this country feel discriminated against? Why do they feel uncomfortable with the PNM? Why are the majority of people who are migrating of East Indian stock? Are you not waking up to that? Is that telling you something? Why in a state sponsorship as Best Village, there is one Indian item?

Mrs. Job-Davis: That is by choice. They do not want to participate.

Mr. C. Sharma: You heard it. The Member is correct. She said that is by choice because they do not want to participate. Assuming that is correct, why do persons not want to participate? Is it because they feel discriminated against? Is it because they see the spread of resources?

Carnival grants are being given out. I am the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad. A group that has been celebrating Carnival for the last 10 or 12 years, once the PNM comes in Government, the funds stop. The funds go to the former candidate who has a group. That applies to many areas. When you look at funding, Carnival is a good example. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent. Look at Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. The PNM wants to play the race card. They are hoping that we will only say Divali and Eid ul Fitr. Discrimination is discrimination. It obtains for Divali. So be it. Why do you

give less money for Divali and less than 5 per cent of what obtains in the other place? Why the same thing does not apply for Eid ul Fitr?

You are trying to tell the national community that the PNM is in Government and this is its approach. You will build homes and the applicants will be as many people who support the PNM. Even within that support there would be few Indians. The Member for Couva South made the point. He said that out of 1,001 houses in Couva, less than 10 per cent of the persons who obtained houses were of East Indian origin. It cannot be by accident that in the last three years of PNM's rule, the majority of intake in the police service does not represent the children of Caroni. It is the same for the army. The Member for Diego Martin Central made a big hurray on one occasion when a few names did not reflect what he wanted. Look at the intake in the Maintenance, Training and Security Company Limited (MTS); the prison and fire services. It tells you something.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Where are you taking the House?

Mr. C. Sharma: Down the road.

Sugar workers have not been able to obtain loans from the National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO).

Mr. Hinds: How many applied?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. C. Sharma: I will come to that just now.

When you look at the establishment of NEDCO offices, they are largely in PNM constituencies. There was no tender for the rental of the buildings. It was always friends and family who rented at higher than market cost. The loans issue is largely PNM supporters. It was demonstrated publicly and when the PNM realized that they were being caught with their pants down, they came quickly to Parliament and declared that NEDCO's information would no longer be available under the Freedom of Information Act.

You are taking away from Caroni workers. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant feels that he can play smart by being foolish, but he cannot. The statistics are available. If under your management, the majority of intake in the police service is not of Indian origin, it tells a story. The population is almost 50/50. If the same thing applies in the prison service; the army; MTS; Petrotrin, TSTT and T&TEC, it must not be 50 per cent. It cannot be by accident that anywhere the Government could peddle influence it has been less than 20 per cent of people of East Indian origin.

You cannot play that race game. You cannot catch the Opposition anymore by being fearful of speaking the truth and presenting the facts. You have control of the radio stations and the media and you can place ads. You place all kinds of ads about Caroni, but not one saying that you will assist them by getting a CEPEP contract or you will assist their children in the intake of the police service.

In today's *Guardian*, there is a young lady whose name I think is Feroza Ramjohn, being denied the opportunity to go to India to study, all expenses paid by the Government of India. She was at home and they went there and took the passport. The Member for Tobago East is suggesting that I wrote the article. Even if I did, it does not change that Miss Ramjohn was denied the opportunity. Why was she denied it? There are two stories. Sometime ago she was supposed to be posted in London. After the approval was given she was denied. Letter sent and withdrawan. She was supposed to go on this training programme; approval was obtained; she was ready to travel but her passport was seized. According to the article, the reason is that her Muslim last name will create problems. It is race.

Mr. Hinds: What about Balkalawansingh?

Mr. C. Sharma: You talk about it.

Miss Ramjohn's only fault is that she is of East Indian stock. There is a second fault. She is of Muslim faith. It goes on. When you look at the courts there are so many discrimination cases in promotions in the prison service. Instead of improving the Equal Opportunity Bill, the Government caused it to be removed. It has no intention for persons in Trinidad and Tobago to obtain equal opportunities.

You are getting rid of Caroni workers and destroying an entire community. There is still some saving grace. In keeping with the global concern about food security, we should look again at encouraging agriculture in a measurable and meaningful way, by making sure that information obtains. Look at the distribution of lands. There is a measured fear that persons will not get lands. It is felt that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West will have control of the lands. Two malls will be built in Chaguanas. That is good. Construction is taking place. Why is it around a particular circle? Why is it not widespread? When the Roopnarine family and others like them have to leave the country, who will take over their business? Is it calculated? Is it the PNM's intention to run business people largely of East Indian origin out of the country? The Member for Laventille East/Morvant can check the records. The people who are migrating are people of East Indian origin in business and professionals as well. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. C. Sharma: With regard to farm management, you will remember that in 1962, the PNM Government caused some farms to be established by Lionel Robinson, brother of the former President and then Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Hinds: Is there any Standing Order to stop this blatant racist talk in this House, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please, hon. Member. Continue, hon. Member for Fyzabad.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member asked if there is any Standing Order to stop the racial thing? There is none! What recourse do citizens of this country have when they are discriminated against? The Member is thinking aloud. He raised that because he is aware that in the Ministry of National Security he has access to intelligence that people are feeling discriminated against to the point that they are willing to take action. He does not want it to be spoken about. He has information that people will take to the streets and people are so fed up, that they are prepared to sacrifice their lives. It is very important. That should be a wake up call for the PNM. It should not be a call for the Opposition. I commend the Member for Laventille East/Morvant for making that observation.

Mr. Bereaux: What we should do is allow you to speak and do not vote for any extension for you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Beautiful! Beautiful! That is PNM's philosophy and I am glad that you have raised it. The PNM is prepared to use their majority as they did on the last occasion to prevent the Opposition from presenting the facts. This is calculated. You cannot take the racist talk and the country cannot take your racism. When the Opposition speaks about the racism you are prepared to use your majority not to extend the time. Who cares? You feel by not extending my time it will stop me from speaking the truth. You feel I am concerned about what you do?

For the first time in Parliament when a child of the Caroni worker came to seek information that obtains in every parliament in the world, the system we follow, the PNM used their majority. Does it stop an elected Member from doing his work? It cannot. It would not be the first occasion that the PNM did not extend the time of a Member. I could not be concerned.

When the PNM is in Government, there is no racism according to them; when they are in Opposition, there are loads of racism. Sai Baba is a thief. All Indians

are thieves. That is what they want to paint. The Minister who moved this Bill is not a thief because she is with the PNM. The Member for San Fernando West is not a thief because she is with the PNM. If they join the UNC or any other party tomorrow, they would be thieves and all kinds of things. Kamaluddin Mohammed was excellent, but unsuitable to act as prime minister. When Dr. Eric Williams died he was not appointed prime minister because he was Indian. No other reason.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think the time is coming very soon when it would be worthwhile for a Member opposite to file a motion on this whole topic of racism. Let us have a full debate on that and get it out of the way.

I am appealing to you that there is much you can talk about on this Bill. Try to get some measure of what is before us in your contribution.

Mr. Hinds: "I must be" deposit the $10 million in Panday's account.

Mr. Speaker: Address me and forget the asides.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member for Laventille East/Morvant in his capacity as junior Minister of National Security with access to confidential information says that in Mr. Panday's account there is a sum of $10 million. I had filed a question and you had turned it down. I had asked you to list the names of Members of Parliament whose phones are tapped. You had refused that question. I want to know whose account he has investigated. I want the Government to indicate of the 16 Members of Parliament on this side, on how many he has caused investigation and what he is doing with that information. What information has he obtained from the Integrity Commission? Under what grounds has he obtained it?

Mr. Speaker: What does all that have to do with this Bill?

Mr. C. Sharma: It has to do with this Bill because people are being discriminated against. They are closing down Caroni and they claim that millions of dollars have been paid out. They are now looking into the bank accounts of people. That is an invasion of one's privacy. The Member is a minister.

They become ashamed when the truth is spoken. Mr. Speaker, I commend you on the observation that the motion should be filed on racism. Filing a motion on racism does not stop the PNM from practising racism. They must determine not to practise racism and no motion would be required.

Coming back to the strength of Caroni that can still be utilized is the question of fair and measurable approaches to land distribution. The projection is to give

two acres of land. Many people will know that that cannot be profitable to the farmer. It has to be a larger parcel depending on what he is doing. They should decide that short crops should be five acres and other crops might be a larger acreage. The Member for Chaguanas made the point that in the community of the sugar worker, the entire family gets involved in the building of a house. They put financial resources into it. When they put financial resources you cannot determine that if a family has a house their needs may be different. That should be treated on an individual basis.

On water resource development and management, the Member for Arouca North said that Caroni owes WASA large sums of money. We need to make sure that water resource is important to successful agricultural development. Different crops require different quantum of water on a daily basis. You have to ensure that there is a subsidy. Water wells must be established and that will assist in the marine resource development.

Soil conservation and watershed management are other areas of expertise. This has come about because of the years of experience of the Caroni worker. The Government has to find ways to utilize that for the good of everyone.

This leads to food security which is just not the ability to feed the nation at a reasonable cost. There is the question of adding value to products making them suitable for export. The Prime Minister of St. Vincent is leading a delegation to obtain membership in the Free Trade Area of The Americas (FTAA). If we can utilize the collective experience and knowledge base of the Caroni worker, it would go a long way in satisfying that market. For years farmers have been complaining and workers have been encouraged to go into farming. The cost of fertilizer and equipment—the Government has to find ways to communicate with the Caroni worker that since their experience is largely in agriculture, it will ensure that they get assistance.

It takes a farmer purchasing a motor vehicle almost a year plus to get the subsidy. He has difficulty to get the subsidy up front. He has to purchase the vehicle for which he has to borrow money; pay interest and then apply for the subsidy. Consideration should be given to do it differently. Markets should be established so that the farmer will have an idea that there is a market for peppers and the quantum that would be required in North America or the United Kingdom.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. A. Nana*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Sharma: They do not want a division? Mr. Speaker, what time will we get the dinner break?

Mr. Speaker: Dinner is available. Some of the Members will prefer you to have dinner now, but it is up to you. Dinner is available for Members. We are not going to suspend the sitting for dinner. Members can feel free to go to the tea room to have dinner.

If it is not too much pain in your stomach, you can assist yourself by going your full 30 minutes and then have a nice dinner.

Mr. C. Sharma: I understand that the dinner being served tonight is beef burgers. I am a Brahmin and I hope that you would take the period to enquire if there would be some vegetarian.

The question of sugarcane cultivation has to be revisited. Before I go there, the Member for Arouca North wants to portray that all Indians are scamps. He said that Dhanpur Sugar Mill came here; ripped off the country and the PNM Government spent $100 million in the plant. I understand that is not correct. Dhanpur Sugar Mill is the second largest sugar mill in India. It is very successful. The Government of Jamaica has utilized its service, I think through the recommendation of the Member for Diego Martin Central. Dhanpur Sugar Mill has experience. Why are you painting them with a brush because they are Indian? If the Government of Jamaica is utilizing them and Guyana is looking for a partnership, we should utilize them for whatever they are worth. The question of sugarcane cultivation is just not cane we use for sugar, but a number of other areas. Expertise all over the world shows how we can improve sugarcane cultivation. That expertise is available locally and elsewhere.

Mr. Hinds: That is why you brought Rao.

Mr. C. Sharma: I do not want to know why you brought Mr. Rao. Rao is Indian.

The question of fertilizers and equipment requires assistance. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West made the point that workers cannot be obtained now for the plantation. One reason for that is that the Government's

management at the national level moves away the worker. How many CEPEP workers can be developed to assist in the agricultural sector? The Government claims that it is training thousands of people in the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) and other similar programmes, but yet there is a shortage of workers to reap the cane. The Government programmes are forcing the workers not to go there. It is hard work and in another place, you do less work for similar pay. The Government needs to revisit that otherwise there will always be that labour problem and it will affect our food security.

With regard to payment, farmers do not receive payments on time. You see how the Government treats with the people for floods. The Member for Arouca North travelled to Debe. It cost about $100 to reach there. As a minister, he is worth about $2,000 a day. He is paying the farmer $41. Why is that? Let me tell you how the farmer sees it. I do not care whether you see it as racial or cannot. He sees it as an Indian person doing farming getting $41. Whether he is right or wrong is not important.

He is an Indian farmer who receives very little assistance from the State and when the flood came he received $41. Mr. Speaker, that does not obtain anywhere else. The question of payment is critical.

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM government said the reason it was only paying $41 was because of the Schedule. They are in charge! They could make a Cabinet decision to pay the farmers a fair price! They do not need to go to the Privy Council! They should not hide behind outdated legislation! They are in control!

In WASA, when the experts that they employed told them to pay $12 million, they paid their friends $51 million. I am sure they would have gotten gifts from that—in another place they would be called bribes. When the farmers suffered losses, however, they were paid $41 but the Government hides behind the Schedule. Mr. Speaker, they do not fool anybody!

Mr. Speaker, that tells the Indian child whose parent is collecting a cheque for $41 that the PNM Government is against them and he has to do something about that. When that child sees that his mother has to get up at 3.00 a.m. to weed and plant; he has to fend for himself and he has to go to school and after weeks pass and the crops come, and then because of the PNM Government's mismanagement of the rivers and the waterways there is a flood after which his "ma ma" gets $41, Mr. Speaker, they are creating a rebel in that young child.

Mr. Speaker, it was that kind of injustice that brought Nelson Mandela to the forefront. [*Interruption*] I must not call Nelson Mandela's name because he does not look like me. Do you see the racism, Mr. Speaker? I could call Mahatma Gandhi because he looks like me and that is okay.

Hon. Member: "Nah, nah, nah."

Mr. C. Sharma: I could call Martin Luther King—

Hon. Member: No.

Mr. C. Sharma: I could call Panday.

Hon. Member: "Yes, yuh could call da name."

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, we have heard about pest control but apparently the Government does not have an appreciation of exactly what is pest control. In the sugar industry you would think it is the froghopper only, but birds, squirrels and other similar things cause damages. Again, one has to treat with the farmers who are suffering that loss. You cannot say that the Government is spending $100 million in pest control and that is the end of it.

Mr. Valley: Sharma, stop now "nah".

Mr. C. Sharma: "Hold on nah, you ent have no food to eat." [*Interruption*] I will stop in five minutes.

Hon. Member: That is too long.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, the Government has presented its case and the Opposition has presented its case. The short point of everything is that the PNM thinks it is doing the best. Mr. Speaker, is it really doing the best for the country? Or, is it doing what is best for its political agenda? It appears that the Government is doing the best for its political agenda. Before I go I must tell the hon. Minister—[*Interruption*] I intend to do it with you, equally, well.

Mr. Speaker, whilst I was abroad the Minister went to Fyzabad and —I must tell her that she is welcome because the country belongs to all of us—I want to suggest something to her. I have fought five elections and there were five candidates; four of the candidates were female and after the PNM used them and they lost, they were discarded. I know that you are not going to fight the Fyzabad seat; I know you are smart.

Mr. Speaker, it has been brought to my attention that the furnishings for the office that the Minister opened in Fyzabad were not paid for; that they were

received as gifts or bribes and she has to be very careful. Again, Madam Minister—using privy information—what about the electricity bill? Make sure and pay your light bill.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM cannot go about abusing the system. They are the Government and they went into an Opposition constituency and opened a major office using state resources. I do not know what part of it is from the state resources. I am drawing it to the Minister's attention that it has come to my attention that the desks, chairs, an air-condition unit and other things have been obtained through illegal methods and that she should check on that.

Sen. Sahadeo: Mr. Speaker, for the record, all the items that were presented to the office, as far as I am aware, have been donated by members of his constituency, actually. I think he is making very false statements, as usual, and I really object to that.

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you very much for that. Mr. Speaker, the Minister has confirmed that everything in her office was not bought that they were donated. My information is that the donations are really bribes to get contracts and other things. Mr. Speaker, you have been a Member of Parliament—without bringing you into the story—how is it that persons have donated an air-condition unit, chairs and other things? Something is wrong! That is a matter for the Fraud Squad and the Integrity Commission. I hope the Government takes notice.

Mr. Speaker, a number of the PNM constituency offices are getting donations. There are no declarations of those donations. Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Minister has indicated that they have not paid for anything, is an indication of how they treat Caroni (1975) Limited workers. Those same persons who are getting contracts; those persons who are getting benefits from Caroni, Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) and elsewhere are doing the offices.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo): Mr. Speaker, I must confess that it has been very much of an experience being in this place. Sometimes it borders on entertainment but, nonetheless, I would put it down to a learning experience.

I have listened, sometimes, with keen interest to the contributions made by the hon. Members on the other side. Many of the issues have already been dealt with by my colleagues on this side but I will, therefore, attempt to deal with those issues, which have not been dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, the Explanatory Note states very clearly what the objectives of the Bill are. However, I still see some Members on the other side who seem to be a bit confused regarding the objectives of the Bill. It says:

> "The main purpose of this Bill is to vest the real estate holdings of Caroni (1975) Limited and Orange Grove National Company Limited in the State and to provide for the management thereof and for the development of business thereon, particularly in the areas of industrial light and heavy manufacturing, housing, commerce and agriculture."

I really regret that the Member for Couva North is not present but I will deal with some of the issues raised by him. One of his first concerns was why was the PNM doing this to the sugar workers? All the previous speakers on this side and even on the other side have enunciated very clearly that with the significant alteration of the preferential treatment afforded to the ACP countries, the growing of sugarcane and the processing of sugar is not going to be efficient, and high-cost producers such as Trinidad and Tobago do not have a place. As a matter of fact, as we look back with hindsight, we were probably more visionary than we thought at the time.

There is much talk about the destruction of the sugarcane industry and greed for the lands at Caroni (1975) Limited and Orange Grove. Mr. Speaker, let me repeat, there are a lot of controls and measures in place to ensure that no Caroni (1975) Limited lands will be given away. All lands will be leased and the State will retain the title for the lands. I must submit that to date there has been no land grabbing. Much was said about the agricultural sector and I must compliment the eloquence of the Member for Arouca North, Minister Jarrette Narine. [*Desk thumping*] I think he has spent much time with respect to the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, I will take a minute or two, albeit it is late into the night, but I think it is certainly opportune of me to explain a bit more in terms of the agricultural lands, which would be assigned to the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers. Much has been said as to why give two; not ten, not five or not one. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the first issue has been the long period of time it has taken this Government to implement these plans. In the first instance, as you would appreciate, if we were to do this hara-kiri we would be taken to task that we have taken good agricultural lands for housing and vice versa.

Mr. Speaker, much effort has been spent in doing a comprehensive Land-use Capability Survey. We have gotten all the various authorities together: the Town and Country Planning Division, WASA and T&TEC to ensure that where we have

mapped out and identified various sites that they are duly approved and, therefore, the whole process will be expedited.

I know how very difficult it is for the former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited. I have walked the talk. I have walked in the various constituencies and I reassure my colleagues on the other side—I do not know why they are so fearful of this Minister; I am new to the trade—that I really have no ulterior motives.

Mr. Speaker, I publicly thank the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers for their warmth; they have embraced me. I have taken much time to explain to them the Government commitments and how they could take advantage of those commitments and how they could access those commitments.

Regarding the agricultural lands, every former employee who has applied for the agricultural land, just over 7,105, I think, have qualified and letters have gone out to all those employees advising them of their eligibility. We have made a further commitment, Mr. Speaker, that as the surveys are completed, the lands will be assigned.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of us have a background and history in agriculture. We fully recognize that those former employees could start their farming on those lands. We have made a commitment that the infrastructural development work would be put in place but we have agreed to, in the interim, that those former employees could have access to the lands. In other words, those who may not have yet become employed would have another opportunity to be an entrepreneur.

At the onset, much has been said about NEDCO. We invited NEDCO to make presentations at the graduations and also on the day of counselling and financial guidance. I have attended all six graduations. For the record and for the information of my colleagues, NEDCO is also due to open a permanent office in Couva. There was much concern from the Member for Fyzabad, I think, but moreover we are bringing them home. For the next eight weeks we will also see NEDCO present and available solely to the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers so they could ensure those who are willing to start their business, in whichever category, could have access to NEDCO, literally, on their doorsteps. Regarding the agricultural lands, and that is the issue, I must state that EMBD will be the Land Management Agency for the Government.

Again, comments were made regarding the locations. Mr. Speaker, that much effort went into this. I heard there were one or two grammatical errors so let me apologize, sometimes my English is not that good. Mr. Speaker, there are many detailed appendices. As a matter of fact, I must point out the appendices have the

status of the training and the institutions providing the training. Mr. Speaker, when I heard that all people are learning to do is make toolum and sugar cake—by the way, I love toolum and sugar cake so I do not mind if I can get a few. I am talking about buying; I do not want it free. I do not take bribes. Mr. Speaker, when I looked at this appendix, I was waiting with bated breath for someone to get up and congratulate us. I do not believe because one is on the other side one cannot get up—Mr. Speaker, irrespective of where I am I would say: "This is a good job." When I looked at the training courses offered I must confess that I am impressed with myself. So when they talk about toolum and sugar cake I get confused. Mr. Speaker, I refer you to Article X11.

There are 15 institutions that provided training for the daily-paid workers and 26 institutions that provided for the monthly-paid. On the issue of training much effort has been put on that. I will refer to some of the statistics because there have been a lot of questions raised in terms of training. At the end of December 2004, there were 3,600 applications for training. Out of that 2,600 have completed their training in totality, that is over the six graduations we have had to date.

Mr. Speaker, you will be pleased to note—and I am sure this time they would probably say congratulations—that at the beginning of this year we received an additional 2,000 applications for training. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we must confess that 5,600 applicants for training out of 9,000, certainly, is a statistic of which we can be proud. [*Desk thumping*] Further to that, some of these former employees have been afforded more than one training course, although our agreement was just one. Let me refer to the last graduation—I congratulated those graduands of that class—out of 300 graduands, 48 took two courses; 9 took three courses; 8 took four courses; 2 took five courses; 2 took six courses and one took 7 courses.

As a matter of fact, I must inform this honourable House of the number of persons who have taken advantage of the opportunity. Mr. Speaker, 108 former Caroni (1975) Limited employees have done both technical and agricultural courses and 100 spouses have benefited from the agricultural courses. Mr. Speaker, 1,261 completed all their courses in agriculture to date, 890 did more than one agricultural courses and 489 did a minimum of 20 hours of computer literary courses.

When I hear the miscommunications in the area of training it bothers me. As I have indicated, doing the walkabouts was really to bring out the former employees to ensure they took the opportunity for the training. Mr. Speaker, how

many of the Members on the other side have taken the time to really work with the community and encourage them to take advantage of this opportunity?

Dr. Moonilal: Hon. Minister, could you also indicate to the House whether you are in possession of any data to indicate the degree to which workers who have been availing themselves of this training have been recruited in jobs? Do you have any data at all as to how many persons have been recruited either through the State or through private sector employers? Can you share that information with us?

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Mr. Speaker, in certain areas of training all the persons trained have been employed. For example, in the area of the carbon steel welding—I will have to check that but it is in the appendices here. In the area of aquaculture, actually they are all entrepreneurs because they have already arranged for someone to purchase their fish because it is ornamental. In terms of the grow box and seedling production—Mr. Speaker, I am afraid to say somebody brought peppers for me because they would tell me it is bribe, too. Mr. Speaker, we have seen tremendous success in these areas. We have started a database in terms of all of them and I would not like to give an inaccurate figure but I will furnish the Member with that information.

In the area of training, I really want to take the opportunity to congratulate Caroni (1975) Limited, the board and management, particularly, the Human Resource Manager, Mr. Morrid` Ali, for doing a good job. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, again, I may have erred when the various individuals did the air-conditioning courses. In meeting with them they indicated that they needed an additional course, because what we had offered was not quite adequate to get the kinds of employment they wanted. We approved a second course in air-conditioning and I believe I can defend my position because we have gone beyond what we committed. It is costing more but I believe to make sure our people are equipped; a second course is being run to ensure the former workers get jobs, which would really make sense. In the area of computers they will be exposed to some level of advanced training.

Mr. Speaker, you will appreciate that much effort has been spent on training by walking the talk and we have also modified a lot of the courses. Let us clarify this fact right now. We talked about the former employees being employed. What this honourable House should know today is that we had to rework all our training courses to accommodate the former workers because many of them were actually

employed. We have recognized that for us to have a higher success factor many of the programmes had to be rescheduled to after working hours and weekends. I may not have the statistics but it is self-explanatory that many of the workers have found employment.

As we would appreciate many of the daily-paid workers work for six months in the year and they are very versatile. I have to commend them for rising to the challenge. They have now equipped themselves with new skills and I am very optimistic that they will see the light of day.

I lived just south of sugarcane plantations, in Tacarigua but it is now called Arouca South; they have now converted it to housing. I remember, as a child, when I would go out to watch the fires, particularly, the older women would ask me—Mr. Speaker, if I say "Betee" they would tell me that I am trying to be an Indian—child, can we get a cup of water? And I did it. I remember them telling me very clearly: "Child, study your work, ah do not want you doing what I am doing; ah don't want you working so hard." Most of the former sugarcane workers have children who are professionals and, again, they have to be applauded and congratulated. Mr. Speaker, this is why we have a problem of getting workers.

On the issue of the training, we really have to congratulate the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers. We also talked about the residential plots and I want to stress that much effort went into the preparatory work. We have already referred to the Land-Use and the Capability Survey. We have 6,164 former employees who have qualified at this time. Members have asked: Is there transparency? We have used an internationally recognized firm, Ernst & Young, to review the data and to ensure all the checks and balances are in place.

With respect to the issues which were raised over and over, one of the negotiated terms was in order to qualify for a residential plot one had to accept the VSEP offer and, more importantly, not own a home as at January 01, 2003. The essence of that benefit was really to assist those former workers who had not yet availed themselves of the various facilities offered in terms of the construction of a home, et cetera, so that was carried over into the VSEP offer. To say it is unfair, I really have a problem understanding that. The essence of the offer was to ensure that persons have a roof over their heads and to assist them. There is a cost concession in that it will only be a percentage of the market value. Mr. Speaker, I hope I have clarified some of those issues with respect to the residential lots.

Questions were asked about the assets of Caroni (1975) Limited. I think the

Member for Oropouche very clearly asked: "What has become of the huge capital assets of Caroni (1975) Limited?" He claimed that the line Minister, yours truly, knows where the assets are. Mr. Speaker, it is my job to know where the assets are because I am supposed to be accountable for them. I will now let this honourable House know what the status of the assets is.

Mr. Speaker, you will be pleased to note that we also had—I think the Member for St. Joseph was trying to teach me good management practices. I respect people irrespective of where they sit; we must always try to be respectful. I listened to what he had to say but I did not take notes. Let me advise this honourable House that an initial audit was done in April 2004 in order to verify all the assets of Caroni (1975) Limited and a review was also done in November 2004.

11.15 p.m.

I understand, as we are ready to dispose of the assets, and as we said earlier, certainly preference would be given to former Caroni (1975) Limited workers. Eight hundred and sixty-four pieces of what is called rolling stock, 520 pieces have been issued. Four hundred and forty-five pieces have been issued to former workers. In other words, it is on loan to former Caroni (1975) Limited workers, which they use in the harvesting of their crops. So 445 of those pieces have already been distributed to them to assist in defraying their cost in terms of harvesting.

Mr. Speaker, there are proper systems, and I also want to put it on record, because some Member will jump up and say they heard two pieces are missing. Yes, let me acknowledge one was reported missing on February 25, 2004 and that has been reported to the police. I understand another unit has been missing and, of course, that will also be reported to the police. As I said earlier, it is quite regrettable that the Member for Couva North is not present. Because, in synopsis, I can probably refer to an article in the *Newsday* of Friday, October 15, 2004. And it reads:

> "UNC failed on Caroni and agriculture
>
> The behaviour of the Leader of the Opposition Basdeo Panday and Opposition members in the House of Representatives on Friday October 1, reached a new low…
>
> Mr. Panday and his members had a six year record of government. On the issue of Caroni (1975) Ltd and on the wider question of

> agriculture, they were dismal failures. It is well known that under the Panday administration the Divestment Secretariat produced a plan to deal with Caroni (1975) Ltd. It recommended the closure of Caroni (1975) Ltd and they did not think about giving retrenched workers any substantial benefits.
>
> When this was made public the response was that Panday's plan was just a proposal which had not reached Cabinet as yet."

Which was said this evening.

> "In fact, Mr. Panday's normal response was to be diplomatic, to take a hands off approach. He never made the situation of sugar, and sugar workers, a priority during his government, and agriculture was neglected. And when reminded of his political base from which he ascended his response was that he was the government of the whole country.
>
> Basdeo Panday betrayed sugar workers while he was Prime Minister and in government.... There is reference to 'our people.' One trusts that they are not referring to Indo-Trinidadians since they do not have a patent on any constituency.
>
> The UNC had nothing to fall back on except the unbridled use of race to preserve its political base. They have in effect taken over the agenda which they accuse others in the party of having such as Hulsie Bhaggan, Trevor Sudama and Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj and of course, Kelvin Ramnath 'Indians For Sale Check Out Panday'.
>
> This time around it would not work."

Mr. Speaker, these are not my words. This is an article by one Mr. Vir Singh of Barrackpore, so let the record be correct. Do you know I am almost tempted to place on record and advise this honourable House—Much has been said about me, whether I wear embroided saris, gold glittered saris; they even talked about whether I wear false eyelashes.

It is really quite amusing. If you sit on this side is it that you are not supposed to wear Indian wear? I believe we should be respectful of all peoples. If I go to a Muslim function I would wear a shalwar. If I go to an African function I would wear an African wear. I cannot understand why my personal attire continues to be under such close scrutiny.

One of the comments made earlier, and now I understand, I have even reached the calypso arena. As somebody said, I am in politics so long, how come they never sing about me. So tongue-in-cheek—I said, "Boy, I have to be good looking yes." I really feel that has something to do with it.

I cannot understand why Members from the other side continue to make statements about a female Member here. They all have mothers. I imagine some have sisters and some even have daughters.

I am not begging for sympathy, because if you know me at all, I really am a strong person. I can handle it. For the record, in the beginning I was really concerned about my children but I have to confess that they have handled it well, and it builds character. I have used these very, very positively.

Much has been said about "putna" and I was told they cannot use this word here. I am not afraid of it. I know, as a practising Hindu, about it but what really has been worrisome, is some of us who are practising Hindus, I would imagine it would have been quite disgusting to hear their political Leader make such disparaging comments.

I was actually affiliated to a Hindu centre which was opened on May 02 1998. I played an integral role in the establishment of that Hindu centre and when the hon. Member for Couva North was then Prime Minister, and in a once in a lifetime opportunity, he addressed that Hindu centre. I have a video on it where he was really complimentary to yours truly. He really applauded me for all the community work that I was doing. I have here a magazine on the launch of that Hindu centre which I will make available to you, Mr. Speaker. In it he said:

> Let your centre inspire the community and if community is built around the spiritual values which this centre represents, the community will, by its example, influence the nation. May you be showered with the richest blessings.

On that day, for those of us who are not Hindus, we installed a Murti of Lord Krishna and, therefore, I would have thought that the hon. Member would have learned a thing or two. But I am not going to dwell much further on it.

In my father's time—he is now deceased—I remember him making a comment that, that gentleman, he thought could do a lot for the Indian people of Caroni (1975) Limited. Well, he must be turning in his grave now to see really that he did absolutely nothing. I respect age, and, therefore, I will move on.

Let me refer to the Member for Oropouche who also indicated he had many concerns in terms of a development plan and that certainly was made available. Also one of the concerns he had was the assets of Caroni (1975) Limited—and it is all listed. I have just indicated in terms of where those assets are.

I now refer to comments made by the Member for Couva South. I understand that he has left the Chamber. I do not understand. Members come and "ol' talk" and they would not listen. Therefore, how are they going to be educated? How can they communicate to their constituents? Members opposite must object to that because they should not leave others to bear the brunt of it. For the record, let me just clarify the issue of the pensions.

First of all, legally any surpluses in the monthly-paid pension resides with that fund. It definitely cannot be used to supplement the deficit in the daily-paid pension. This issue in terms of the surplus from the monthly-paid pension being used to finance the deficit in the daily-paid cannot be done and it is not done. It is totally illegal. Much effort has been put in place in terms of getting these pensions on an actuarially sound basis. One of the biggest issues we have is the inadequate database that was not maintained by Caroni (1975) Limited and, therefore, much effort has been spent in validating that database.

Some comments were made of some $28,000 for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). I do not know why people like to call these figures. The salary of the last CEO was $19,300 and part of the agreement was a 5 per cent increase which was paid to all workers. The present CEO is paid just about $21,000. I do not know the relevance of it but let us be transparent.

Much was discussed in terms of the disappearance of equipment and I hope I have been able to clarify that.

Gilbert Park. The correction was made and, I think, the Member for Diego Martin East certainly, clearly, outlined if we had referred to our development plan we would have seen that Gilbert Park is going to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

When you are in a company like Caroni (1975) Limited which dealt with real estate, part of the business of the day would be to rent the various houses which are not occupied. Obviously, that was done and I think we must applaud them for ensuring that the houses are kept as intact as possible and, certainly, when we have sold all the houses to those who are eligible for the bungalows, then those remaining will be put up for public tender. Really, albeit the Member took a long time to speak, and in summary that is all that was said.

I must congratulate my colleague on this side who dealt eloquently with the few issues that were raised by the Member for St. Joseph. What is amazing, it is quite interesting because he talked about not having this plan and cannot understand. He knows Mr. Hospedales is efficient, but he did not expect him to be so efficient to develop a plan to shut down when he did not ask him. But we all know the true story. The true story was they wanted a shut down plan. When it was leaked out, all of a sudden everybody was afraid. Nobody took ownership of that. We really underestimate the people of Trinidad and Tobago and it is time we start respecting the people. Be a big man, as they say, and own up to it. That was all that was required.

Let me congratulate the Divestment Secretariat in the Ministry of Finance. They certainly polished up that version and what we brought here was truly a much enhanced and improved development plan. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for St. Joseph did congratulate the Divestment Secretariat. He was really very complimentary and I want everyone to know that certainly the Divestment Secretariat played a very important role in assisting us with that plan.

The Member for Diego Martin West took quite a lot of time to deal with many of those issues raised by the Member for St. Augustine. He indicated there were no financials into this. And by now we should know how a government operates. There is a budget, there are allocations of funds and if one looks there one would see much funds have been allocated to the Estate Management Business Development Company (EMBD) in terms of the infrastructural development. We have in the various companies, the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited (SMCL) et cetera, that funds have been budgeted and, therefore, to say there is no financial plan is certainly inaccurate.

The Member for Chaguanas, and I see he, too, has left this honourable Chamber, but I do not seem to understand. One of the comments he made was that there is nobody in Caroni (1975) Limited to deal with issues or queries. Let me say, for the record, in excess of 4,000 queries were handled last year. I do not have an up-to-date figure but I must impress on this honourable House that people have been allocated and much effort is in place in terms of handling queries. I think the people have our commitment that we continue to entertain the concerns and queries.

Another issue was in terms of John-Williams. I do not know why everybody talks about it. We indicated that it was a matter of fact, yes, right now they are managing Gilbert Park. They are not paid a fee, but they are able to train and help. It was a temporary month-to-month arrangement. Now it has been handed

over to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs so certainly that would be dealt with by that Ministry.

The issue of pensions came up in terms of what is the qualifying income. We indicated and we have given the undertaking that we will also ensure—but certainly the intent—and it was stated that the NIS income received by recipients is not used in the calculations in terms of qualifying income. Certainly, the NIS income received by former employees will not be deemed income in terms of that accountability.

Much has been said about the Estate Management Development Company (EMBD). As we indicated in the Vesting Bill the lands will be vested in the (EMBD) to manage those lands. At this time albeit, it has not been vested. What has happened is that Caroni (1975) Limited has transferred the responsibility to the (EMBD).

I also want to put on public record that I enquired into what was deemed to be, just around Christmas Eve, that certain crops were, in fact, cut down. I want to let you know that this was discussed and it was not condoned. We certainly agreed that people should not be using lands without permission but in the interest of kindness, congeniality, I did indicate to the executive chairman that warning letters could have been given. He indicated all of this was done. Now that people would be getting their two acres pretty shortly, we hope this will not persist. We do not condone this. What happened as far as I was told, they got tired of giving notices, they continued to plant and again, as I indicated, in the spirit of Christmas certainly it was not very acceptable. Sometimes people do their jobs a little too well and it can cause quite a bit of pain.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Fyzabad—it was difficult to understand because everything was race. I really could not put my hands on anything definitive. I will let him know that certainly, all the government programmes are available to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.[*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, when we talk about the Multi-sector Skills Training (MuST), Helping Youths Prepare for Employment (HYPE) and Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) certainly I would like to encourage all the Members on the other side that the Ministry of Social Development has a booklet where it has all the programmes being offered and, therefore all Members can have access to that to make sure there is a level playing field. Just remember, I want to remind them, the responsibility is theirs and do not come and say we are discriminating. I want to say very categorically that they have the opportunity to access it.

Everywhere I go I try to encourage, be it Caroni (1975) Limited workers. For example, I have told them they also qualify for these programmes so they can apply for them. I have actually encouraged the former employees to take advantage of yet another opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have demonstrated the extent to which this Government has gone to ensure that the future development of Caroni lands will take place on a structured basis, and will be informed by sound technical criteria. The restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited has been a difficult one and I must say much effort and energy have gone into it.

Mr. Speaker, I believe in the years to come—right now the process in some instances may still be a bit painful but in the long run, I am confident that the people of Caroni will have a brighter future, not for themselves only, but for their children and their children's children. I thank you.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

First and Second Schedules ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do adjourn to Friday, January 28, 2005 at 1.30 p.m.

On Friday it is Private Members' day.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.42 p.m.