

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE EIGHT PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON OCTOBER 17, 2002.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 01, 2005

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members for leave of absence from sittings of the House: Mrs. Eulalie James, Member of Parliament for Laventille West for today's sitting of the House; Dr. Fuad Khan, Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan, for the period June 26, 2005 to July 02, 2005; and Mr. Stanford Callender, Member of Parliament for Tobago West, from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Administrative report of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2001 to September 30, 2002. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Annual report of the Arima Borough Corporation for the year 2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
3. Annual report of the Arima Borough Corporation for the year 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
4. Annual audited financial statements of National Helicopter Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
5. Annual audited financial statements of the Vehicle Maintenance Corporation

Papers Laid

Friday, July 01, 2005

of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (VMCOTT) for the financial year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

Papers 4 and 5 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Breaches of Ethical Principles
(Petrotrin)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing the following matter of urgent public importance, namely, the breaches of ethical principles and corporate governance by the management of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago (Petrotrin), a state enterprise.

The matter is definite because it relates to a specific matter, that is a massive cost overrun of \$104 million over the contracted sum of \$22 million for one plant upgrade project.

The matter is urgent and current because of the widely publicized and, until now, unanswered exposures in the press of the alleged cover-up, massive corruption and unparalleled scandal associated with the award and execution of contracts at Petrotrin.

The matter is of public importance because it deals with exposures of the colossal ethical breach of corporate governance and violations of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, through bid rigging at major state enterprises funded by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The matter is, indeed, important. However it does not qualify under this particular Standing Order.

FINANCE BILL

Bill to provide for the imposition or variation of certain taxes and to introduce other provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance*]; read the first time.

FAIR TRADING BILL

Bill to provide for the establishment of a Fair Trading Commission, to promote and maintain fair competition in the economy, and for related matters [*The Minister of Trade and Industry*]; read the first time.

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO HOUSING DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION BILL**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [June 06, 2005]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): I was wondering what item we were debating. On the last occasion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or let me say, on this occasion, we seem to have the correct Bill before the Parliament, because on the last occasion, we had another version.

I want to first of all say that in looking through this legislation and the intent of the legislation that nothing substantial and fundamental will result in the enactment of this legislation to replace the National Housing Authority (NHA); nothing in this Bill is different to what the Government intended many years ago when it introduced the National Housing Authority.

If you look at the Explanatory Note, the purpose of the Bill is to establish a statutory corporation to facilitate the construction of housing for low and middle income citizens and residents. I do not know whether this is any different to what the NHA's mandate has been.

Before I deal with this, the purpose of establishing an authority to facilitate the provision of housing for low and middle class income citizens is really to provide security for the family. We are aware that in this country, we have a major deficit of housing, particularly, in the low and middle income earning groups. So that no one will have any argument against any institution of the State which is committed to facilitate construction and to facilitate provision of housing. We are doing this at a time when the entire nation is reeling under pressures from certain elements in the society that threaten the security of the family.

I looked at the papers yesterday—this is the *Guardian* of yesterday—Beetham “1 kidnapped every 2 days”. There have been 93 kidnappings reported for the past 180 days. I would not go into the details. We are looking at ransom demands of \$47.250 million and 40 kilograms of cocaine.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are looking at a time—as my hon. friend from Oropouche just informed the House—when there are serious questions about the abuse of public funds by state corporations.

Mr. Valley: Your company, Petrotrin, the one you work for?

Mr. Singh: Abuse is abuse.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will deal with that at some other time. I would not be distracted. We are talking about allegations of abuse of the public purse. I looked at the newspapers this morning and I saw an article in the *Guardian*—

Mr. Singh: That is not supernatural; that is the real thing.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—in which a certain gentleman said:

“My own Minister of National Security (Martin Joseph), who belongs to the same party I am a member of, refuse to give me protection.

Responsible leaders almost took me down.

They have brought this country to a level of fear.”

Claimed the Ecclesville councillor who said he paid bribes to Government Ministers Franklin Khan and Eric Williams.

Mr. Partap: Sweetbread.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The security of families is an issue affecting all responsible citizens. So while we are talking about expending large sums of moneys—moneys to provide low and middle income housing at subsidized prices to ease the social burdens of families—we ask the question: Would the Government housing programme redound to the provision of greater security for the family? When you look at where a lot of these crimes are taking place, you will observe that a lot of the persons charged are coming for government housing estates. So that we need to be assured that the housing programme is designed for those who are in the greatest need, and not those whom the Government expects that they can bribe to get political support. It brings into question, not only the policy for the provision of housing, but the policies for the equitable distribution of houses to those who need them most. That is why I make reference to some of these issues.

I have noticed, as well, an article in which the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is quoted as having said that while there might be nepotism in the selection in the recruitment of police officers, there are certain criteria which these police officers must satisfy to be employed, as if nepotism is acceptable. So we can very well say, by extension, that if nepotism exists in the allocation of housing units then that is okay, once the persons who are beneficiaries meet the criteria.

I am saying to this honourable House that under no condition and circumstance can a society tolerate a policy of nepotism, when it comes to the use of public funds and public expenditure. But I will go into a little detail with respect to the allocation policy.

I find it very interesting as well that this debate is taking place at a time when the Member for Diego Martin West seems to be rather outspoken, and, perhaps, a bit loquacious. On one occasion, he described the Members of the Privileges Committee as “a bunch of cowards”. I found it very interesting that no one took umbrage or exception, particularly my friend from Princes Town. I know him to be a man who will not have anyone call him a coward. The hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West was described as a coward. I do not think, having known him for this length of time, that he would accept such a description from his hon. friend from Diego Martin West. And, of course, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, were also Members of the committee. I do not want to drag you into this discussion. The Member for Diego Martin West then went on to criticize his own government and Prime Minister for the selection of Lenny Saith, Christine Sahadeo, Christine Kangaloo, Abdul-Hamid—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I clearly recall that matter. That matter came from another debate. Maybe I erred in not telling you that we are dealing with the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Bill. I see where you are going. I think you better come back a little.

Mr. Singh: He does not want them in the House of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is possible.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps I did not clearly indicate to you where I am going. I am trying to establish that the Member, who is championing the cause, or attempts to be championing the cause of the dispossessed and underprivileged, really has little or no credibility—

Mr. Singh: Shadow boxing!

Mr. K. Ramnath:—and while strictly speaking, his utterances may not be in respect of the provision of housing, he is nevertheless the Minister and he has overall authority for the distribution of houses on an equitable basis for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] As I was saying, I do not want to belabour the point.

[MR. RAMNATH]

We are hearing criticisms about the way the Government is structured; we are hearing comments and criticisms from the Member about the way his leader selects Ministers and these are people who must deliver housing; these are people who must deliver services. If he is critical of his Prime Minister for selecting too many Senators and putting them in the Cabinet then we have a crisis of Government in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Singh: His decision is irrelevant.

Mr. K. Ramnath: My hon. friend from Tobago or Diego Martin West went on to launch a most scathing attack on the Minister of Education. He said that had it not been for the very special effort of his wife and himself, his children would not have been as successful as they are today, because the education system is not delivering; an education system which must deliver carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, planners and surveyors—[*Desk thumping*—]—was severely criticized by a senior Cabinet Minister for not providing money's worth. I will come a little to the provision of moneys for buildings and money's worth in housing.

I asked myself: I wonder what is disturbing my hon. friend that suddenly he has become very talkative? He could not be criticizing the Members on this side, because they have been in Government for the last three and a half years. So the fact that the Government's education policy is not delivering results could not be blamed on the Member for Siparia; but it has to do with the incumbent in office. Then I read in the newspapers that there was a commission of enquiry into the conduct of NH International, Warner Construction and a company known as Landate, in which the Minister himself admitted that he has a financial interest.

Mr. Singh: And he is building houses.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Then I realized that clearly my hon. friend is disturbed that his Prime Minister, on the advice of the Member for Caroni East, has set up a commission of enquiry to investigate, among others, a Cabinet Minister. If I were in a Government and the Prime Minister sets up a commission of enquiry to investigate me, I would resign. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Singh: Shameless!

Mr. K. Ramnath: What is coming out is there seems to be bitter conflict between the Prime Minister and the Member for Diego Martin West. I hope that the recipients or the intended recipients of government housing will not be the casualties of this bantering and this internal squabbling. I will not tolerate my

leader bringing my wife into public ridicule and odium. I will not remain under a leadership—and I am not at all criticizing my friend from Caroni East for raising an urgent matter of public importance. I certainly will not be part of any organization, if the leader of my party brings my wife and myself, as a senior Cabinet Minister, in public ridicule. That is exactly what the commission would do.

Dr. Rowley: You are hoping!

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, not at all. I have more respect for you than to hope that. You must ask your leader what he is hoping for; you must ask your leader why he has singled you out for attack! There must have been other ways. For example, my friend, from Ortoire/Mayaro knows that he was called and said to leave. [*Desk thumping*] He did the honourable thing and asked that if I am under investigation, I will resign from the Cabinet.

Member for Diego Martin West, that brings into focus some of the issues that you have been raising about the integrity of Parliament, parliamentary institutions and even the Members of Parliament. There are certain ways to deal with professional people. So do not think that I am here to attack you. I have no evidence that you are involved in any scandal.

Dr. Rowley: Oh, really!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have no evidence.

Dr. Rowley: Ask your partner.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not a commissioner; I am not in the commission of enquiry. Allegations have been made. You have made allegations about everybody on this side except, perhaps, me. I heard the Member for Diego Martin West say that “half of you on that side are before the courts and the other half would be in jail by the time the term comes to an end”. I heard him say that here.

Dr. Rowley: By Christmas.

Mr. K. Ramnath: When I objected, he said: “Not you.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I know that it is really interesting to carry on with this but it does not deal with the housing Bill and I would like the hon. Member to get back to the Bill. The hon. Minister of Housing, let him deal with it please. I recognize that it is jovial banter, but let him deal with the matter.

Mr. K. Ramnath: That is a serious matter, Sir. With the greatest deference to you, I am building a case here; I am looking at housing. I think that Landate may very well be an opportunity or a model in Tobago. I went to Tobago recently to a conference. I was invited by my hon. friend from Arima. I was a guest at that conference. I did not see the Member for Tobago East.

Mrs. Job-Davis: I was not invited.

Mr. K. Ramnath: For the purpose of the record, she was not invited. [Laughter] I heard that villas and so forth are being sold in Tobago for US \$3 million and US \$4 million. I do not know how true that is. I say to myself that I am very happy for my friend from Diego Martin West. If as a person who has a financial interest in a housing development project he would have made a lot of money then, perhaps, some of us lesser mortals might get a room at a reasonable price.

I want to say that I understand the unsettled behaviour of my friend from Diego Martin West. I want to warn him that when you are making these unwarranted attacks without evidence you have to be careful, because on your own side there are those who are gunning from you. It could very well be by Christmas, you might be in prison before the Member for Caroni East or the Member for Couva South. [Desk thumping] You never could tell what will happen.

Dr. Moonilal: Go ahead and attack his wife; attack Mrs. Manning.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So let me say that it is very unfortunate that a man who is responsible—a Member who is responsible for looking after the poor and underprivileged—had to make all these public utterances, at a time when he should be talking about the housing stock; and about how early former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited will get a lot of land. Mr. Deputy Speaker, notice what I am saying, not an NHA house, but a lot of land on which to construct a home.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West boasted how he "burst their throat" in Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Rahael: That is not true.

Mr. K. Ramnath: That is absolutely true. He promised them—he went on record as having promised that those who do not have homes would get a lot of land. He promised them that they would get \$1,000 a month pension.

Mr. Rahael: That is not right.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You stood in this House—I will get the *Hansard*—and said

that they would get \$1,000 a month pension if they qualify on the basis of age, because you will not get old age pension if you get \$1,000 a month national insurance—

Dr. Moonilal: He misled us.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So, there are people in this country who are getting both national insurance and old age pension because they have no other pension coming in. Caroni (1975) Limited wants to pay and has been paying \$600 a month. The Member stood in this House and said they would get \$1,000 a month and they have gotten nothing.

The Sugar Industry Welfare Labour Committee is harassing sugar workers who are tenants and who have loans to pay out their loans. In fact, at one time, they were being terrorized by informing them that they would take the outstanding money out of their VSEP, and then came the weeping Minister.

Dr. Moonilal: Who is that?

Mr. K. Ramnath: The one whose heart—according to the *Guardian*, the iron lady weeps. She really believed, as a lot of others before her, that she could make an impact on the PNM. All she has to do is ask Errol Mahabir and Kamaludin Mohammed after having served from 1956. In the case of the latter he served for 30 continuous years as a Minister. What is his fate? You could ask the Member for San Fernando West what she sees as her fate in the PNM. So, this iron lady who wept for some child—[*crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That is why he ran. He did not stay.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I want to know who invited me in San Fernando or Balisier House or whatever it is. I want to know what the purpose of the gathering was. Maybe he would explain. I dealt with that already. You know, that is what they will descend to when they cannot deal with a matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the iron lady wept. She did not weep for the 10,000 families that were summarily dismissed from Caroni (1975) Limited under the leadership of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's; and she did not weep for those thousands who were told that they would get a lot of land so that they could build a home. Before the weeping was finished, she disappeared from the portfolio, because it was never their intention to put the distribution of housing

lots in her hands, as it was never their intention to put the investigation of Petrotrin in her hands, or all the other state enterprises, particularly, EMBDC and Dr. Rao. It was never the Prime Minister's intention that she would investigate Mr. Rao. So, one morning, she then discovered that she was no longer responsible for that portfolio. So, two Ministers have gone—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, just for the record, as far as I am aware as a Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Minister Sahadeo is still in charge of the investment portfolio in the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Singh: Not EMBDC!

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am really not interested in what she is in charge of. All I am saying is that two Ministers have gone and we have not seen any implementation of the policy of land distribution with respect to workers who were dismissed by Caroni (1975) Limited. There is a third Minister who is now responsible for Caroni (1975) Limited and that is Minister Conrad Enill. As far as I am aware, Minister Enill is responsible for the Estate Management Business Development Company Limited that is in charge of the distribution of lands. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these lands are very important for us to have a very successful housing policy.

Mr. Valley: Again, please, just so that Members would be informed. Minister Sahadeo is still in charge of Caroni (1975) Limited as a company. I just want to say that the Vesting Bill is before a committee in the Senate. The commitment of the Government with respect to workers and land and so forth, those commitments are valid; they would be carried out and so on as soon as the Vesting Bill is approved. There is no issue with respect to that matter.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not think the hon. Minister understands what I am trying to say. Since I gave way, let me just ask him a question: Who give John-Williams permission to construct a permanent building at the corner of the Solomon Hochoy Highway at the Couva Main Road? [*Desk thumping*] Acres of land!

Mr. Singh: The Vesting Bill!

Mr. K. Ramnath: And a Vesting Bill is before a joint select committee or a select committee of Parliament.

Mr. Valley: I do not know. Let me say—

Mr. K. Ramnath: But you are taking up my time.

Mr. Valley: I do not want to take up your time, but you asked a question. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am aware, for example, that Caroni (1975) Limited—before EMBDC got into the act—provided persons like John-Williams with some one-year tenancy or licence to operate the club at Brechin Castle that we took issue with and so forth. As far as I am aware, there is no one who can give authority to use any of Caroni (1975) Limited lands at this time. [*Interruptions*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: For the benefit of elucidation, let me tell you that I am aware that Gilbert Park is being utilized by W Connection for good purposes—for sporting. In the absence of the Caroni (1975) Limited maintaining those facilities, some arrangement was made for him to use the ground. I am talking here about the construction of a steel structure on the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited at the corner of Couva Main Road and the Solomon Hochoy Highway. That is not what I am talking about. This is not a facility that has been leased for a year in the absence of any management committee to support the maintenance of grounds of housing and so forth. I am not talking about that. I am talking about people.

The same Uthara Rao, who enjoys a special status in this country had a security firm hired, headed by a former commissioner of police, going from house-to-house cutting down people's peas trees and corn trees behind their homes on 10 feet of land and terrorizing people who they claimed are occupying Caroni (1975) Limited lands illegally, but Mr. John Williams is constructing a steel structure, complete with piling and so forth, on lands of Caroni (1975) Limited at the corner of Couva Main Road and the Solomon Hochoy Highway.

Hon. Member: It was agreed before by Cabinet.

Mr. K. Ramnath: This Mr. Rao and EMBDC are a law unto themselves and they are doing so—did you listen to the aside? It was agreed before. They have no knowledge of the situation. The most senior Member on the other side, the Member for Diego Martin Central, said he really does not know. The others, whose portfolios do not include that, they know. You do not know whether he had planning permission either.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Complain!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What is he doing?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Is that a complaint?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that lands which were earmarked for distribution to sugar workers are not being developed for distribution; I am saying that the Minister is unable to use this legislation to provide the housing stock that is needed to satisfy the deficit, or even part of the deficit; and I am saying that together with the National Housing Authority or the Housing Corporation, there have to be other initiatives. The key to a successful housing programme is the availability of lands.

This Government and the UNC government never had a problem with excising lands from Caroni (1975) Limited to do anything, so vesting was not important. They excised lands from Orange Grove to build houses; they excised lands from Caroni (1975) Limited to build the Couva Housing project and to build the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. They did not have a Vesting Bill to build schools and so forth. The Government owns Caroni (1975) Limited.

In the old days, we say a World Bank caveat, the Cabinet had to approve certain things because of the conditionalities in relation to a loan from the World Bank. They have had no problem and, yet, if the NHA was not involved in the building of the homes, no one was allowed. It was when the government of the UNC entered into a progressive agreement with Roystonia—which was severely criticized by the Minister of Housing—not the same kind of partnership they entered into with respect to those houses in Cashew Gardens with an entrepreneur who did not have a cement mixer or a shovel. I had him checked out. He has no record, but he entered into a partnership to construct houses at Cashew Gardens. I will get to that in a little while.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Roystonia was the subject of a most scandalous set of remarks coming from the Member for Diego Martin West until he realized from his legal advisors that he did not have a leg to stand on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the best partnerships entered into between government and private enterprise with respect to housing has been that Roystonia project in Couva. People are pleased to go and live there—low income families are living there; middle income families and above middle income families are living there. They are living in peace. You ask yourself whether this Housing Corporation is going to make any difference, or is it going to be any different from the NHA except, of course, the workers of NHA no longer come under the Statutory Authorities Service Commission. That is the only reason they are seeking to set up this corporation.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: To change the name.

Mr. K. Ramnath: And to change the name. So no wonder Devant Maharaj or his likes are filing judicial reviews with respect to how the authority is being run—the bias that takes place in the distribution of homes and the bias that takes place with respect to promotion opportunities in these statutory authorities. When you look at the Bill, there is nothing in it that is going to allow the Government to be more progressive, in terms of satisfying the housing needs.

2.15 p.m.

So, what is then the intent of the legislation? When you look at the legacy of the PNM, and in order to look at the legacy of the PNM, you simply have to listen and look at what the people of Beetham Estate are saying. No human being should have to undergo, on a continuing basis, what the people of Beetham Estate have had to undergo for years. They know very well, that not only the Caroni Swamp is being polluted with dangerous heavy metals and other environmental pollutants. They know that the municipal dump should not be located upwind in a city like Port of Spain. They know that we are dealing with valuable property as well. They spend a lot of money propping Mr. Ray Braithwaite, who is another Uthara Rao in terms of the contacts he has with the Prime Minister, and the one-man operation he leads. I know him very well; I do not blame him for having been selected to do that. The one who should be blamed is the one who selects, and that is the Prime Minister.

The dump in Claxton Bay—the Member for Tabaquite raises that issue all the time—poses the same environmental problems to residents west of the Solomon Hochoy Highway. But Beetham Estate was a project of the late Prime Minister. This is not about squatting. These are people who are the recipients of Government housing, except that this regime has no respect for them. They can complain forever about the environmental problems that beset them and their children on an ongoing basis, and the Government turns a blind eye.

They assume that they would vote for them all the time, and therefore become contemptuous, but this oil rich country that we boast about, heading towards developed country status, should be ashamed that we have a place like the hills in East Port of Spain in the condition that those hills are today. They have no idea and no plan to deal with the serious problem of housing that exists in that area. None of their housing statements—nothing the Minister has said, in his so many statements about housing—talks about how do we deal with that problem which has resulted in more problems for everybody. That is the legacy of the PNM.

[MR. RAMNATH]

When you look at areas that have been traditionally neglected, like La Brea, and you compare that with what is happening in Laventille and Port of Spain, and so on, you ask yourself; why do they re-elect the Member for La Brea? He must have certain attributes. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*] So, what do we do as a country that sees crime in relation to poverty and poor housing? What does a Government do in such a situation, apart from saying, we are going to build X number of homes in the coming year? Satisfying this housing deficit has to be a national priority. You just cannot decide that Emile Elias, who campaigned over the last five years for the PNM, would solve all your housing problems, even though he is getting a lot of contracts.

Mr. Singh: Pay back time, pay back time.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You cannot hope that the NHA or the new housing corporation will partner with a few contractors and that you would satisfy the housing demands. I have said repeatedly, that you are not going to develop any of the areas outside of those already developed with low-cost housing. You have to have lands made available for executive housing in the Point Lisas area, otherwise, no one would come and live there. They would continue to live in Westmoorings and in the East-West Corridor as they do, and we are not going to get the benefit of the payroll.

I also would say, by extension, the same thing in La Brea. You need to have a marina in La Brea. You need to have a golf course in La Brea, as we had before. I understand that was torn down when the current Member for La Brea was having a sabbatical. You need to encourage the people who are going to work in industry—in the methanol and ammonia plants and the aluminium smelter, and so forth—to live in the Southwest peninsula. Shell knew the answer when they built Clifton Hill, before you all destroyed the only beach that Point Fortin has—everything is gone—and Clifton Hill might even go just now. So, when we should be maintaining our good housing and the amenities that go with those housing—

[*Mr. Valley holds up document*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I cannot read from this distance. When you should be maintaining those things, the focus of the Government is to build these two-bedroom houses and sell them for \$220,000; houses which are less than 10 feet apart in Cashew Gardens and in other areas, promoting potential for serious social problems. We should be talking now about making lands available at commercial prices to

developers, so that people can build their homes. People who want to build homes cannot afford the price of land.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am indeed grateful to the hon. Members. I am saying that there must be a comprehensive thrust. In an interview published in BWIA magazine—I was doing some travelling recently—there is a very interesting article about housing in Barbados and in Trinidad and Tobago.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The writer was concerned about the escalating prices. They interviewed Mr. Fifi from Home Construction, who indicated that the price of housing in Trinidad, and by extension, land, is driven by demand, not by anything else. Now demand could be related to low mortgage interest rates, and so forth. Mr. Fifi said that for a very long time prices would continue to escalate. The young couple in this country cannot buy a house, it is impossible. You cannot get a square foot of land on the outskirts of San Fernando—not in San Fernando—for less than \$60 a square foot, it is not available.

When people build their homes in Palmiste—as a former Member for San Fernando West, you would know, Mr. Speaker, of the difficulties certain people are experiencing with a plan, to come next door and put up high-rises; a plan by the National Housing Authority (NHA)—something supported by the Member for San Fernando West—high-rises and low cost apartment buildings for tenants. After people have built their expensive homes on expensive lands, which are in excess of \$1.5 million and \$2 million, they now have to have neighbours. That is not the way you develop a society. That is not the way societies are developed. Is it any wonder that one of the things I had in my dream, that they would one of these days put up a gate somewhere by the stadium and anybody going West may have to go through a gate, because certain people in that area are very concerned about people like me coming to live there—low income earners.

Mr. Imbert: Not like you—you. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: My friend from St. Joseph lives in that region, so I think I better discontinue this line. The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is that you do not have the policy in place; you do not have a system in place to have balance development, and that is what is needed. You are not going to have growth poles developing, if you do not cater for people who want middle and upper middle income housing and lands, for which they are prepared to pay.

Their answer to the housing problem is to find a tract of land around every well-established housing development and put down houses and say: “This is a legalitarian government, we are for small people, go and live there, and you can continue with your habits”, because—I want to tell you something, they built 1,007 housing units in Couva, you pass in front my house when you go there. There are some very nice people living there, but there are some very bad people as well. They never built a community centre, a playground or a school. It took the UNC government to build one of the most modern primary schools in Couva. [*Desk thumping*] It took the UNC government to build a community centre for these people. They did nothing of the sort. When you read the newspapers you would see people in the constituency of my hon. friend for Arouca South complaining incessantly—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What are they complaining about?

Mr. K. Ramnath:—about the lack of facilities in the housing developments in east Trinidad.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Where? Where?

Mr. K. Ramnath: In La Horquetta and Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What facilities? They have everything.

Mr. K. Ramnath: That is why they had to put police posts. They are protesting and they are angry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They have district hospitals, they have everything.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You would tell them that when we go to campaign, because I am quite sure that is one of the seats that would be coming to the UNC in the next election. [*Desk thumping*] We would surprise some of these people.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They would have to be mad to vote for the UNC.

Mr. K. Ramnath: That is right. You keep them in bondage. You kept them with smoke inhalation on a daily basis—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath:—and you feel that they would vote for you; but they are very responsible citizens.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Member for Couva South, as you know, that and God face you would never see.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am telling you that people are understanding that this is an oil rich economy. [*Desk thumping*] It is an economy in which people are not getting their fair share. That is what my friend from Diego Martin West said; that people are not getting the value for the money that we are spending. I am not the only one; he said that.

Mr. Singh: San Fernando West.

Mr. K. Ramnath: And he understands that there is not the required calibre in the Ministry of Education to promote the kind of educational opportunities, and so forth, for the country. So, I applaud him for being honest in criticizing the Minister of Education.

I am saying there has to be a comprehensive thrust. We have to make lands available. There is not a single statement coming from the Government about making Caroni lands available for people who would like to buy them to construct a home. It is about "we controlling it"; it is about "we building the houses and we deciding who get the houses". I do not want to go into house-padding and voter padding, and so forth, I would leave that to other Members who have the information. But, what is abundantly clear is that the provision of these houses is not for satisfying housing needs but for satisfying the political needs. [*Desk thumping*] You would recall the matter concerning a Lady—that is the feminine of a Lord in Britain—who is facing a very big fine for using Government funds—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The importer.

Mr. K. Ramnath: —the importer—for using Government funds for satisfying the constituencies, the members of the political party to which she belongs. One of these days, I am quite sure, we would take a case like that to the Privy Council. I pray every day that we shall never remove the Privy Council as our final court of appeal. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] When I consider the maturity of

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judgments; judgments with a human face; judgments that are concerned with future developments, and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, they would never be able to build enough houses to win any seat that we control in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] I could assure you of that. That is not any concern of mine. If you look at what they did in Tarouba and you see an example of what should not be. People in Gopaul Lands are already planning to sell and move. A lot of them are going to Toronto, because they are driven out by the criminal and kidnappers that you create in those housing developments. [*Desk thumping*] Do not be surprised that the reduction in the voter list has to do with migration. I would talk about that at another time, because we must not only look at two periods, we must look at what happened in the preceding periods, when they padded.

The point I am making is that if you do not have balanced communities, you are going to have major shifts in population, as occurred in the United States. If you are the last to leave Florida, walk with the US flag, is the subject of bumper stickers, because what is happening is, a lot of people feel threatened that the Hispanic communities are taking over South Florida, so they keep moving up North, and so forth. In Trinidad, people are moving on a regular basis. If you apply to the US Embassy for a visa today, you would have your appointment sometime in October, and the Canadians are processing thousands of applications for residence in Canada.

You ask yourself why would people want to leave this place, I think that this is a wonderful place to be? When you have to face the reality out there—and I sympathize with the Nath family, people who have contributed so enormously to the development of the society; the Roopnarine family; all the families who are victims of a PNM created kidnapping class—[*Desk thumping*] You know, Mr. Speaker, those houses, while you can say they are needed, you do not have the supporting infrastructure in place to ensure that people who are moved from their natural communities can now re-adjust.

There are no jobs in many of those areas. Where would the people of Tarouba go and work? They do not even think about these things. They used to tell people if you come to Couva to live, you would get jobs in Point Lisas. They have no jobs for them in Point Lisas. So that housing is not going to be solved by creating this housing corporation, with all its niceties, and so on. Housing would be solved when you genuinely mean to assist people in having decent homes, decent recreational facilities, and so forth.

When I read the newspapers that Mr. Chavez, who obviously has his own agenda, which has been made public; who has a fight with his friends in Washington; who wants to set up his own regional trading bloc—I have not heard anything coming from my friend from Diego Martin Central, I am sure he would be speaking about that some time. I want to warn that we, as a country, face serious consequences, as a result of the initiative of Mr.Chavez. I was glad when I read in the newspapers that the Prime Minister did not sign anything.

Our premium market—where we make maximum profits; where we make all our moneys—is the English-speaking Caribbean. The Government understood that when they established the Caricom Oil Facility—although it was not properly explained by my friend, he was a little confused on that day when he sought to explain.

Mr. Singh: That could have been any day.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Caricom Oil Facility—I would bring it to housing and I would show you what I am trying to do—was established in such a way that it would not appear that we were subsidizing anybody, but rather, when oil reached a certain price, the Caricom countries will benefit from a fund, which they would decide how they use. They could buy LIAT planes; they could do what they want with it, and so on. Mr. Chavez unilaterally decided that "I am the fifth largest producer of oil in the world; I have enormous reserves; I can increase my production at will; that I am going to recolonize the Caribbean"—an accusation made by Williams a very long time ago. "I will now offer prices which have never been experienced before"—that is a reduction of about US \$6 per barrel—to countries in the Caribbean. Then I see the Prime Minister and my friend from Port of Spain South at the conference—I am sure they really went to find out what was happening. I see no reason that if we do not act swiftly, why our Caribbean neighbours will not accept the offer made by Mr. Chavez. In fact, this is not the first time he has made that offer, he has done it before. He has even promised to further reduce the price of fuel to the English-speaking Caribbean countries—and let me make it clear, that is not for us in Trinidad and Tobago, that is for consuming countries in the Caribbean—by providing transportation that would further reduce the cost of fuel to these islands.

Mr. Singh: What happened to the gas pipe?

Mr. K. Ramnath: If that were to take place—I am glad that you raised the issue Member for Caroni East—Petrotrin market would disappear, because the

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vast majority of products are sold on this market. The extraregional market takes a very small percentage, and the international market, an even smaller percentage. When you are faced with a serious problem—we are not an exporter of crude, we have to make that clear, and we have a small production that BP has gotten rid of. The cost of decommissioning BP facilities is so high that they took in front, and said that they were going to sell it, and the liability for decommissioning it would then be of those who have purchased it. So, it is an economic decision that they decided.

Mr. Singh: Just like Maranatha.

Mr. K. Ramnath: In addition to that, they retain the right to drill in the deeper horizons in those fields. So, the production that BP has right now, which is exported to the United States, is not bringing the kind of revenues that you get if you manufacture products and sell them abroad. Having said that, the point I want to make is that in the midst of this present scenario—high prices—you could see revenues tumbling; you could see jobs being lost in the refining industry; you could see expenditures in housing rising, while incomes are falling. We went through this period.

Mr. Singh: Deja vu.

Mr. K. Ramnath: We have the experience. My friend from Chaguanas had to manage the country during such a period, although he was the beneficiary of some rather caustic remarks coming from this Bench here.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The Member for St. Augustine, you said Chaguanas.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Oh, I beg your pardon; you know I always saw you as the Member for Chaguanas—St. Augustine. [*Interruption*] They have no sense of humour, they are extremely bitter because they know their fate. In a few years' time they shall no longer be there. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: There are a number of ways you can say I am sorry, but the best way is to say, "I am sorry".

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That is when you withdraw your resignation in 24 hours, you just went and said, "I am sorry".

Mr. K. Ramnath: When oil prices began to tumble in the 1980s, ammonia prices started to tumble; methanol prices began to tumble; they are all related to energy prices. We are talking about spending large sums of money. The Minister of Housing and Member for Diego Martin West promised that there would be a huge increase in the budget for housing in 2005/2006.

I am saying to you that with this approach, that money is really no problem, that you can talk about building a brown paper bag stadium—I think that is the name of it—in Tarouba—\$850million which, if it is built by NH International it would go to \$1,700 million; or if my friend from Diego Martin East has anything to do with it, it would fall down, and when he repairs it, the hurricane would take it up. [*Crosstalk*] You are talking about a Government that feels that money is now available so that they can do whatever they want, without getting value for that money. [*Desk thumping*] Any housing thrust must be done in such a manner that we are going to benefit in the long run.

I am saying to you that you have to be careful that any serious dip in the price of oil—although we are told that prices are market-driven and for a while we would see high prices, all kinds of possibilities exist when it comes to the oil industry, and particularly the impact such changes would have on small producers like ourselves. I warned the Government that we must get value and quality for the moneys we are spending. The joint ventures must be re-established in the manner that they were established under the UNC.

2.45 p.m.

When you look at Union Hall in San Fernando—a UNC project—you will be quite happy to want to live there. Ask the Member for San Fernando West, I think she still represents that area.

Dr. Moonilal: She has investments there.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The idea was to have mixed housing; the idea was to have quality housing and to promote quality families. Their focus is how to mass produce, using their friends in the construction industry—

Mr. Singh: Match boxes.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—to build these unacceptable buildings that they call homes. I went to Cashew Gardens to view what they were doing there—

Mr. Singh: Unbelievable!

Mr. K. Ramnath:—and I am ashamed that those are the homes they want people to pay over \$200,000 for. When they realized that people would not want to pay that and could not afford to pay that, because they would not qualify for a mortgage unless their joint family income exceeded \$4,000 a month, they said they could rent-to-own—some kind of rent/purchase agreement. I have no problem with rent/purchase. I believe that if people cannot afford a mortgage their

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rents should go towards eventually purchasing, but give them a decent home. Do not mass produce those houses to satisfy your friends in the construction industry. You cannot have those homes less than 10 feet apart, as you have done in Cashew Gardens and in Tarouba and expect that you are going to have privacy and that families are going to grow up without the attendant and social problems.

Mr. Speaker, they are not really seeking to deal with social problems. Housing is both a physical and a social problem. The Minister of Housing very well knows the crowded homes in the country. We have discussed this matter; the sharing of bathrooms by different families in rental accommodations. You would think that when you start a thrust in making houses available for people to purchase that you would give them the assurance that once and for all they are going to live like decent human beings. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is not going to add any value to this country. This National Housing Authority is a den of iniquity! It is riddled with political corruption, and the distribution policy is scandalous! I remember the days when Mrs. Elmina Clarke-Allen was the Minister of Housing and Mr. Desmond Cartey and I would have conversations with them with respect to allocation of apartments for needy families. These needy families had no access to the National Housing Authority but I must admit that Mr. Cartey was very accommodating.

Mr. Singh: He was employed with the UNC, I understand.

Mr. K. Ramnath: When you go there you feel so unwelcome. There is no systematic way of dealing with applications. There was an advertisement by the National Housing Authority for a \$10,000 repair loan.

Hon. Member: \$17,000.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I personally ensured that 700 and more applications came out of my office in Couva South. [*Interruption*] One of the few high level constituency offices functioning in the Caribbean.

Hon. Member: Oh yeah!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I had over 700. I can challenge the Minister, I have copies of them! I made copies and I had them delivered to NHA! You know we never heard a word! They said that they were going to draw it by lottery. Do you know when I enquired in Couva South—[*Interruption*]—this is a fact!—I could not get people who said that they got money, because they came to me. I remembered one name in particular that got a letter that said "Come, we have to attend to you." His

name is Raymond Baptiste; he happens to be my brother-in-law, but because of his name they called him.

Hon. Member: How do you know that?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am telling you!

Hon. Member: I thought he was going to say Ramnath.

Mr. K. Ramnath: These are real issues in the country. If you want to know, Mr. Member for La Brea, through you, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: Did he get the money?

Mr. K. Ramnath:—you check the distribution of homes in Tarouba!

Dr. Moonilal: We will have to change our names.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not making this statement here to create any problem. I have said before that they distributed 1,007 homes in Couva when Mr. Mottley was the Minister, and they could not find seven East Indians to put in those homes. [*Interruption*] Go and check the distribution! You have to face reality in this society! [*Desk thumping*] I am not going to do like those people who come to the Senate in your Government, and pretend that the realities do not exist and then start to weep. [*Interruption*] I am not going to do that! Why did the Minister say that Opposition Members were telling their constituents not to apply?

Hon. Member: That is a lie!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have never heard such unadulterated piffle in my life.

Miss Seukeran: That is true Kelvin.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Nonsense!

Hon. Member: We encouraged them to apply.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, my time is up. Let us put an end to that kind of nepotism; let us put an end to that bias which exists; let us formulate policies that will make people feel that they are treated as equal citizens and let us have an authority that truly is interested in satisfying the housing needs of the population and stop playing politics with the people's money.

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

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In listening to the Member for Couva South, I was not certain whether he really believed what he said or he really meant what he said. As a representative of the people, I take offence to some of the positions that have been put forward in this House by the Member for Couva South, who is a representative of the people just like me. He presented a position to this House, a philosophy with respect to housing development that is clearly based on the principle of class bias.

Clearly, when one listens to what the Member for Couva South said and I took notes, class bias. Clearly! Let me go straight into some of the things he said that “he does not like the people who pass in front of his house on the way to their lower cost homes.” That is what he said! He said: “Do not build low cost developments in Point Lisas,” Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, I object.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am on my feet and I am not giving way!

Mr. Ramnath: That is a misleading statement. I never said that!

Mr. C. Imbert: I am not giving way!

Mr. Ramnath: I am not asking you to give way! You think I will have to tolerate nonsense like that!

Mr. Speaker: Order please! Order please!

Hon. C. Imbert: You said that!

Mr. Speaker: Please continue, Member.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ramnath: You are a big liar, I never said that! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. C. Imbert: Do not call me a liar! Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert:—spent a long time complaining bitterly, about low cost housing developments devaluing exclusive housing developments. He gave examples, he spoke about homes valued at \$2 million and \$3 million and then somebody, suddenly, comes and put these low class people next to these properties. That is what he said! He could try to hide it! He could not help it! It just came out and I

took notes. Throughout his contribution, the general theme was that the PNM administration is surrounding all of these wealthy people's homes with low-class housing developments. That is the general theme of what he said and he personalized it by saying, he does not like these people who pass in front of his house in Point Lisas—

Mr. Ramnath: I never said that!

Hon. C. Imbert:—on the way to their houses.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please!

Mr. Ramnath: He is polluting—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! I am at a little disadvantage because I came in a little late during your contribution but, Member, as far as possible, do not misquote. I do not know, all I am asking you to do is not to misquote, if that is what you are doing. I am not saying you are doing it.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not misquoting, Mr. Speaker. He said that “satisfying the demand for housing should be a national programme” that “we cannot develop areas outside of the traditional areas with low-cost housing”. “We need to develop elite housing developments to attract people to these areas”. That is what he said!

Mr. Ramnath: I have a copy—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh, so you agree with that?

Mr. Ramnath: I never said that I do.

Hon. C. Imbert: So, this note-taking is correct! Oh! Mr. Speaker, the general theme of what the Member for Couva South has said, is that he just does not like all of these low-class people, and all of these low-class housing developments coming into areas such as his, where there are \$2 million and \$3 million homes. It is a bigoted approach! It is a discriminatory approach! It is based on class bias, and I am surprised that someone who was elected by the people, could come into this House and present such a prejudiced position.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Why are you surprised?

Hon. C. Imbert: That is what he said! He said it before in other debates in this House. He has said, he just does not like the idea of all of these people from Laventille and these people from Arouca—

Dr. Rowley: He said they spoiling Couva.

Hon. C. Imbert:—they are spoiling Couva. What are they doing there! What you bringing all these people here for! Do not bring them! I have news for him. *[Interruption]* The fact of the matter is that the traditional areas for housing development in this country are full. They are full! If you try to find a piece of land between Chaguaramas and Arima or try to find a piece of land in the corridor it would be a very difficult exercise; very, very difficult exercise! You try to find a piece of land in Diego Martin, you cannot find one! It is full! If you go into the Barataria area, for example, no land! Everywhere you go is full of houses and other buildings. As the country develops and as young families, who naturally, will want to have homes of their own, seek to acquire properties, so that they can build their families in a proper environment, they have to look somewhere else.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South is not living in this country! He is not living in Trinidad! Why do you think the Chaguanas area, which I call the "greater Chaguanas area", is exploding? Because, everywhere else is full. There is nowhere else to build houses, we have to start moving. We are moving east with developments; that is why the Home Construction Company took the decision at the time, many years ago *[Interruption]* to create a city in the Trincity area and now when one goes up there—it was not like that 20 years ago, but if you go there now you would see one of the largest shopping malls in the country. In fact, I am told that when the Trincity Mall development, that is on the way at this time is completed, it will be the largest shopping mall in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it may very well be the largest shopping mall in the entire Caribbean. It has been developed to deal with the demand, because the traditional areas in the suburbs of the capital city of Port of Spain are now full. There is no space left. People are chock-a-block on top of each other in these areas. People have started to move out eastward towards the St. Augustine, Trincity and Arouca areas, moving eastward all the time. You have had a demand created now for a new city in the Trincity area, and Home Construction has seized on that and they developed the golf course; they developed the shopping mall and they now have a cineplex up there, which I understand is very well attended and they are continuing with their development.

In central Trinidad, if one takes a look at what is happening, you have the PriceSmart Mall developing—I was there, just over the weekend and I see more construction is taking place in the central Trinidad area. I see the PriceSmart Mall—I think that is the proper name for it—expanding, new construction taking place in that Endeavour area. When you look over the highway in the Charlieville

area, as I said before, I am told that that gas station in Charlieville that is over the Endeavour flyover is the busiest gas station in the entire Caribbean, not just in Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South and other hon. Members opposite, they have to get real! The entrepreneurs are doing it. The businessmen know what is going on, they are expanding their businesses into central Trinidad and up into the Wallerfield area. Many businesses—I understand Peake Industries is considering relocating its industrial activities from the western peninsula and sending it out eastwards and going down; and many industries have already located themselves into Frederick Settlement, which 10 years ago was empty. It is now full. If you go to the Frederick Settlement Industrial Estate, you will see a number of factories that did not exist there 10 or 15 years ago. But, this estate is now full and you have a number of industries which were traditionally located around the urban centres now relocating. Look at the El Socorro area, look at the area between the Barataria flyover and El Socorro, on the north side of the highway, 10 years ago, there was nothing there. People were planting crops and things like that—I am talking about close to the Republic Bank Sporting Facility in the Barataria area—now when you go up the highway, what do you see there? You see a number of commercial enterprises have relocated their business out of the congested Port of Spain and Diego Martin area and are now relocating themselves in the Barataria area. In El Socorro you have—

Hon. Member: Many enterprises.

Hon. C. Imbert:—many enterprises, which have decided that it is more efficient for them to relocate themselves out of the congested city centre and relocate themselves into the El Socorro and Barataria areas. More and more people are moving down to central Trinidad, into the Frederick Settlement area, into the Chaguanas area and so on.

More and more people are moving even further south into the Couva area; people are moving east into the Oropune area; into Trincity and Arouca going west; now that we have the University of Trinidad and Tobago developing in the Wallerfield area and the Wallerfield Technology Park. As a matter of fact, just yesterday there were proposals to expand the area available for technology development in the Wallerfield area and clearly, when one looks at the pattern of development in Trinidad and Tobago one will know now, that 10 years from now you are going to have residential developments and housing developments in the Wallerfield area. It is clear! You do not have to be a “see-er man”! You do not

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have to have a crystal ball to see that! That is the way this country is developing and the Members opposite have got to make that paradigm shift. They have got to make that quantum leap! They have got to emancipate themselves from that mental slavery that they are in! They have got to look at the country holistically!

There are new growth poles in Trinidad and Tobago, and as far as I am concerned, in my travels in the central Trinidad area, central Trinidad is exploding! Where else are you going to build houses? If the factories are relocating out of the capital area and relocating into the central Trinidad area; if the commercial enterprises and the retail outlets are relocating out of Port of Spain and moving into east and central Trinidad, of course, we have to build houses there, to support these industries and support these commercial developments. Clearly, all of these businessmen—

Mr. Valley: Look at Jarrette.

Hon. C. Imbert: I know he is doing it—all of these entrepreneurs and all of these persons involved in commerce, they obviously know something that the UNC does not know. They know that the East-West Corridor is full, there is no space left. Because of the traffic congestion on the main arterial routes between east and west Trinidad, it is counterproductive now to locate your business along the corridor. They are moving out and as they move the residential developments will follow. And the PNM administration has made the point, we have made an announcement that it is our intention to extend the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to Manzanilla. We are not making joke about that, this is a serious thing. We intend to make a freeway all the way from Diego Martin to Manzanilla with a spur into Sangre Grande and up to Toco and so on; all the way down to Mayaro.

Mr. Singh: Stop the smoke in the dump first.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is not the point! We are talking about housing here! You will hear about the dump in a little while. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, they have got to get out of this little narrow-minded, “cocoonish”—if that is a word—this closet-like thinking that they have. They are hiding in a cupboard and they do not want to look outside, because they are afraid of what they will see.

Mr. Narine: They still in the box.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, they are inside the box and they lock the box with a padlock. They are not outside at all!

Mr. Singh: Because of kidnappers! [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Imbert: If the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—and forget which government it is, if it is possible for Members opposite to forget which government it is—any government of Trinidad and Tobago, that has a policy position to construct 100,000 houses in the next 10 years to deal with the known demand, these houses have got to go into the new growth centres in the country. You cannot build 100,000 houses in Diego Martin! You cannot build 100,000 houses in Laventille! It just cannot be done and it would be foolish to do so anyway!

Clearly as these houses are going to be built to deal with the known demand—and I will come to that in this little while—clearly, these houses would be built in eastern Trinidad, in central Trinidad, in southern Trinidad, south eastern Trinidad and south western Trinidad. Where else would one build these houses? This PNM administration, recognizing that we have to modernize this country—the housing thrust is only one aspect of the development, that is only one part of it. Let me come back to the highway system. We will be building a highway from the existing location; we have awarded the contract already to extend the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from O’Meara to Antigua Road, which by the way, for those who may not know on the other side, Antigua Road is the entrance to the new University of Trinidad and Tobago in the vicinity of where the Carib Glassworks aggregate facility is, up at the end of the Wallerfield stretch.

The Ministry of Works and Transport has awarded contracts just within the last month or so, to extend the highway from Santa Rosa Racetrack all the way up to the entrance to the new University of Trinidad and Tobago and we are going to continue through and, as I said, we are going straight to Manzanilla all the way down to Mayaro.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, the designs are completed for the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway, the first phase of the extension from Golconda where it is right now, in the Cross Crossing area to the Debe area, that contract is expected to be put out for tender within the next couple weeks. After that, the next extension is to Penal. When the highway gets to Penal—because we are going to build it incrementally, we are not going to be waiting for the entire highway alignment to be designed all the way to La Brea and Point Fortin—we have the piece from Golconda to Debe, we are putting that out to tender and starting building that immediately. Shortly thereafter, we will put out the next section from Debe to Penal. When the highway gets to Penal it splits into a “Y” one leg goes to Point Fortin and the other leg goes to Penal.

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When that construction is finished you will be able to leave Arima, Port of Spain, Chaguanas or wherever and drive on a freeway all the way down to Debe, Penal, La Brea and Point Fortin. That is just the North/South link that we are doing there.

Then you have the East/West link. The designs again, are being done for the highway from San Fernando, first to Princes Town, then to Rio Claro and then to Mayaro. You have all of these hubs. San Fernando being a hub, for example, the North/South link will pass through San Fernando, the East/West link will pass through San Fernando and again, the St. Joseph/Barataria area will be another hub where the North/South and East/West links go through. You will have this highway taking you into Princes Town, Rio Claro and Mayaro; you have the other highway going to La Brea and Point Fortin.

Mr. Singh: I guess you will build houses going up the highway.

Hon. C. Imbert: What you have to do—I am glad the Member for Caroni East is trying to exercise his mind, starting to think now! [*Crosstalk*] As these highways are built, it gives you access to new population centres, it gives you the ability now, to create new housing developments which will be easily accessible by a modern highway system.

When the Member for Couva South comes into this Parliament with this old tired cry about “what you building houses in Couva for”, “we do not want any houses in Couva”, “house padding”, I mean, I am tired of it! It is like the bleating of a little child! If they are truly interested in the development of this country, they have got to see that there are going to be brand new growth centres created in this country, for housing, residential, commercial, industrial and recreational development, [*Desk thumping*] if they are thinking about it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They cannot see that.

Hon. C. Imbert: How on earth would one create a port in the Toco area, maybe, perhaps, serving the new oil industry that is springing up with the BHP platforms just off Biche there, and you have the British Gas platforms just north—I wonder if these people ever travel in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Nah!

Hon. C. Imbert: I was on a boat the other day, just going North of the north coast, I saw these two oil rigs that are outside there—gas rigs, actually—in production already. That was not there 20 years ago. We did not have these rigs north of the Blanchisseuse area. We did not have gas in production in the north part of

Trinidad 20 years ago; we never conceptualized that east of Biche we would have major oil production taking place. I understand production has almost reached 50,000 barrels a day in the BHP fields just east of Biche.

Now that you have these new industrial developments; you have petroleum production in the north/east quadrant, clearly, it begs for a modern highway system, modern transportation system and for commercial, residential and industrial development. Why must we stay in this little narrow box and say the traditional areas, Port of Spain and San Fernando, must remain the centres of population in Trinidad and Tobago? We must all remain confined, as if we are in barracks; as if we are all barracoons in the barracks!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Certain people for certain areas.

Hon. C. Imbert: I think that is a kind of mentality that seems to be seeping through, that we must all remain confined to barracks in Port of Spain, in San Fernando and so on. I am offended by it! The other thing is, the society in Trinidad and Tobago is not comprised of wealthy people. What percentage of the population could afford a \$4 million home? It has got to be .000-something per cent. Perhaps, the Member for Couva South falls into that category because he gets more than one salary. [*Interruption*] Yes, he gets more than one salary, but that is not the point. The percentage of persons in Trinidad and Tobago who can afford a \$4 million home is very small.

Let me come now to the applications at NHA. I am advised that there are over 70,000 applications for NHA units at the National Housing Authority, as a result of the initiatives of this PNM administration. I have done my own simple calculations. If one had to take up a mortgage loan of \$150,000, with the new interest rates that we have introduced as low as 6 per cent and periods of repayment of up to 30 years, I have worked out that on \$150,000 mortgage on one of the smaller NHA units, a two bedroom—and I will come to that issue in a little while—that the repayment might be about \$1,000 a month. The qualifying income using traditional banking criteria for a mortgage loan repayment of \$1,000 a month might be about \$3,300—\$3,500 a month.

I am satisfied, of those 70,000 applications at NHA, as many as, maybe 30,000, maybe more—I do not have the exact data, but I would think that at least 30,000 of these applicants meet the qualifying ceiling for a mortgage loan of \$1,000 a month and thereby qualify for one of the NHA units.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Why do we have a situation like this? I have to wonder if the Member for Couva South lives in Trinidad and Tobago. Where does he live?

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the reality in Trinidad and Tobago is that a number of people live in a crowded situation. There are many homes in Trinidad and Tobago where you have multiple families; 10, 15 people living in one house; two, three, four families, a set of generations: the grandparents, the parents, the children with their own children, all living in one housing unit, because there are simply no housing units available for them. This is why the UNC housing policy failed. If you have a demand from about 70,000 persons, 30,000 or 40,000 persons minimum, in my opinion, who qualify for a National Housing Authority (NHA) unit can pay the mortgage, but are now living in rented premises, some of them paying more than that \$1,000.

I know people who are paying \$1,500 a month to rent an apartment much smaller than the NHA unit they will get for a mortgage loan repayment of \$1,000. One individual or two families living in a small two-bedroom apartment paying \$1,500 or \$2,000 a month, if you present them with the opportunity to go into their own unit, where they will no longer be renting, they will have to be crazy to say, "No, I will stay here in this two-bedroom apartment, chock-a-block, jam up with meh father, meh grandfather, meh cousin, meh tantie, meh nenen, because the Member for Couva South say so." People are tripping over themselves.

As a parliamentary representative, I have noticed a shift in the problems that people present to me when they come to me in my constituency office. Last night I was in my constituency office, as is normal on a Thursday night, for us on this side, at least. More than 50 per cent of the persons who came to see me, were looking for housing. *[Interruption]* As the Member for Diego Martin West has reminded me, long ago it was URP jobs. Now 50 per cent of the people who come to see me want an NHA house that the PNM is building and they are happy to get it. They want to know when it will be finished; when they will be interviewed for income qualification and when they will know if they qualify. They are not into this esoteric nonsense I heard coming out of the mouth of the MP for Couva South; they want a house and they want it now.

I wish there was a way that we could build 20,000 houses a year, when I look at the kind of demand coming at me, because I have to tell all of them, "We cannot give you a house that does not exist; the houses are under construction; have a little patience." At least now they have hope, because one of the things

that was different under the UNC is that they interviewed endless people. [*Desk thumping*] They interviewed thousands of people. They invited applications; they made them pay \$20 to apply for a house. They had no house to give them. It was an illusion; they were not building any houses; nothing of any significance; a drop, one, two here and there. But “yuh” interviewing 20,000 and 30,000 people and telling all of them, “You have qualified for a house and you will be allocated.” [*Crosstalk*]

I have seen the letters; they keep bringing them to me; frustrated people. They went to the Ministry of Housing in 1998, 1999 and 2000; “Look de letter dey give me; I have been interviewed and I qualify for a house,” and “You will be allocated a house shortly”. Well, shortly was in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001; no house, and they paid for it, too. We are not into mamaguy. The UNC was giving people letters and they had houses to give them. They created a whole band of frustrated people. Everybody comes and talks to me about their frustration; so many times they went to NHA; they “run them around; dey gih them letters; dey tell them come back.” But there were no houses to give them.

Mr. Hinds: What about the letters of comfort?

Hon. C. Imbert: At least now when someone comes to see me, I ask them, “Well, where would you like to live?” Some want to live in Diego Martin; some want to live in Chaguanas; some want to live in Trincity.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: None of them want to live in Couva.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is surprising where they are happy to live. Some of them are happy to live in Chaguanas; some are happy to live in Curepe; some want to live close to where they grew up in the Diego Martin area. I tell them, “Fine, you want to live in the Diego Martin area, the houses are under construction now; it may take about 12 months, so you will have to wait; if you want to live in Chaguanas, a lot of houses are being done at this time and, therefore, your waiting time will be shorter; you decide what you want to do.” For the first time, people have options and choices; [*Desk thumping*] it is real. It is not imaginary. People are exercising their options and some say, “I do not mind living in Chaguanas; I want to live in Chaguanas, it is an easy run for me; no problem; if I could get a unit in Chaguanas in six months, I will be happy to take that.” Another one will say, “No, I prefer to wait the twelve months and see if I can get an apartment in the Four Roads area, the Powder Magazine area,” or whatever the case may be.

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Now we can have meaningful discussions with our constituents; not the kind of mamaguy they got from the UNC when they were given letters for imaginary houses that never existed. Now, as a parliamentary representative, I can have a meaningful discussion with my constituents and I know that within the next six, 12 or 18 months, they will be able to get a house and move out of the cramped and uncomfortable conditions they are in now. [*Desk thumping*]

When I hear the nonsense coming out of the mouth of the Member for Couva South, I wonder: “Does he ever meet the public?” Does he do what we on this side do every Thursday evening, sit in our constituency office and receive members of the public, people who voted for us, listen to what their problems are and try to solve them? Does he have any perspective as to what life is like in Trinidad and Tobago? If he did, he would not talk that stupidity about: “We do not want these people in our area; doh bring dem here; leave dem up in town; doh bring all these Laventille people down in Couva.” It is almost akin to pseudo racism.

I, therefore, support what the Ministry of Housing is doing 100 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: All of us.

Hon. C. Imbert: I can see a plan; I can see a programme. It makes sense and it is realizing a lot of the aspirations, particularly of young couples in Trinidad and Tobago who are now forced to live in their parents’ homes or forced to live in very unsanitary and unsatisfactory circumstances in unsuitable rented accommodation.

When I think about the policy on the other side, I remember that in 1995 the PNM administration had built some NHA units in Glencoe, down in the La Horquette Valley Road area. The policy just for that particular development was that these units would be reserved for public servants and other persons working in the Government service. These units would be reserved for public servants, persons working in the protective services. I thought it was a very laudable affair. We finished the houses, but events occurred to result in a change in government. So the houses had been completed by the PNM, but had not been distributed by the PNM.

In comes the UNC; in comes a new Minister of Housing, the then Member for St. Augustine. What does he do? He decided that the units were too good; it was as simple as that. Apartments in Glencoe, “dat too good” for police officers and senior public servants and nurses and teachers. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, that is what he did. He decided, that “It too good for dem so; dem eh suppose to come and live in

de Glencoe area.” He scrapped the whole thing; put a new system in place and when you look at the recipients: family, friends and all kinds of things. It is absurd. It is a gated community now. An NHA development that was designed for persons in the middle income bracket, public servants, members of the protective services, is now an exclusive gated community in Glencoe, populated by persons, some of whom already had homes and could easily have accessed the housing market without having to come into State-subsidized housing. [*Crosstalk*]

The Aranguiz Villas were the same thing; that was another development which was designed under the PNM administration to satisfy the general pool of applicants in the NHA. What happened? The government changed and what did it do? No longer are the Aranguiz Villas to be allocated to persons within the general pool of the NHA application list. “Nah, done with dat!” Party hacks; party supporters, friends, persons in the upper income group; very wealthy people given two units, some of them. The thing is absolutely scandalous.

So when I hear the Member for Couva South talk about a balanced development, what does he mean? Does he mean taking State money, subsidizing housing and giving it to the rich? Is that what he means? That could never be right. This PNM Administration is involved in a multifaceted approach to housing development. There are housing developments within the NHA, which cater for middle income and upper middle income, which will be sold at the market price; there will be no subsidies involved; there are units within the system like that.

Then there are units which cater for the lowest end of the spectrum, which are the rent-to-own units, where it is recognized that persons cannot even afford the \$1,000 I spoke about. Maybe they could afford \$300; maybe that is all they could afford at this point in time. Therefore, you have units built on a rent-to-own principle, where you start off paying \$300 or \$400 a month in rent and part of the rent goes towards a reduction in the price of the unit. At some point in time, maybe five years from now, you are given the opportunity to convert your rental option into a purchase option. By that time you may have reduced the price of the unit from whatever it was, \$150,000 down to \$120,000, as the case may be. The person may have gotten a better job at that point in time. They would be older and may have been promoted and can now afford to pay \$1,000 a month, so they convert from rental to housing. That is the lowest end of the spectrum.

There is also the recognition that some people are very poor, underprivileged, disabled, challenged, whatever; they may never be able to afford to acquire a property. They may be in a rental situation for a long period of time; that is right

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down at the bottom of the spectrum. You have at the upper end, middle income and upper middle income developments, which the NHA is doing, no subsidy. Then you have all in between that, where you have two- or three-bedroom apartments, two- or three-bedroom houses, duplexes, condominiums, townhouses; it is a complete range of housing solutions. It is true balanced development. [*Desk thumping*] If you go into an NHA development now, you are going to see the whole range of housing options: two- and three-bedroom houses; duplex apartments, condominiums, the whole thing, depending on the needs of the individual.

I am really scandalized to think that anybody in this House representing the people could be pleading the case of rich people. That is what the Member for Couva South was doing. He was pleading the case of the wealthy. He said, "Do not surround us wealthy people with poor people, because it is going to devalue our property; it is going to upset me and I doh like these people around me." I just find the whole thing absolutely scandalous.

The other thing that this legislation seeks to do is to reorient the NHA from its traditional role, which was, for many, many years, the construction of houses using the direct labour approach, which we all know is an anachronism. It is an antiquated approach, the whole concept of Government doing things by direct labour. There is nobody on that side who could tell me he or she believes that the concept of producing goods and services by direct labour is a modern approach. They could say it, but I know they do not believe it.

This legislation is moving the NHA from the antiquated and archaic mode of delivery, using direct labour, to a project management approach. It is definitely a paradigm shift, a quantum leap. It is moving the NHA out of the old traditional way, where you would see NHA staff: masons, carpenters, bricks and mortar, pounding nails and so on, and being quite inefficient about it, because the system just conspires to rob itself of inefficiency, to a system where you are more administrative, regulatory and forward-looking; you are more service, results, performance and target oriented. This is the only way one could construct 100,000 houses in a 10-year period. [*Desk thumping*] It is impossible to take the staff of the National Housing Authority and put them to lay bricks and pound nails and get them to build 100,000 houses. It is absolutely impossible.

It has to be done through outsourcing. It has to be done by allowing the private sector to mobilize resources. How else would you do it? It is clear that is what this legislation is all about; it is a change in the way the NHA does its business. One of the reasons this legislation took so long was because they

wanted to make sure that the workers were given an opportunity to buy into the concept. If I go to Part VI, for example—I laughed when I heard the Member for Caroni East insinuate that I was not going to deal with the legislation. I have to give him the philosophical underpinnings and now we move into the clauses themselves. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Singh: I know you too long to fall for that.

Hon. C. Imbert: You think I could read a bill in two seconds? I am glad you think of me in that way.

When one goes into clause 31, one sees that:

“A person...may, within six months of the appointed day, exercise one of the following options:”

This is about staff:

- “(a) to voluntarily retire from the public service on terms and conditions agreed between him or the appropriate recognized association representing him and the Chief Personnel Officer; or
- (a) to transfer to the Corporation...”

This is the new corporation.

“...with the approval of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission on terms and conditions no less favourable than those enjoyed by him in the service of the Authority.”

The person has two choices: either retire and get his termination benefits or transfer to the authority.

Dr. Rowley: There were more options.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am just talking about those two. So there is no compulsory retrenchment taking place here; that is why it took so long. There was a lot of discussion with the trade unions and so on to make sure that the workers were treated in the most equitable and humane manner; something that I am sure the Member for Oropouche would be very happy to hear. The whole thrust of this legislation is to create a management-oriented housing authority.

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The other thing that bothers me is that, as far as I am concerned, the Members opposite do not have the moral authority or any kind of authority to talk to the PNM about housing. The Member for Caroni East was a supporter of a particular government. He was unable to be a member, because he was on the other side, at that time; he was in the National Alliance for Reconstruction. He then jumped ship after he lost his deposit or whatever happened to him. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Singh: “Nah, nah, doh try that.” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Imbert: But the fact is that the Member for Caroni East was just barely—he probably scraped through by five votes. [*Interruption*] I am glad you admitted it. The Member for Caroni East was a supporter of a particular party that had a housing policy that they must build no houses. That should have been in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Imagine a government having a housing policy that, “We shall build no houses”. “Thou shall not build a single house in Trinidad and Tobago.” So for five years, between 1986 and 1991, we had a government in place and a particular minister who then jumped into another party, another government, saying, “Thou shalt not build houses.” So our policy is, “No house”.

Between 1995 and 2001, the same minister—he moved from this party to that party—again, “Thou shalt build no house”. So you have the National Alliance For Reconstruction and then the UNC, 11 years of a housing policy effectively building no houses in this country. It is no wonder that we now have a demand for 70,000 houses and you have 40,000 persons who can meet the mortgage income criteria. It is no doubt that they created it. Look at the development of this country, all the housing estates. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They must say no; they cannot take the truth.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, if one looks at the housing developments in the country; look at my own constituency; you have the River Estate Housing Development. That was built—I have to do some arithmetic now—in 1975; so it

was built some 30 years ago, about 400 houses. You have the Diamond Vale Housing Development, built shortly before that, 2,000 houses. All that was part of the PNM initiative to create a housing solution for the salaried people of this country; that is essentially what it was; for workers, people who work for people and receive a paycheck at the end of the month; the salaried people. [*Desk thumping*]

So you had the Diamond Vale Housing Development, 2,000 houses; I think that was about 1970, and then the River Estate Housing Development in 1974/1975. Between them that is about 2,500 houses in that part of the country. Later on you had the Point Lisas Housing Development and then there was a whole number of other developments in the hills and foothills between Port of Spain and Morvant and going even further East. If you look up at the hills, everything you see there was built by the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] Every single one of those housing developments was built by the PNM, as part of a planned programme to remove people from the squalid conditions they were in. [*Desk thumping*] It is just like education.

When the PNM came into this country, one of the first things Dr. Eric Williams did was introduce a policy of free education. I have to go back to that and make the point that when I attended the University of the West Indies in 1975, my education was free. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: What a waste of taxpayers' money!

Hon. C. Imbert: I had to see another government come in 10 years later, 1987 or whatever it was, and introduce a cess for university students and start us on the road of high fees for tertiary education and start a distortion in the matrix of persons who were attending university. I went to the University of the West Indies in 1975 and I saw a whole cross section of people on the campus. Then I saw an evolution, where we began to have the introduction of fees and then the whole matrix, in terms of class, changed on the campus in the 1980s. [*Crosstalk*] I said the 1980s. There was no UNC in the 1980s; you are too young; you are just a child.

That is why I was happy, in my last incarnation, to be a part of the PNM's policy to reintroduce the concept of free tertiary education, the full circle. [*Desk thumping*] I was a beneficiary of the PNM's policy of free higher education in 1975, as was, I expect, everybody on that side. I am sure all of them on that side,

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were beneficiaries of the PNM policy of free higher education. [*Crosstalk*] Some of them may not have gone on to university, but I am assuming that most of them did.

Mrs. Job-Davis: If even they did, you would not have noticed.

Dr. Rowley: “Partap where you went?”

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Partap did not go anywhere.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: I am happy to be part of the PNM Administration 30 years later, in the year 2005, that is taking us back to that time when barriers to education are removed. I now bring the parallel to housing. [*Crosstalk*] In addition to making education free, providing access to higher education for everyone in the society, the PNM also introduced a policy of housing for everyone in the society. As you see all the housing developments that have been built all over Trinidad and Tobago, they were built by the PNM in the various areas. We had an interruption with the housing situation, just as we had an interruption with the tertiary education situation.

Dr. Moonilal: You had an interruption with crime.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am happy to see the thing turn full circle again. I am happy to be part of an administration that is making affordable housing solutions available to all our citizens, regardless of their background or religious or ethnic persuasion. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: Housing for all. It is not like that famous mamaguy from the Member for Caroni East, “Water for all”. We are not in the business of mamaguy. We are truly in the business of housing for all. [*Desk thumping*] I know what is wrong with the Member for Couva South and other Members opposite; it is paranoia. They are paranoid. [*Crosstalk*] When you look at Maslow’s hierarchy of needs—Member for Oropouche, stop me when you find it is getting too difficult—[*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: PNM education in action!

Hon. C. Imbert:—if you look at the triangle, what is at the bottom? Food and shelter. What is down at the bottom there? Shelter is right down at the bottom, basic needs. So any fool could see that shelter is a basic need. Therefore, on that side, they are getting paranoid, because they did believe us when we said

that we were putting in place a housing programme that would construct 100,000 houses over a 10-year period. Member for Diego Martin West, how many houses will be constructed for this fiscal cycle?

Dr. Rowley: Six thousand, three hundred and fifty houses. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: If you look at the private sector, we have probably hit the 10,000 figure that we are aiming for as an annual average. What is bothering them is that 6,350 families have been provided with a basic need by this PNM administration. What is frightening them is recognizing that they have missed the boat. They built an airport and desalination plant and all kind of “ting”. They missed the boat; they should have been building houses, because they recognize now that we are serving the basic needs of the population and they will never see the corridors of powers again. Never! [*Desk thumping*] It is pure paranoia.

What is also bothering them is that as you have natural population migration out of the urban centres, people moving out of Diego Martin, Port of Spain, Barataria and so on, and moving into Caroni, Chaguanas and so on, following jobs, industrial and commercial development, that is changing the population demographics in that part of the country, and you cannot fool those people. That is what bothering them; as these new immigrants—as they would want to call them—come in to the Chaguanas and Caroni areas, they cannot fool them. They cannot use the rhetoric that they are so accustomed to, to fool these people. What is bothering them is that as you have natural population movements, we are building houses where the people want to go. People move into the houses, register for elections, as they should, and the entire demographics in Trinidad and Tobago have changed and all of a sudden they see their hope of an election victory disappearing in the dust.

The Member for Couva South is paranoid. [*Crosstalk*] I mean, he already has to worry about them making overtures to the former Member for Couva South to come back in. I remember Mr. Warner saying, “Come back Ramesh; come back Gillian; come back Fuad; come back Hulsie; come back Trevor,” and he has to worry about it, because they might take them seriously. Then he has to worry about this; that you have this natural flow of people working in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and the Government is expanding it. He knows that everyday more and more petrochemical plants are coming to Trinidad and Tobago: gas to liquids; downstream industries; ethylene plants and melamine.

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He knows that consideration is being given to the creation of a south Point Lisas Industrial Estate, which will require services and support services and housing developments to house the persons working in the new industries and servicing the industries; he knows all of that. It is pure paranoia on his part, because he sees the demographics changing and his chances of ever being in government just evaporating, although there was none, in the first place.

I just want to deal with two more matters, because I totally support this Bill. If one looks at it, the board of the new Housing Development Company has been given authority to get involved in all types of housing development. The Bill has been well done. The Schedules give you the terms and conditions of the board members; the conduct of proceedings by the board and they have listed all the areas where the workers are going to come from. The way the board is established and the powers and authority of the board give it the ability to operate efficiently as a truly modern 21st Century organization, proactive, lean, clean and mean, operating as a focused organization in terms of delivery. It will be contracting, outsourcing services, not having this huge establishment with thousands of workers milling around, but having high powered professionals, educated, well trained personnel in the organization, all in a management mode to allow delivery.

There were some issues that the Member for Caroni South was bleating about. Even though the Member for Diego Martin Central corrected him, I also want to put it on the record. The Member for Couva South knows that the Government, out of respect and recognition of the views of the Members from the other place, sent the Caroni Vesting Bill to a committee of the Senate; he knows that and he knows very well that the committee is fine-tuning the legislation. It has already been passed in the Lower House. It passed through there; was sent to the Senate and the Senators asked for it to go to a select committee. The members of the party to which the Member for Couva South belongs, asked for that Bill to go to a select committee. It is being dealt with in the committee; it will come back very soon; it will be passed and then the Caroni Lands would be vested in the Estate Management Company, and they would give their leases. [*Crosstalk*]

I am ignoring the prattling from over there. This is the last issue I want to deal with. I am confused when I listen to the Members opposite.

Dr. Moonilal: You are generally confused.

Hon. C. Imbert: The Member for Couva South said, and I wrote it down, that he could see no evidence presented to this House of impropriety on the part

of the Member for Diego Martin West. I was so amazed that I had to write it down and listen to him.

Mr. Partap: He was joking.

Hon. C. Imbert: He was not joking; he repeated himself. He went on to explain it. He said that he could see no evidence presented to this House of impropriety on the part of the Member for Diego Martin West. We then have the Member for Caroni East bringing into this House what he called evidence.

Dr. Moonilal: What it was?

Hon. C. Imbert: Who are we supposed to listen to? None of them; they are a bunch of jokers. How can you have one Member prosecuting a case and another Member in the same party on the same Front Bench, one saying propriety, one saying no impropriety? [*Crosstalk*] And both of them are fighting for leadership of the party. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche, you have been giving a running commentary. You probably spoke just as much as the Member for Diego Martin East; please. [*Laughter*] You have 75 minutes to make your own contribution.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, in view of that, how much time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: You have up to 4.06 p.m.

Hon. C. Imbert: What, 15 minutes? Oh, I see; the Member for Oropouche is trying to derail me. This one minute, one minute business.

Mr. Ramnath: “You all eh tired with this stupid fellow?”

Hon. C. Imbert: I see that the Member for Couva South has come back; I will have to start over. [*Crosstalk*]

I have some more notes here. The Member for Couva South said—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: You have nothing to say.

Hon. C. Imbert:—in condemning the development programme of the PNM Administration, “All of these crowded developments; we must have no crowded developments in this country.” Has he ever gone to Westmoorings? Does he know the size of a lot in Westmoorings?

Mr. Ramnath: When I get into government I will build a high rise house next to your lot. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Imbert: A Westmoorings lot, the most exclusive part of this country, is 5,000 square feet; houses chock-a-block. I mean, he was afraid of “de” gate or something? If the Member used to go down there, because—obviously he does not visit the Member for St. Joseph—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “Dey doh talk.”

Hon. C. Imbert:—“dey doh talk”. Obviously, he has never been to the apartment of the Member for St. Joseph.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He does not ever go to Westmoorings.

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh, I see; I now understand; “dey fighting for leadership.” [Crosstalk]

Mrs. Job-Davis: He has not been invited. [Crosstalk]

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to say, “He cyar go there.” I remember a particular statement made in which the Member for Couva South warned the Member for Port of Spain North, “Doh come down Central; yuh cyar come down there; they will lynch you; they will eat you alive.” I am not going to say that.

Mr. Ramnath: I said that your security cannot be guaranteed. You have nothing to say.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not going to say that to the Member for Couva South. I will tell him, “You can come to Westmoorings anytime.” I am not the MP, but I give you an open invitation; you can come anytime. If you go there you will see that the houses in Westmoorings are on 5,000 square feet lots.

Mr. Ramnath: I go there all the time, Sir.

Hon. C. Imbert: Chock-a-block; there is less than 10 feet between some of these houses in Westmoorings; these \$4 million homes.

Mr. Ramnath: I visit there at night; in case you want to know. [Laughter]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What “yuh” doing down there? I hope you are not going there illegally. [Laughter]

Hon. C. Imbert: When I hear the Member for Couva South speak, the trite trash that comes out of his mouth, if you go to Tarouba, where there is an NHA development on, at this point in time, what is the size of the lot? Some of the lots are 5,000 to 6,000 square feet. He has no idea; he is just talking nonsense; he has no possession of the facts; spreading rumour and propaganda in this House. So if

5,000 square feet are adequate for Westmoorings, where the land—he just does not know what he is talking about; people must stay in their quarters; they must stay in their barracks; they must stay in northwest Trinidad and “doh come down south”. “We doh want dem,” that is what he said.

Land in Westmoorings is selling for \$500 a square foot. I was made aware of a lot there that sold for \$2.5 million.

Mr. Ramnath: To keep people like you out; that is the point I was making.

Hon. C. Imbert: I see. So we on this side are building a housing development in Tarouba, which I understand is over subscribed and the people love it very much, where some of the lots are the same size as the lots in Westmoorings.

Mr. Ramnath: They are not.

Hon. C. Imbert: I did not say all, I said some of them. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I am not going to be sidetracked by his nonsense.

Mr. Ramnath: That is for your subjects. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: As far as he is concerned, it is politically correct to houses chock-a-block in Westmoorings, but it is not politically correct to have the same density and distribution of houses in Couva and Point Lisas, because he just does not want those people from Diego Martin to come and live in Couva and Point Lisas. As I indicated earlier, he just does not want them to pass in front of his gate. He said that some of them are nice, but some of them are not so nice. Do you deny saying that? He does not like the idea of these people passing in front of his gate.

Mr. Ramnath: I live in a working class neighbourhood.

Hon. C. Imbert: The mentality pervades all of them. You have the Member for St. Joseph who was accused of objecting to Ato Bolden coming to live in the exclusive Westmoorings towers that he lives in. “All ah dem is de same ting.” I cannot understand how representatives of the people, it does not matter what background they come from, what class they belong to, just do not like people. Whether they are rich or poor, on that side, they do not like people. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They do not even like each other.

Hon. C. Imbert: They want power and control. They want to be in their nice little privileged enclaves, their nice little gated communities. They want to hide

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from the people, discourage the middle class, the working class of this country from coming to live by them, because they will give them some disease. I just find it horrible. [*Crosstalk*]

I urge Members opposite: let us talk about something else. Let us not bring this class bias into this House. When the Member for Couva South asked people to vote for him, he did not say, "Vote for me, but do not come and live by me." I am asking Members opposite to forget your political, petty, partisan foolishness; we are talking about housing. Do not come to this House and talk nonsense about "yuh doh want dis kind of people living in your neighbourhood", and "yuh doh want" people from North Trinidad living in Central Trinidad. "Doh come and talk" that nonsense in this House. If you want to talk about housing, come and talk about housing. If you feel that the 70,000 applicants to the National Housing Authority do not know what they are doing; "dey chupid"; we should build no houses for them; "dey mad"; all these people rushing to put down deposits and who want to buy NHA homes are all crazy, well, you are entitled to say that, but I would like you to give some justification for that kind of nonsense.

In conclusion—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank God!

Hon. C. Imbert:—I absolutely reject the rhetoric from the other side. I am proud to be part of this administration that is solving the housing needs of the working people of this country, from the man on the shop floor, all the way up to the general manager, that is what I consider to be a working man. I am happy to be part of an administration dealing with the housing needs of the salaried people of this country. I am happy to be part of an administration that is ignoring the "dotish" talk on the other side and is proceeding at speed to provide affordable housing solutions to all our citizens all over Trinidad and Tobago, regardless of class or ethnic or religious background.

Thank you.

Mr. Winston Dookeran (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin East, if I can discount all the small talk in which he was engaged, has, in fact, raised an important issue, which is worthy of some discussion in this Parliament. I will not, of course, deal with the assertions that he has made about the Member for Couva South, in which he attempted to portray the hon. Member as having what he called a "class bias".

Hon. Members: He does! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. W. Dookeran: It all goes down, I guess, in this Parliament, as a matter in which he can score small political points. [*Crosstalk*] That is something the Member for Diego Martin East has been very good at. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Anything small.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Thankfully, the wider intelligence of our population discounts those points and it is, perhaps, not worthy of our time to refute those assertions which, on many occasions, I have heard him make.

Mr. Imbert: That is why you are in Opposition.

Mr. W. Dookeran: But he raised an important issue about the continuity of PNM policy and the aberration of this continuity that took place between 1986 and 1991 and thereafter between 1995 and 2001. He led me to think that what he was saying was that the very PNM policy which we followed throughout the 1970s, which he is proud now to reenact in Trinidad and Tobago, has always been the correct policy for this country and he claims it was unfortunate that there has been some discontinuity in these policies. He gave examples of he, himself, getting free education; he talked about the housing policy during the periods of discontinuity in which he said no houses were being built.

I want to remind him that it is, in fact, that very policy which was followed during the 1970s, in particular, that led to the then PNM government calling for a reassessment of the cost of PNM policy to the nation. You would remember the mid 1980s, when Mr. William Demas, the then Governor of the Central Bank or some position of imminence, at that time, was called upon by the government to look at the cost of that policy prescription derived from the fortunate circumstances of the early 1970s when the oil bonanza hit us and we began to have free everything: free housing, free education and free school meals. We began to import our meals from Miami.

That is the fundamental basis of that policy, which the hon. Member said that he is proud to reintroduce in this country; that is what frightens me most. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: Take it!

Mr. W. Dookeran: The *Imperatives of Adjustment* was a document produced in the mid-1980s, which pointed out the risk and failure of such a policy sustaining itself in periods of difficulty. It is easy for politicians and leaders to

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use the country's patrimony to satisfy the momentary political pleasures of the day. [*Desk thumping*] That is the easiest thing to do, but it is the most irresponsible thing to do in the context of management. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We should do like you and steal it?

Mr. W. Dookeran: The *Imperatives of Adjustment* is but the testimony of the risks and failures of that policy. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Had not this country, in its collective political wisdom, changed the Government in 1986, what would have happened to our situation if that policy had continued? It was, therefore, in that period that the *Imperatives of Adjustments* enunciated an entire programme which said that unless you used your wealth to create more wealth, you will one day lose that wealth. [*Desk thumping*] It is the easiest thing to do, as a politician; to go to my constituents and say, "Everything in this country will be free from now on and we are fortunate we can do so, because of the price of oil." [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: You had your chance to talk; why "yuh doh shut yuh" mouth and listen? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members, the Member for St. Augustine is making an interesting contribution; I will like to hear him. If you do not want to hear him, then go outside.

Mr. S. Panday: Go outside!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, the *Imperatives for Adjustment* was initiated by the then government, under the astute leadership of Mr. George Chambers, at the time—[*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: Oooh!

Dr. Rowley: I did not hear that. "Yuh call him 'duncy'."

Mr. W. Dookeran:—having had the responsibility to recover from the excesses of the previous government and temerity of purpose to initiate that process. When this country took the political decision in 1986 to vote the PNM out, they knew that they were voting out a party that was taking them down the road of distress. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: I am raising this because the hon. Member for Diego Martin East tried to portray the argument that the PNM policies of the past were always correct and that he is now proud to reintroduce them. That is what he is saying in no uncertain terms. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: They were!

Mr. W. Dookeran: The *Imperatives of Adjustment* looked at the issue of public expenditure and how this country could create a resilience of its own and suggested major departures. It was left to the National Alliance For Reconstruction government of 1986—1991 to take hard measures to put this country back on track. [*Desk thumping*] We all know what the political consequences of that were. One thing we do know, is that it placed the platform back on its feet. [*Desk thumping*]

If this Parliament were to accept that policy in which there is going to be excess expenditure, these are the implications of it, in which our revenue base that we have acquired will not be utilized to create wealth. Wealth creation in the local community is the way to go, not subsidization. [*Desk thumping*] If subsidization has to take place, it must be in the context of a wealth creation policy. [*Desk thumping*] This is the shortsightedness of which the Member for Diego Martin East spoke and that is why I felt it was necessary to, at least, put that case forward, that he is, in fact, leading this country to some day. We know it is probably not going to be early, because external events are favourable to us, but we have not been able to use those resources; so the continuity of PNM policy is, in fact, the greatest risk that we are facing in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: Short memory, shortsighted; short everything!

Mr. W. Dookeran: It will, perhaps, take a new generation and a new Parliament and a new government to undo the ills that this policy is going to incur for the future of the people in this country. [*Desk thumping*] He may gain short-term political points. He might be able to tell his constituents that there are houses to be got—and we do not know about that; we can talk about that as well, because I was also surprised when he said that he would, in fact, give a real choice against a false hope, because he was offering real housing against letters of undertaking for houses. When I look at the performance of the housing portfolio, I wonder whether that claim of providing real housing is, in fact, true.

Mr. Singh: Real racket!

Mr. W. Dookeran: The evidence I see from the *Report of the Administration of the Ministry of Housing and its Agencies, October 2000—September 2004*, which was given to the Joint Select Committee on December 10, 2004, does not support the claim.

Hon. Members: Read it!

Mr. W. Dookeran: It was very interesting, in skimming through the report this morning, I saw the Land Settlement Agency, whose job is to give leases, saying that the agency was established to provide leases for squatter families on sites across the country and then it gave its targets. I quote from page 11 of the report. Since the inception of the agency only nine tenants were regularized. No squatter has been regularized.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Read the NHA part.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Whether that is so or not, this is from the report given by the Land Settlement Agency (LSA).

Mr. Imbert: The National Housing Authority builds houses, not the LSA.

Mr. W. Dookeran: It is part of the housing policy. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They do not build houses. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. W. Dookeran: Regularization of squatters—I can talk about the LSA as well. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: His claim that the housing policy is, in fact, producing housing, is questionable.

Mr. Valley: You are looking at the wrong thing; that is not housing; that is squatter regularization.

Mr. Ramnath: You worry about Acker and BWIA. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, even if I were to accept that he is giving real hope, the capacity of that policy to satisfy the housing needs of this nation will never be realized. You require a much wider policy. You require a policy that involves State funding, but a policy that requires the involvement of the private sector in the provision of that housing.

Mr. Valley: “So who you think building de houses?”

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. Singh: Heron Lewis; PNM contractors! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. W. Dookeran: Another part of the PNM policy of which the Member for Diego Martin East spoke is the question of using controls rather than performance. The entire process of setting up these institutions is aimed, in terms of the design, at maintaining control, so we can create clients of the State all the time. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not focusing as much on the performance of the product; it is the use of the State, and it raises another issue as to the role of the State in the economic development.

4.15 p.m.

What is the role of the State? Is it to produce public goods that would satisfy a small part of the community and claim it is satisfying all the needs of the entire society? A Government that is true to its national mandate would satisfy all the segments of the housing market in all the communities, not produce 10,000 houses as it claims it will for a demand that is probably 50,000 houses or more. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, they can hem or they can haw, but they do know that the fundamental basis of that policy is doomed to failure. [*Desk thumping*] I was very surprised and disturbed that a Government Minister was saying that he is so happy to now have the opportunity to reintroduce these policies because of disruptions of period. It took entire governments to rectify the situation. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: Could I buy property in Landate, boy?

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

Mr. Singh: He did not do like Imbert.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, what is the role of the State? We have moved from a period of State domination into a period where we begin to embrace an entire reform programme in this country. Are we going to go back to that philosophical underpinning of which the Minister spoke? Are we going to go back to those philosophical underpinnings of the role of the State becoming the

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predominant agency for the production of goods in this country? Should we not focus on the key issues of security, crime, war and order? [*Desk thumping*] If there is one role that the State has, in its primary, secondary and tertiary function, it is in the provision of law and order in this country. [*Desk thumping*] And to design the right institutional response to the problem is where the Government is faltering.

The same way he says this Bill is going to move from direct labour to project management. I ask, do you need to produce an entire Bill to change the management system in an institution? [*Desk thumping*] Every Act, as far as I know, allows the managers the freedom to produce project management systems for the delivery of their products. But he is trying to tell this House that he is bringing a new Act to change the system of management from direct labour to project management, and an unsuspecting population will believe that this is in fact a noble objective.

Mr. Speaker, we have now recognized the failure of the National Housing Authority (NHA) to deliver on its social functions which has decided to give new homes by creating a new corporation, a new name.

Mr. Singh: It is like changing your underwear.

Mr. Ramnath: A total failure.

Mr. W. Dookeran: I went through the provisions of this Act and there is in fact one issue which has not yet been aired in the Parliament and that is: What will be the liability? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: It is an attack question.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: What liability will the Housing Development Corporation inherit? That will in fact be the driving force on how much it can perform. And I hope that the Minister in his winding up tells us the size of the liability that will be inherited by the Housing Development Corporation because I saw in clause 41 of the Bill that it makes provision for the transfer and vesting of assets, liabilities, rights and obligations of the National Housing Authority to the Housing Development Corporation. We have no idea.

In the report that was laid before the joint select committee, the financial statement was so incomplete and without summaries that one could not determine

the financial liability of the National Housing Authority. [*Crosstalk*] My friend, this is the *National Housing Authority Report for Joint Select Committee, December 10, 2004*. It talks about the LSA and the other arms of the housing policy and this is the information which we as Members of Parliament are working with.

So I am asking the question: what is the liability that is in fact going to be inherited by the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation? Is the State going to write off that liability? Is that the intention that there will be a write-off of that liability so at least the corporation will start with a clean balance sheet and a proper financial capability to discharge its functions? If it is going to inherit all the obligations, and financial liabilities, then it would be a new institution with all the old obstacles to change.

There is no evidence to tell me otherwise so if we were to continue with these PNM policies which the Minister says he is so proud to be associated with, those same policies that almost led this country into collapse— [*Desk thumping*] If he was talking about a new design of policies for the year 2000 and beyond, it would have had credibility, but when he linked the present policy with that of the 1970s, it was a frightening thought. If that is the philosophical underpinnings of the role of Government in the management of this economy, it is something that all citizens of this country should take note of.

Mr. Ramnath: He was not supposed to speak.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, we know by now that after four years of being in office the Government is caught in a political challenge that it has not been able to deliver and its response to that challenge is to create a new set of false hopes to hoodwink the population. [*Desk thumping*] Whether it does this by introducing a new corporation and says it will deliver, or whether it does it by producing another institution—we would talk later about the Venture Capital Bill which is what I was hoping to debate today.

Hon. Members: Ohhhh!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Which I will.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You came with the wrong information, you have the wrong Bill.

Mr. W. Dookeran: You see the underlying thing is the philosophy that underlines these policy prescriptions, that is what we are talking about and it is in

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this context that we must also view other attempts by the Government to create a new hope. Is this going to be a new hope? In fact, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West has said it most eloquently, that the value for money is not being achieved in public expenditure in this country. [*Desk thumping*] And he dealt with it in respect of certain sectors.

Mr. Ramnath: Brilliant speech!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Presumably, as a Member of Cabinet, he has more information as opposed to myself as an Opposition Member. So it is not my voice, but the voice of those who believe that this country deserves better expenditure and better Government in this land. Let us not be carried away by the small talk and the attempt to define the Opposition in the eyes that they would like to see. Defying the Opposition as if it is in fact a group that is creating spoils, acting like spoilt children, that is what they always try to do, and that, to them, is greater political debate and strong points. [*Desk thumping*] I do not feel that I even need to respond to that, Mr. Speaker, because I said we have discounted that argument and the country will so do. What we must understand is the philosophy of Government that underpins its strategies, programmes, legislative agendas and whether it is relevant to Trinidad and Tobago in the year 2005 and beyond. That is the debate that this particular presentation has drawn up.

If we get on to that debate, rather than dismiss my argument by howls and crows that I have no argument that is why someone writing in the *Daily Express* today, July 01, 2005 had this to say:

“Most of the headlines and reporting were sub-standard. Is it any wonder that our country is in the mess we find ourselves in? Dr. Keith Rowley is absolutely correct in his statement that our Parliament is populated with idiots. They have lost all credibility.”

Hon. Member: Including yourself.

Mr. W. Dookeran: And that is the popular question because we have been forced to debate the nonessentials and allow the essential issues to go undebated. [*Desk thumping*] Each week we have been forced to debate the little points and when one waits to hear a Government Minister outline his Government's policy, its programmes, its performance, its beneficiaries, they forget performance and we hear nothing about that. We hear the little points and we have no basis to know whether those points have any truth in them. [*Desk thumping*] But they are meant to catch the eyes of some reporter so that they can portray their position in

that light. That is why statements like these have been made in the press so often about this Parliament.

I, too, some time ago, had echoed what Dr. Rowley was saying, for earlier on in this Parliament I saw the trends developing and today I conclude by saying that I hope you, as Speaker, would not be burdened by the heritage we would have to carry in this Parliament.

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, whenever my friend, the Member for St. Augustine, gets up to speak and he starts to pontificate, my mind goes back always to that day when he informed us at the end of his contribution that after five years in the Ministry of Planning and Development he was unable to achieve anything.

It comes to mind because whenever he makes a contribution in the House, one sees clearly that he misses an essential part of the ability to implement, especially in the public service.

The Member took umbrage to my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East, when he made the point that the PNM way of doing things was efficient and he is happy that we can return to that way. He was speaking specifically about the education system of the PNM and its social programme such as housing and so on.

Mr. Speaker, the Member continued and spoke about the fact that the Government was changed in 1986. Sadly, however, his analysis seemed to have stopped in 1986. He failed to continue the argument to inform us about what happened in 1987, 1988 and especially in 1990 because he does not understand the connectivity that if he follows a particular course, acting as though there are no constraints, then there would be certain consequences. He analyzes one side by saying if you have money then you must not spend too much. But in a political environment he fails to consider—in fact, not even in a political environment, but any environment in which one operates one must always be conscious of the constraints under which one operates and act under them until such time that they can be removed, otherwise you run into situations such as occurred in 1988 and 1990.

[HON. K. VALLEY]

What is the purpose of the legislation before us? We criticize these things simply because we believe that to change to project management, we have to bring legislation. Anyone, a fifth form student looking at this legislation would clearly see its intent. We are saying that we are in a new environment and we have to change the paradigm. The NHA—and it goes back to the issue of the role of the state—grew out of a particular paradigm and it goes back to the issue that the Member is asking: the role of the State.

The NHA grew out of that paradigm when the feeling was that public sector must provide the labour. NHA, in the old days, not only built houses, it provided the mortgage, it was supposed to collect the rents which it did not, it was supposed to maintain the apartments and few of the people really went out to do what they had to do, as was experienced only last night when my colleague and I were in a part of my constituency in Diego Martin Central. Simply, this legislation is saying that there is an attempt to put in place an efficient structure which, first of all, was started already even with the old NHA.

NHA today is no longer providing mortgage financing; that is now being provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company. We are going further by putting in place a structure such that the maintenance of apartments and so on can be contracted out to small contractors. We are putting in place a structure that would see efficiency with respect to the private and public sector corporations in the building of houses as one is seeing right now. The joint venture arrangement where the State provides the land and the private sector comes in with the expertise and the development, is what this legislation is all about.

This legislation mirrors the paradigm to which we are striving, the 2020 environment and that is what it is about. So when the Member comes here and asks about the role of the State, we are demonstrating how we view the State. We say clearly that today the role of the State must be to assist in the creation of efficient structures so that the private sector operating in those structures would evidence efficient behaviour.

The structure to a large extent determines the behaviour. If there are inefficient structures, then do not expect efficient behaviour, and it is only when behaviour is efficient that one would expect good behaviour and that is what we are doing. It is what has been done with respect to NBN, it is what has to be done with other institutions and what we are considering at the port as we look to develop 2020 country status. We have to look at our various structures that we put to appropriate things in place.

Mr. Speaker, what is the fact about the experience of the 1970s? We have heard various commentators commentating on what was known as the “oil boom years” and the period between 1974 and 1982 in which the oil sector’s excess revenues were some \$23.1 billion of which roughly about \$12 billion was spent in the development of what is today known as Point Lisas.

Mr. Speaker, I felt it amazing at all times, even today people who were there and ought to know better still attempt to comment negatively about that period. *[Interruption]* I am just saying what was good because things must always be judged relatively and if one were to compare the experiences of Trinidad and Tobago with other countries that were similarly placed such as Venezuela and Nigeria, oil developing countries, one would see that we did exceedingly well. That is the reality. *[Desk thumping]*

Today, when foreigners come to Trinidad and Tobago they do not leave without going to Point Lisas. It cost us money, there were errors. Nobody would say there were not errors in some aspects at Point Lisas, but then we speak about the learning society and today we are now better able to handle the oil wells.

There was no revenue stabilization fund in that period. Thank God for that! *[Interruption]* Thank God there was no UNC because if there were of what is today, the UNC—they “mash up” the Government in 1987/88. Do you know that? And the remnants of what were left of that party almost mashed up the country. *[Desk thumping]* That is the reality of that party. So do not come and tell me about—

Mr. Singh: Abu Bakr sent you.... *[Inaudible]*

Hon. K. Valley: My friend, let the analysis show what happened. *[Interruption]* I am saying categorically that the Government—you see people talk, it is just like crime you know. They want to deal with crime after the fact. Similarly, they want to deal with 1990 after the fact. That was a result largely because of the policies pursued by the Government at that time. That is the reality of the situation. *[Desk thumping]*

We were there and were cautioning the government telling them early what its policy would lead to. They did not listen and even today when we listen to the Member for St. Augustine, we see that there is no learning when he talks about wealth creation. Nobody says that we ought not to concentrate on wealth creation, that is what the Government is about, but it is clear that in any country the

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government must take care of those people who cannot compete. There must be a strong, social orientation and when you fail to understand that, then you will pay the consequences. The Government is clear. You talk about the role of the Government and it said quite clearly that it will use the excess revenue from the energy sector to build sustainability in this economy.

Mr. Partap: Corruption!

Hon. K. Valley: You know about that.

Mr. Partap: No, you know about that.

Hon. K. Valley: You know about that. Do not tell me about corruption. You know about that. You made that. You wrote the book. That is what it is and in our manifesto for the period 2002—2007 we are clear. We said what is going to underpin our development while we wait on the planners with the 2020 programme is that certain critical elements are important and there are six issues we said would underpin what we do during this five-year period.

The first is equity; the second is education; the third is health, housing, social services and personal security. And if one were to look at the operations of the Government, one would see that we are true to our promise. When they talk about equity, recently you would see that the Government incorporated the Rural Development Company, a company geared specifically to deal with the needs of rural communities because it is clear that it is a Government for all the people.

There is no issue about building homes in one area and not in the other. My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East, made it clear that we would be building houses throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It does not matter what we do, we want to do it with equity. I have said before if there is any Member who can point to any area where he feels there is a lack of equity, point it out and we will look at it.

Dr. Moonilal: Would the Member indicate whether or not he would be allowing Members of the Opposition when the question is asked to receive the names of the persons who have applied and have been successful in receiving housing, particularly at Tarouba in San Fernando, their address before, their new address, names and data?

Mr. Rahael: Why he must do that?

5.15 p.m.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I have a difficulty giving the names to anybody. If you are talking about some type of classification; if you want some information about how many people are coming from Diego Martin or San Fernando; group information is fine; we do not have any difficulty. But I am saying that an individual's privacy must be respected and I see nothing useful can be served by telling you where the person comes from or who and where the person is living. I do not know why I should give the Member that. If he is asking for some type of group information; if he wants it on a constituency basis, that is fine, but it must be on a group basis; it must not be able to identify individuals.

The Member continued his rambling that the State is only concerned with the public good. I do not know what the “hell” he meant by that, quite frankly. Today, if you look at the housing programme of the Government—

Mr. Speaker: I get the impression you said something about “hell what he meant”. Refine your language. Rephrase it.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, let me rephrase it. I do not know what the “hell” he meant by the opposite of heaven. [*Crosstalk*] I meant no offence. All I am saying, I did not understand what he was saying, in simple language.

If one were to look at what is happening in housing right now, one sees, clearly, that there is an organization, the National Housing Authority (NHA), which is contracting out the provision of housing; arranging the financing from the bank. I think that was an excellent structure that was put in place, so that the small contractors could participate and provide the houses to beneficiaries. What is this concept of public good? The Government is no longer building houses and renting them out for rents that they cannot collect. Every time he speaks in this House, look for one phrase: “clients of the State”, an anachronism belonging to the 1960s; just chatting all over the place and saying nothing!

Dr. Moonilal: Cool down; cool down.

Hon. K. Valley: Wherever one were to look today, one would see that the Government is moving on a course to involve the private sector in whatever it does. The Member for Couva South in his contribution, spoke about the need to have different systems in the provision of housing and argued the case for some type of overall plan for Couva, and while he was speaking I was holding up this

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document: “The Couva/Point Lisas Structure Plan Proposal and the Shorter Proposal Development Plan, Couva/Point Lisas, 2005—2020; Presentation of the Couva/Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce.”

I have this here because it was only this morning that the Couva/Point Lisas Chamber was at my office making this presentation, a presentation that they would be making to the Business Development Committee on Tuesday morning. Because what we are doing, we have gone out to the Chambers—Greater Chaguanas, and the other day, in Penal/Debe—spreading the same message that: “You know your community; here we have had a restructuring of Caroni; there is now land available; you need to tell us what you see for the community.” And the Greater Chaguanas Chamber made a presentation to the committee about two or three months ago and on Tuesday morning Point Lisas would be making its presentation.

Just to give an idea of some of the things they are saying here: The implementation of their strategy—I would tell you the projects they identified in a second:

“Projects will be implemented through a model in which the private sector develops projects with no significant financial input from Government other than the land.”

So that they are contemplating an environment in which the Government provides the land and they are going to develop commercial projects, working with the Government for the development of the Couva/Point Lisas area. Some of the projects we are talking about are: The development of an agro-processing facility—they are saying that would require some 10 acres; the development of a port at Orange Valley—another 10 acres; a marine park at Carli Bay—10 acres; light manufacturing and service industry park—100 acres; the establishment of a sport and cultural complex—50 acres; the establishment of a town centre—50 acres.

In terms of the implementation machinery, they see an arrangement between the Couva/Point Lisas Development Company, 100 per cent Government-owned company, with Government leasing the land, of course, through the Estate Management Business Development Company (EMBDC), to the company. The main function of the company is to oversee the development of the area. In terms of the stakeholders, they are talking about involving the National Gas Company,

PLIPDECO, which, of course, already has an experience in that area; the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee; the Couva/Talparo Regional Corporation and, of course, the Government.

So that I listened to the Member for Couva South, but these are all things in the works and this is not only happening in Couva/Point Lisas. As I said, the Greater Chaguanas Chamber has already made a presentation; Penal/Debe—I challenged them, and they asked me to come down there and tell them what are Government’s plans for the area. I said, “No, that is not how we do it. You tell us. You know your area.” Going down to Penal/Debe—I mean, I have not been down to that area for quite some time. After I left you I got lost. We took a wrong road and we were about an hour late. I told them: “Look, I even got lost coming here and you want me to tell you what we want to do down here?” They have to tell me. That is the challenge, the mandate we gave them leaving Penal/Debe.

Dr. Moonilal: We must invite you and come and guide you.

Hon. K. Valley: You guiding me, boy? That is real trouble; not me and you at all.

So I do not know whether there is anything else I need to say. The Bill is simple. All it aims to do is convert a statutory authority to a corporation. And what are some of the minuses? Mr. Speaker, as you know, the top management of NHA cannot really deal with the recruitment or disciplining of staff. They have to go through the statutory authority. What we want to put in place is a more efficient system. We have been arguing that these service commissions, yes, they were put in place in an environment to protect employees and so on, but at the expense of efficiency, in some cases, and to the extent that we can do it, we are saying let us put a system in place that is going to be more efficient.

Under clauses 31 and 32 you would see that the employees of the NHA would be given certain options. But we have to move to ensure that there is a structure in place that would aid efficiency. That is simply what this legislation is about and I commend it, therefore, to the House.

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

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central has really said nothing in 25 minutes but merely tried to say that the Government is asking people to guide them as to what to do. He has not added

[MR. S. PANDAY]

anything philosophical to this debate, as the Member for St. Augustine has done. Again, he tried to create a situation of scoring a few cheap points.

When one looks at the Bill, one would see—as a matter of fact, he seemed to have been looking at the old Bill; the one that was previously circulated, so he is not even up-to-date with the legislation before the House. It seems to me that his arguments went contrary to the Member for Diego Martin West, because the Member for Diego Martin West, in his arguments, really made one point. That point was: “We want to control the human resource management of the NHA.” He was saying that the NHA was governed by the Statutory Authorities Service Commission (SASC) and that if you wanted to employ persons, you had to wait until the Statutory Authorities Service Commission recommended it before they could get their personnel.

So, basically, that is what they were arguing. So this thing about big paradigm shift is not really anything new. What the PNM is trying to do, and trying to hoodwink this country, is that although you know that the Statutory Authorities Service Commission is a PNM party group and they do the bidding of the PNM, like in the case of Marlene Coudray, where they tried to move her at the behest of the Prime Minister, and at the end of the day when they were backed in a position, they claimed that, no, they were independent, but up to today they cannot say why they wanted to remove Marlene Coudray.

What this Bill wants to do is to remove the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation from the purview of the SASC.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Why?

Mr. S. Panday: Because the PNM want to “tief!” They are corrupt! And I would show how corrupt in a minute. That is all they want to do. I would show how “all yuh tiefing” right now, under the NHA! They want to hire their friends and family so nobody could interfere with them.

The last semblance of independence, which we know is not really totally independent, that Statutory Authorities Service Commission which is appointed by the President to deal with employment in the NHA and other statutory authorities, they even want to remove that. That is the aim of this Bill. They want to rape the Treasury; that is what they want to do! When one looks at the Bill, one would see all the PNM wants is control. That is the paradigm shift they are speaking about; they want total control. This is the reason they have come with this.

I predict that this organization will be more corrupt than the NHA, and if one wants to find an organization which is the most corrupted in Trinidad and Tobago, it is the NHA. It is a nest and a hive of corruption! When they remove the SASC from the scene, I predict that under this new structure and this new dispensation, nepotism and PNM corruption would flourish. This is the aim of this legislation. When one looks at the legislation, one would see that the politicians would control every facet and function, including the bad employment practices, in this new corporation.

As I said, the NHA is a nest of corruption; a hive of corruption; a hive of nepotism and I would prove it now. In San Fernando, there is a housing development, somewhere near Prince of Wales Street. When this Government came into office, it spent millions of dollars to refurbish the buildings; paint them. As a matter of fact, they put toilets in every apartment—

Mr. Rahael: Good job.

Mr. S. Panday: I agree with that; that is good, but one year after, they started to demolish the buildings. People are still asking where all the materials went. But this is the PNM corruption, nepotism and inefficiency!

We asked them: “Why did you spend all this money if you knew you were going to demolish the buildings within a year? Is that your paradigm shift?” It is so tied up in corruption that you would be surprised. When they decided to break down those buildings, the NHA took a decision to remove the tenants. There is a lady who is in the constituency office of the Prime Minister, the former Mayor of San Fernando, Hazel Rogers-Dick, she is on the NHA board and that board took a decision to find temporary tenancies for the—

Mr. Rahael: To relocate.

Mr. S. Panday: Yes, relocate. She is on that board and she is in the Prime Minister’s office.

Hon. Member: So what is wrong with that?

Mr. S. Panday: I would show you why now. They decided to give contracts to people called “agents” to look for alternative accommodation. Do you know that she, who sat on the board of the NHA to take this decision, took a contract too? Deny it!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We deny it.

Mr. S. Panday: I would show you how “all yuh” corrupted!

Mr. Rahael: Is UNC here, or what?

Mr. S. Panday: Worse than UNC!

Mr. Valley: Nah, nah; not possible; not possible.

Mr. S. Panday: Coming out of the Prime Minister’s constituency office, it breached all the rules of company law. It makes Dansam Dhansook look like an angel. It makes “sweetbread” look as though it is nothing. Having sat on a board where you have a fiduciary duty to perform on behalf of the country, you went and took a contract from the same board; used insider information. That is what is going on in this NHA!

Mrs. Job-Davis: Who they gave the insider information to?

Mr. S. Panday: I would tell you. So when she took this contract—they called it the “agency contract”—she hired some people called “spotters” or “finders” to look for alternative accommodation. This happens in the NHA. When the spotters got the alternative accommodation, this member, Hazel Rogers-Dick, would go to a landlord and take over the negotiations. When they tried to get the rent at market rates, she said: “Leave that to me. I will see about the rent.” So she negotiates the rent. And she is a member of the board! This is the corruption! When she negotiates the rent, it is usually more than the market value.

Mr. Rahael: How do you know that?

Mr. S. Panday: Give me a minute! Do not rush me. Wait!

Out of that now, she gives the spotter, or the finder, a percentage of the month’s rent. So she is not only stealing from the NHA, she is even stealing from the poor spotter or finder. She is taking 60 per cent back for paperwork. That is what is going on now. They are such a pack of boldfaced thieves that they gave a receipt and made the finder sign the receipt. They are so boldfaced that they gave a duplicate to the finder and a duplicate to the spotter. We have it in our possession.

That corruption is like the URP corruption, in that the contract was taken in the name of somebody. I would not call the person's name—Erwin; not so old, not so young—let us call him Erwin E. And if you go and look for all the spotters and all the finders, you would see they have never seen this Erwin. Hazel Rogers-Dick is the only person they have spoken to. Do you remember when her foot was

broken? She had a driver in a hired car with her broken foot and picked them up and carried them. They have never seen this Mr. Erwin. And this member of the board of NHA paid them by cash. So it is clear what is happening. And you all have the gall to call other people corrupted? It is just like when we had this midday murder on Independence Square and when they asked the fellow who was charged: "Where are you working?" He said: "I does collect URP cheque."

So it is clear that this Erwin is getting a small kickback to allow his name to be used. I have the surname and I checked the electoral list, the telephone directory; I did a lot of research and I found two. When I questioned them, they knew nothing. When I boarded the third man and I put it to him, he stopped talking at once, and he lives in the constituency of San Fernando East. So that is the kind of corruption that is taking place now in the NHA. When you have the Auditor General coming and giving you an auditor's report, you could never spot things like these, and when you amend this legislation to give the Minister and the politicians total control, this is the mayhem that would take place in this country. This is going on from the office of the Member for San Fernando East at Coffee Street, San Fernando.

When one goes to the office of the Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister, the moment you ask for housing he would say: "Talk to her." And "all yuh" talk about equity and fairness in distribution? And the Member for San Fernando East and the Prime Minister knows about that. It is he who appointed her on the board of the NHA; he knows that she takes the decisions of the board on behalf of the NHA; he knows that she is a part, as I say, of that decision-making process. *[Interruption]* I will tell you about the car you bought and sold to a drug dealer soon, you know. Keep on provoking me. You all like to pelt stones but when you get mud, you backing out. My wife "does" work for "she" money, you know. I do not know about anybody's husband who is getting free work. Corruption! *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order! Do not be sidetracked.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, one must remind them how corrupted they are. One must remind her that her husband could not get a job anywhere and this PNM Government gave him a job and he is not working and getting false money! That is corruption! *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. S. Panday: Let them heckle!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He came to help you in your constituency, and he is helping you too—

Mr. S. Panday: To do what?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: To put water in your constituency!

Mr. S. Panday: So at least he is trying to work, because he never worked before.

Imagine that the Prime Minister appoints somebody on the board of the NHA and have that member of the board in his office and when people come to speak about housing, he directs it to her. Could you imagine when she goes to a board meeting what kind of corruption and influence she would have on that board? All she has to say is: “I have come from the Prime Minister’s office. The Prime Minister wants this.” And do you think that all the board members who are appointed by the Government could bark? This is an enterprise. The Corporation Sole is the shareholder. There are no checks and balances and there will be no checks and balances when this Bill is passed. For example, in a private company, you would have a meeting of the shareholders where they could question the directors. In this case, the shareholder is corrupting the system.

Mr. Hart: We are passing the Bill.

Mr. S. Panday: Pass the Bill, but we would expose you.

When they talk about giving houses, the whole system is corrupted. The Member for Diego Martin West says we are telling people not to apply. They are applying and not getting! That is what is taking place. *[Interruption]* No, I “ain’t” leaving that at all. I know it is burning and it is stinging and we will continue, because the PNM is corrupted!

So what happens now is that they have been dancing people who have applied for years. Right now in the constituency of San Fernando East—*[Interruption]* Your husband don't work for “he” money! That is what is bothering you, and everybody knows that! I want to put it on the record!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Put it “nuh”. Do not write him any letters—

Mr. S. Panday: The houses in San Fernando East, how is it some people are getting houses? If you pass through Corinth, you would see, sporadically, people getting houses. And when they ask her: “How is it that we cannot get?” She says: “They came there and made noise by the Member for San Fernando East so we have to give them.”

So when you talk about distribution, this is the way the distribution is taking place—political interference—and this Bill opens the door for complete political interference. Read the Bill and you would see what I am speaking about. The board will be appointed by the President, which is really the Cabinet. Only one board member would be appointed after consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly. So listen to what is happening. When they are moving out the people—look at the discrimination that is taking place among the PNM people themselves, or people who they believe are their supporters.

These new houses in San Fernando at the corner of Kelshall and Hobson Streets, Bernard Street, Coffee Street, Coconut Drive, listen to what happened. When they are moving the people, they have their own system of discrimination. If you are “high class” or a staunch PNM, or somebody who throws money for the party from the CEPEP contracts, like the manager of the Roy Joseph housing scheme—the CEPEP group—who is the brother-in-law of the former mayor, Ferreira—while people were getting Coffee Street, they got Coconut Drive, at a rent of \$5,000—\$6,000 a month.

So when the Member for St. Augustine said that their own members would turn on them, that is already happening, because the PNM has a way of discriminating against its own people—the poor. You talk about class? This is a case where you are using corruption to perpetuate class divisions. That is what is taking place. The poor people who are in the scheme got Coffee Street; the others who are staunch PNM and have “big wok”, are getting Coconut Drive at rents of \$5,000—\$6,000 per month. We have information coming out that this—*[Interruption]* I agree with the Member for Diego Martin West, they should make all of us full-time, because I did not have enough time.

There is another thing they are using. At one time they told the tenants “We are going to break down these houses”—by the way, the contractor is NH International—“and you must go and get your own; look for your own tenancy. We will pay all the rents and utility bills for you.” And they would locate tenancies. And this board member from the Member for San Fernando East’s constituency office would go and negotiate. When I questioned some of them, they said they never got any finders’ fee. They went with the whole hog.

This PNM Government would breach the rules as they now stand in order to perpetuate its corruption. There was a certain house in the constituency of San Fernando East where the tenant had sublet these premises to some people. That is

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a breach of covenant in the lease between the NHA and the tenant. Then when the head tenant went to renew the lease, they said: “No, you have breached the covenant.” So a spotter found a place and went to this same board member who is in the constituency office of the Member for San Fernando East, and told her. She said: “Leave that. Forget the rules; forget the law. I will fix that up.” And so said, so done. The lease was renewed and the property was tenanted.

When the property was tenanted at a very high rent, much more than the rents in the area, the lady went back and told the people: “This place needs repairs.” So what they did was, they rent it for six months in bulk, and took back \$12,000 from the tenant for repairs. This happened in San Fernando East and this is the corruption that is taking place now. Having taken back that \$10,000 or \$12,000 for repairs, CEPEP and URP were used to repair the building. All that money is gone. These are the things which are taking place that we need to make sure we do not allow to happen. We are saying that this PNM has perfected the art of corruption, because if that person had taken the lease on her own name, then the Integrity Commission would have seen it as an income, but having taken it in another person’s name, what happens is, you do not have to declare it to the Integrity Commission. So they have dealt with it in that way.

So, as I said, there is a lack of transparency and this Bill would, indeed, exacerbate the situation. In those circumstances, we are saying if you want support for this legislation, where the Government intends to spend large sums of money, there should be an annual forensic audit in all these companies, because if one looks at the legislation one would see, just as under the old Housing Act where the Auditor General would audit the books at the end of the year, when one looks under the new Act, what does one see? The Auditor General or an auditor appointed by the Auditor General would do the books for the end of the year and would present this in Parliament, as the case may be.

We are saying that when politicians have so much control in the affairs of these state companies, we must put checks and balances; we must make sure that all these companies—the Trinidad and Tobago Rural Company; UDeCott and the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation—must have forensic audits to hold them in place. As I say, the Bill creates nothing new. The NHA is doing what it is doing now; it could do it under the old Act. There is no paradigm shift, as the case may be. The aim of this is really to allow for political control, interference and corruption by the PNM.

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

Mr. Harry Partap (*Nariva*): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas has dealt clinically with the Member for Diego Martin East and, therefore, I need not—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Chaguanas?

Mr. H. Partap: Yes, Chaguanas. I know what I am saying. You are not talking for me. I said “the Member for Chaguanas has dealt clinically—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Who is the Member for Chaguanas?

Mr. H. Partap: Sorry, St. Augustine. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You do not know what you are saying.

Mr. H. Partap: I still know what I am saying. The Member for Chaguanas dealt with him last week. [*Crosstalk*]

The Member for St. Augustine has dealt clinically with the Member for Diego Martin East and I need not comment further on that. But I just want to refer to the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin East when he spoke about his meetings with the constituents. He was telling us that when he meets with his constituents, he offers and directs them to accept houses outside Diego Martin East. So the Member for Diego Martin East has really exposed what the PNM plans to do with the housing, that is, direct people from the East-West Corridor into the housing developments in the marginal seats so that they can solidify their hold on power.

Hon. Member: Couva is a marginal seat? [*Crosstalk*]

BeethamMr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. H. Partap: You are not only building houses in Couva. What about San Fernando West? And do not forget we are coming for Toco/Sangre Grande. [*Crosstalk*] Not that; you would not get that.

So he has really exposed, this evening, what is the real intention of the Government’s housing programme. We want to say, on this side, that this has always been the aim and purpose of the PNM. All they are concerned about is solidifying power. They do not care how they run the country, as long as they are in power—and how they run it down. So what they are doing is putting housing developments all over. Housing is good; people need houses, but give the people from the area where you are building, the first option for the houses. Do not

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encourage people, like what the Member for Diego Martin East said, to move from one constituency to the other.

This Bill to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation and related matters is really designed to “lick up” three organizations.

Mrs. Job-Davis: To “lick up”?

Mr. H. Partap: Yes; to destroy; to beat up. That is, they want to get rid of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission—that is one—so they can appoint whom they want in this new organization that they are contemplating. Secondly, they want to get rid of the Central Tenders Board, and I would go into that later to tell you what the PNM wants to do by getting rid of the Central Tenders Board. Thirdly, they want to remove the oversight of the Ministry of Finance on financial matters relating to that proposed Housing Development Corporation.

So those are really the real reasons. That is the concept. That is the rationale, really, for this plan to establish the Housing Development Corporation. The PNM intends to feed corruption through the formation of companies and corporations in the various ministries and they are choosing those ministries that have been allocated huge chunks of the national budget. Now they are trying to build a case to justify this move of appointing companies to do things in various ministries. In which ministries are they establishing parallel companies? They are establishing parallel companies in those ministries to do the work that the public service workers are supposed to do. So they want to get rid of a lot of things in order for them to have a personal hand in the running of these companies where they can siphon the taxpayers’ money to their friends and to themselves.

A company was formed in the Ministry of Education to get the school building programme off. We built about 100 schools in six years and the Members for Siparia and Tabaquite did not have to form a new company. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. H. Partap: For three and a half years the Minister of Education has been sitting in Hayes Street and she did not build a single school. She opened many, and those that she opened were what we built. There is one for her to complete, the SWAHA College in Sangre Grande, but she cannot finish that; it is still there.

The Ministry of Works and Transport, another huge spender, they have established a company to remove the PSIP, and the Ministry of Local Government has formed an infrastructure company. Of course, they already have a company that would remove their dogs from the highway. That is in operation, I understand. I

believe the next thing they are going to do is establish a new company in the Ministry of National Security, because definitely the Minister of National Security needs help. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant is of no help to him. According to an editorial in one of the newspapers, he is a big bag of wind, making a lot of “ol talk”; quick to talk, and so on, but nothing substantial behind that talk—a bag of wind; that is how one of the editorials described him.

So he needs help, because today the kidnapping industry in Trinidad and Tobago is growing under the PNM; it is flourishing. Murders have moved past 172, and that was last night. As I speak now, I do not know what is happening. And they are taking them by the twos. Ninety-three persons have been kidnapped.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, that is a good subject for debate, but not on this Bill. Could you get back to the Bill, please?

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will come back to the Bill. What I was pointing out is that this Housing Development Corporation is just one of those things that the PNM has been putting into operation. They establish companies in the various ministries and they may very well have to do it also in the Ministry of National Security, as I mentioned, and I was telling you why they may have to do it, because the Ministry is failing to deal with crime.

I would not go against your rules and I would get back to the Bill. I just want to make one point, and that is, last night there was a gentleman in Santa Flora, the constituency of the Member for La Brea, who was shot while trying to prevent the kidnappers from taking his sister. So things have gone extremely bad.

Mr. Rahael: That happened inside the house.

Mr. H. Partap: It happened in the business place. So things are bad and, maybe, they may have to think of putting a company now in the Ministry of National Security. As I said, no one is safe. The Chairman of the Fishermen and Friends of the Sea, Gary Aboud, said that the PNM had been making too many feeble excuses. In fact, he said that their Vision 2020 is curved like the tail of a pig. What a description!

During the past few weeks, two Members of the other side, the Member for San Fernando West and the Member for Diego Martin West, have been saying that the Government is not getting value for the money that they are spending and they are saying that there is poor performance for the amount of money that is being spent. I wanted to believe that this may be a spontaneous reaction to the

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incompetence of the PNM, but on second thought, I do not think, really, that is what they meant. My belief is that they are building a case to establish these companies, like the one we have in this Bill here, the Housing Development Corporation. As I said, it is a conduit to siphon taxpayers' money into the sticky hands of this corrupt PNM Government.

One month ago one of their own, a councillor from Rio Claro, made bribery charges against certain Members on the other side. In a very graphic way he explained how it happened. So what the Government is intending is using the Housing Development Corporation to really siphon money, to get more money into the hands of their friends. Today the Minister, in the Bill before us, is asking us to pass legislation that would collapse the National Housing Authority and form this new housing corporation. But we, on this side, do not trust the Minister of Housing at all. He is proposing at clause 29 of the Bill that the new housing corporation be exempt from the scrutiny of the Central Tenders Board; remove transparency; throw all that through the window. Clause 29(2) says:

“The Board shall, subject to the Minister’s approval, make rules relating to the award of tenders and contracts and those rules shall govern the conduct of the award of tenders and related matters.”

As I said, we do not trust the Minister of Housing to decide on the rules relating to the award of contracts, because the Housing Development Corporation would have access to billions of dollars, and you have a Minister who is under investigation making rules for the tendering procedure. That does not sound right.

Mr. Speaker, you are aware, and I am sure the House is aware, that shortly there would be a—there is a notice in the newspaper which speaks about this commission of enquiry into matters relating to the Landate project; one on May 31 and June 29. Basically, what the notices were saying was that they would be investigating that scandal involving the hon. Minister. You would recall that the hon. Member for Caroni East and Chief Whip brought the attention of this House to the siphoning of materials from the new Scarborough Hospital construction site to a land development project in Tobago, named Landate. They were “thiefing” by the wheel barrow, sand, gravel and cement from a public project, which is now registering an overrun cost in the vicinity of \$59 million. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. H. Partap: On the Indian Arrival Day weekend, an employee of NH International was shot in the face, and NH International is also involved in the

housing development. She was left for dead in Blue Basin, and on the way to Blue Basin, according to what the police said, two other people were killed. What I am saying is, there seems to be a link, and I think the police must investigate that link to make sure that all avenues—all sides—are investigated so that if there is a link, that link must be exposed and the people involved must be dealt with.

I gave you one of the rationales for the Bill before us to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development, but the true rationale is so glaring that any Standard 2 child in a school that was in operation when we were in office would quickly decipher. The rationale, I am telling you now, is obvious. The proposed Housing Development Corporation is designed to further propagate corruption in the Ministry of Housing. We have no doubt at all that the establishment of the Housing Development Corporation by this PNM Government is just another crooked attempt to institutionalize corruption and discrimination in the Ministry of Housing.

The formation of a Housing Development Corporation, as outlined in this Bill, is an admission of failure by the Minister of Housing. He is now seeking to have a new state enterprise established to do what he should have done but what he cannot do—build houses. The Minister of Housing, the Member for Diego Martin West, is admitting to the Parliament this afternoon that he is a total failure. He is not only a total failure in the Ministry of Housing, but he has failed in other portfolios. He failed as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; he failed as Minister of Planning and Development and now he has failed as Minister of Housing. The Minister had complained that they were not getting value for money, but it is he and his colleagues who have been responsible for this state of affairs. If you are not getting value for money, you are responsible; you have set the pattern.

I want to just draw your attention to the Ramgoolie Trace Housing Project, which is in the St. Joseph constituency. A senior official was instructed to award the contract for the construction of those units to Winchester Industries International Limited. That company was formed in 2002. Within a short space of time they were able to get an \$80 million contract.

Hon. Member: Who are the directors of that company?

Mr. H. Partap: The directors I have here are Lincoln and Crystal Simmons of Valsayn. They had as their architect, John Bynoe, and the Quantity Surveyor was

[MR. PARTAP]

Isaac McLeod. Within a short space of time they were given a contract for \$80 million to build 368 housing units at Ramgoolie Trace.

6.15 p.m.

Winchester Industries had drawn down \$20 million. They did work on the project valued at about \$5 million; then they abandoned it and carried with them \$15 million. The Minister of Housing conducted no enquiry as to how that money was spent and why the contractors abandoned the project. Why was the performance clause in the contract not invoked or implemented? What is more painful is the fact that the Minister of Housing awarded another contract to nine small contractors to complete not 368 houses, but 100 units. Winchester Industries took \$15 million and ran. There was no investigation or police action. Today the company's business address is empty; nobody is there. No telephones connected. You cannot get in contact with them and no one is around.

That is what they want to do again under this Housing Development Corporation. They want to have free access. Move out the Central Tenders Board, the Statutory Authorities Service Commission and the Ministry of Finance, so that the Minister of Housing could have full control over who gets what in terms of contracts.

In speaking on June 06, the Minister said that there were joint venture arrangements in the Ministry of Housing and houses were built. That is only for PNM supporters and contractors. They get the big contracts. There is no tendering. They push the small contractors into competitive bidding. The small contractors fight among themselves for the crumbs. This is what they want to propagate by the Housing Development Corporation. The Minister wants to continue to influence the award of contracts so that he can get rid of the Central Tenders Board.

There is also a scandal in the Dades Trace project at Santa Margarita. That contract was given to Romain and Associates and they are doing the design for the housing development project in Tobago called Landate owned by the Minister of Housing. Do you see why they want to get rid of the Central Tenders Board? It is standing in their way. How can you get value for money if you are awarding contracts on the basis of party affiliation? That is the direction which the PNM wants to take this country.

There is another project that I should draw your attention to and that is the Balmoral Park project. In this project houses were built by Caribbean Housing Limited. Water is now seeping from under the buildings. One of the affected residents, Mr. David Baldeosingh, has been seeking the assistance of the Caribbean

Housing Limited to have the matter corrected. This is the letter that was sent to Mr. Harry Outah the general manager of Caribbean Housing Limited.

Mr. Imbert: Is that NHA or private?

Mr. H. Partap: You are using private people as well. You said that you are using joint venture and you are not monitoring it. It is the Ministry of Housing. People have various options. This is a joint venture.

Edinburgh East,
Edinburgh Gardens,
Chaguanas.

We wrote on behalf of Mr. David Baldeosingh who purchased a house from your company in November 2002. We refer to his letter to you dated June 14 in which he informed you of the problem with water seeping into the foundation of his house and requested that a new unit be made available to him. Earlier efforts by Mr. Baldeosingh to get you to resolve the problem have met with no success.

We have been made aware of the correspondence between Mr. Baldeosingh and your company and the effort you have made to determine the reason for the leakage of water and attempts to repair it. However, since your efforts have not resulted in abatement to the leakage, we request that you make another unit available to him and compensate him for the costs he has incurred to date in connection with the leakage.

The foundation of this house has been severely damaged and could result in it collapsing causing serious injury or death to the occupants.

In their haste to get housing they do not look for quality. These units are built in a swamp on a water table. Geotech Associates did a structural assessment of it and this is their report.

It is understood from the client that water seepage issues were first reported on June 05, 2004, by residents of the housing unit. Water was observed to be seeping through the gaps between the exterior masonry walls of the unit and the concrete apron. Caribbean Housing Limited has subsequently sealed the gaps and replaced the concrete apron where appropriate. Subsequent to these remedial works the water found an alternative route through an electrical conduit at the north eastern corner of this structure.

Heavy water flow was discovered through the foundation brick work.”

[MR. PARTAP]

That is the kind of houses for which they are asking people to pay \$265,000. That is the kind of sloppy work that is being done. That is what they want to do, to say that they have built houses. The gentleman is taking legal action and we look to see what will happen eventually.

When the Minister spoke on June 06, he boasted that Government can provide 10,000 housing units a year. The PNM has been in office for three and a half years as of yesterday. Where are the 35,000 housing units? *[Interruption]* You owe us 35,000 units. What is the sighing about? You could make it. You come here boasting that you are providing 10,000 housing units a year.

During his contribution the Minister spoke about fiscal 2003 and 2004; he completely ignored fiscal 2002. You did not talk about average; you talked about 10,000 housing units a year. Even then, with all the joint venture projects; in-fill programmes and rent-to-own schemes your government managed to drum up a figure of only 6,336. *[Interruption]* You promised 35,000, not “we”! The stark reality is that you have not even reached 6,366. The Minister said, “We hope to build”. They are not built as yet. He is speaking like his Prime Minister when he spoke the last time in the House about a number of projects that they were going to do. That is counting the chickens in the “hen belly”. “Not a post hole eh dig yet.”

Dr. Rafeeq: “Yuh could spell that eh Hansard.”

Mr. H. Partap: I want to tell the Minister that he is in a housing deficit of 28,664. That is how much you owe us.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Compare that with how many you built.

Mr. H. Partap: I am not comparing this evening. You promised us 10,000 units a year and you only delivered 6,336 in three and a half years. You owe us 28,000. That is the kind of public relations they do. They come to Parliament and make all kinds of high sounding statements, when you put them to the test they cannot do it. The same thing happens in every ministry.

The sum of \$3,000,000 was spent on advertisement. I want you to fix the roads and open the school. You built houses on water. There is no water on the hill even though the Minister of Education said that there is water. The hill is about 800 feet.

Mrs. Job-Davis: That is gas to kill people children.

Mr. H. Partap: “Doh leh mih tell yuh where the gas is coming from.” The gas is coming from Point Lisas.

They are not concerned about the location of the housing units and that they are building houses and there are no recreation grounds, community centres or anything where the people can meet to discuss. They build houses and that is the end of the story. I give you a house and that is it. They want to come with this Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Bill to put power into their hands to continue raiding the Treasury.

Clause 23 of the Bill says that the funds of this Housing Development Corporation can be applied and there are a number of headings it can be applied to. One of those would be fees for services of consultants. That is as wide as you can get. What prevents the corporation, if it is passed, from employing Dansam Dhansook as a consultant on the instructions of the Minister—because he is the one who makes the rules—so he could shut his mouth? Used the funds of the various corporations to fight the election in 2002. They bought out the election and paid people. In Cumuto and Tamana, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla was walking in front and the bag man was behind. Paying for votes! That is against the law, but the police “on all yuh side, so we in trouble”.

They have done that before. They have been moving money around. Very soon we will ask for some explanation on what has happened in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. There are scores of bogus consultants employed in the various ministries. These are jobs for the boys and girls of the PNM. That is the fear we have on this side. We do not trust the PNM to do things right.

I was reading the telephone conversation of Mr. Jerry Narace and Mr. Dhansook on the *Sunday Express*. He said,

“I just tell you just relax with Matthew.”

“That sounding a lil corny.”

“The party will help any party member. We have had people who have had their things thrown out. You are a member of a party. There is a benefit for being a member of a party.”

We all know that. There is a real benefit for being a member of the PNM party. The Members for Ortoire/Mayaro, Port of Spain South and La Brea will know. [Interruption] The time will come when I will tell you. The party will do this, not the Government. This is the kind of conspiracy that would be hatched by the PNM to siphon hundreds of millions of dollars from this Housing Development Corporation. You are talking about billions of dollars in their hands. That would

[MR. PARTAP]

be used to help PNM party members in trouble. There is a benefit for being a member of a party. I did not say so. Jerry Narace said so.

I can see the PNM using clause 23(g) to fund their various conspiracies. It points to situations where the corporation can use its funds to defray expenses. It is as wide as that. Clause 23(i) says:

“any other expenditure authorized by the Corporation in the discharge of its functions.”

Mrs. Job-Davis: What is the problem?

Mr. H. Partap: It is like a slush fund.

Mrs. Job-Davis: What is a slush fund?

Mr. H. Partap: You do not know?

Mrs. Job-Davis: No.

Mr. H. Partap: You have not been with PNM long enough.

The corporation can appoint a PNM hack with no qualification or experience under the rule which states “any other expenditure”. We do not trust them. We are convinced that this Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Bill if passed and comes into an Act—and it will be because they have the majority—will be another legal means for the PNM to raid the Treasury and fill the feeding troughs. They will bulldoze everything and everybody standing in their way.

I have noticed a number of companies were being formed. I was wondering if the Prime Minister is planning to privatize the Government by forming all these companies. The fact that the Government has to form separate companies like the Housing Development Corporation, tells us that it is an indictment on the competence of Ministers.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members for allowing me extra time. I may not use all of it.

I have noticed that over the past three and a half years much money has been spent on advertisements. After that mask of PR is removed you have to face up to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You better start doing things for people.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Why? You do not want to come back?

Mr. H. Partap: We know that the National Housing Authority (NHA) is riddled with corruption. When the PNM returned to office money was allocated for the Uriah Butler interchange. That money was redirected to NHA for a massive project to repaint all NHA units. As the project was a massive project so was there massive corruption and it was a free-for-all through various gangs. You know them. In all that Sen. Muhammad Shabazz was able to build a wall on his private land. The NHA made an example of him. I think that they fired him. *[Interruption]* The fact is that he built a wall with taxpayers' money. You remember the ghost gangs with various names such as Jennifer Lopez and other American pop figures that were on the pay sheet? It was a "tiefing" spree. When they reached there and saw the money they started to take from a side. We have no guarantee that this Housing Development Corporation will not now become a feeding trough for the PNM.

We are aware that the present set of units undertaken by the NHA involves dubious community sub-contractors. Some of these so-called contractors do not have as much as a wheelbarrow but they are building houses. I can name you some. They have no track record on construction. They own no equipment. Some of them will borrow a shovel and a wheelbarrow. They end up with millions of dollars in contracts. *[Interruption]* The Member for Tunapuna should not talk because he is really a convicted felon sitting in the House.

Mr. Speaker: No, no. I will ask you to withdraw that remark and you need to apologize too. Please.

Mr. H. Partap: I will withdraw it and if it requires an apology—

Mr. Speaker: You need to apologize to the House.

Mr. H. Partap: On your instructions, Mr. Speaker, I will gladly apologize. I wish he had apologized to the Mayor of Chaguanas as well. I apologize, Mr. Speaker, to him. He is my friend, but sometimes they say show me your friends and I will show you who you are. So I am trying to keep away from him.

I am reliably informed that the floors and walls of several housing units now under construction in Tarouba are substandard. It appears that some of these

[MR. PARTAP]

floors have arthritis. They are curved and bent and in some cases they have collapsed. Fix the arthritis floors in Tarouba before you put people there. Please, fix them. You know the old people say they “kilkityay”.

Mr. Speaker: You will have to spell that for the Hansard reporter.
[*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, since it will go into my time I will spell it for her afterwards.

The housing units now being built by the NHA are beyond the reach of the wage earners. They are boasting that they are building houses for the wage earners. The cheapest NHA house costs about \$200,000. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong. An occupier will have to pay a rent for about 100 years before finally getting full ownership of that property. According to the NHA these units are available to prospective homeowners whose combined family income exceeds \$3,000 a month.

With 40 per cent living below the poverty line of US \$2 a day, or TT \$12.60 a day, it is estimated that 70,000 of the poorest of the poor can never hope to access an NHA apartment. That is the reality.

When the UNC was negotiating the housing loan with the Inter American Development Bank, the UNC had requested a subsidy of up to US \$6,000 per family to be used as a down payment on house and land to a maximum of \$120,000.

6.45p.m.

Our concept to provide shelter to citizens was based on the starter-house serviced lots where we would have provided housing lots with access to electricity, water and telephones. Recipients would have had access to a \$10,000 interest-free loan. In fact, the serviced lots would have been available at \$5 per square foot, while the undeveloped lots would have been made available at 25 cents per square foot.

We were making people a part of the programme. Do you know what you are doing? You are handing out! You are making them clients of the State! [*Interruption*] Yes, that is why they are crowding your offices. They know you are giving free houses! They would pay one or two month's rent; they would not pay the rest and then you would write it off. That is what you would do! Do you think we do not know? We were offering people a partnership in owning their homes.

Mrs. Job-Davis: You will or you would have?

Hon. Member: “Woulda, coulda, shoulda.”

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, I will ignore the asides and talk to you. The kind of concept we had for the houses were not to create crime factories as they are now doing. Mr. Speaker, they are creating crime factories all over Trinidad.

The Minister's incompetence is reflected in the fact that more than 25 per cent of the housing units undertaken by the Government so far are incomplete. Yet, he has handed out keys to the recipients. He has asked persons to accept incomplete houses! *[Interruption]* There is a plan in their stupidity! The plan is that if you give them the keys now they would have two months residence status and then they could be registered to vote! *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Imbert: But that is the law.

Mr. H. Partap: I agree; that is the law! Do you see what they are doing, Mr. Speaker? *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker, it would seem as though the Minister of Housing has forgotten Union Hall squatters. It appears as though the Minister of Housing is out to spite them in order to get even with the Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East. The Prime Minister is very interested in these squatters. The NHA placed them in decanting centres in Tarouba to allow for what they said was the development of the area which they formerly occupied. But now they are living in intolerable conditions! They are in boxboard units. These units are hot and stuffy and about 10 families use one toilet! That is what they have reduced the poor to in this country. Why must these squatters, who are entitled to houses, be the victims of the spite and vindictiveness of the Minister of Housing and the Prime Minister?

Hon. Member: And they say they like the poor.

Mr. H. Partap: Yes, with ten families using one toilet! They like the poor too bad and they cannot proclaim the OSH Bill! If that is their Vision 2020 then they would eat the bread that the devil kneads.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the Minister of Housing would take the advice I am going to give him. The Member for San Fernando East has already put Hazel Rogers-Dick to undermine the Minister of Housing in San Fernando. I hope the Minister understands that the Prime Minister has put Hazel Rogers-Dick to undermine him. The Member for Princes Town has explained what she is doing there. *[Interruption]* She is there to undermine the Member for Diego Martin West!

Dr. Rowley: And you are so sorry about that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That is why he is bringing the new company!

Mr. H. Partap: Yes. When he brings the Housing Development Corporation into being, he would have a say of who would be employed! I am sorry for Hazel Rogers-Dick then, because she would be outside. You had better take this in your hand! [*Interruption*] But they are going to pass the Bill because they have the majority. I am asking the Minister to please do something about those squatters in that dark hole of Calcutta right now in Tarouba. Please assist those people, if you say you like them!

There are no provisions in the Bill for accountability and transparency in the use of taxpayers' money. It is a case of himself reporting to himself. This is troubling when we know that there are clouds of impropriety hanging over the head of the Minister who piloted this Bill. The Minister is attempting to get this Parliament to set up the Housing Development Corporation that would be exempt from scrutiny. We do not trust him! We would not have any faith in the cronies he would appoint to run the corporation and since this Bill does not provide for the checks and balances to make us comfortable and we do not have the guarantee that the corporation would not become another NHA, we certainly cannot support this Bill.

The attitude of this Government is to close down institutions when they are in trouble and form new ones as if the problems would simply go away. We have no faith in them! We do not trust the new Housing Development Corporation as outlined in the Bill! We see it as another excuse for the non-delivery of goods and services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We see it as a clever means of taking taxpayers' moneys out of their pockets and putting it into the hands of the PNM's friends, families and supporters. This is another CEPEP! This is another URP! This would be just another NHA! It is another pipeline to the PNM feeding frenzy!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Singh, did you want to make a contribution?

Mr. Singh: I will make it at the committee stage.

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, when I presented this Bill I was very careful to give the rationale behind the creation of this agency. I gave some examples as to what is happening now and how the coming into being of the Housing Development Corporation would allow the State

to manage the current and expanded housing portfolio using modern management methods, which were absent from the current arrangements, resulting in a number of difficulties.

I want to make it abundantly clear that I have no difficulty with the Members on the other side espousing the policy of their administrations or of their current party. One thing is fundamentally clear, and we all have agreed on that, that the PNM's policy is different to the housing policy pursued by the NAR and the UNC, so there is no argument there. However, I was absolutely astounded by the contribution of the Member for St. Augustine.

When I listened to the Member for St. Augustine, I suspect that like me, he had dozed off during the debate and somebody roused him and told him to get up and talk. He got up and said the most amazing things. When I consider that he was in charge of our Central Bank at one stage in the proceedings; we got away lightly!

He accused us of going back to failed policies. But as he did that, he espoused the failed policies of the administrations that got him where he is today. I cannot understand how he could not see that! I am going to respond to a few of the things he said because he was their frontline speaker and somehow, in some quarters, he is viewed as an intellectual and, therefore, I must respond to what he said because I know they expect a response. He said:

“Government had the responsibility to use wealth to create wealth.”

[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Of course, according to him, that wealth belongs to the wealthy. If you let that wealth go to the non-wealthy you are giving freeness; persons would sponge off the State. He said the PNM's policy was a failed one because housing costs too much; education costs too much! Mr. Speaker, the frightening thing about that policy, which is called the Africa policy—and it is precisely that mentality that has Africa where it is today. African politicians who are known to have this policy, where if the State has resources—as many of them do—and they have money, they do not use those resources on the people; they do not spend that resource on improving the quality of life so that education costs too much; health costs too much; infrastructure costs too much and housing costs too much, so everything costs too much. Do not spend State money on those things!

[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

What do you do with the money?

Mr. Imbert: You keep the money and you thief it.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Ahhhh! That is why Saynia Batch's wife was caught in the airport with 35 suitcases full of cash. That is the Africa policy and that is what he is espousing to us today! I have never seen him angry before, he was virtually frothing at his mouth when he said:

“But we are going back to failed policies, spending money on people; housing cost too much, that is bad economics.”

He decried my colleague's contribution about education.

“These things costs too much and they are not generating wealth.”

I want to tell him and all his friends this evening, the PNM's policy is clear. We make no apologies to anyone. The money of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is to be spent on the people of Trinidad and Tobago! [*Desk thumping*] There is no greater need in this country today, outside of education and health, than housing.

I have noticed that with all the hours they have spoken, not one of them had the temerity to get up and say there is not a housing shortage in this country. They did not say that! So having acknowledged that there is a grave housing shortage what they are saying is to let it continue. Those who live in comfortable houses could have that policy but we are responsible for putting in houses those persons who are not properly housed in this country. That is the PNM's policy! [*Desk thumping*]

I now go to a bit of “dotishness” that was said by his colleague, the Member for Couva South. He said: “Where would the people of Tarouba go to work?” We have built houses in Tarouba and the first thing they told us was that houses could not be built in Tarouba. I want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the Tarouba infrastructure was lying unattended for years. In fact, when we went to build the houses there, we had to redo the plumbing infrastructure because it was lying idle for so long that it was damaged. The roads were there! They, who in the face of the grave housing shortage in the country, and who took the position to let that continue, said to us: “I see you are going to build houses in Tarouba; houses cannot be built there.” The Member came here today and said: “You have built houses in Tarouba and you have put people there but where are they going to get jobs?” Persons who are in and around San Fernando who get housing in Tarouba, where are their jobs now?

Mr. Imbert: In Port of Spain.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: In other words, you have overcrowding in San Fernando and environs now. They are working wherever they are working! There is a philosophy from my friend from Couva South that if you move them a quarter mile away to good housing it will affect their jobs. How stupid could one get? They have a need to throw everything at the housing portfolio because somehow or the other they have a problem with it.

Mr. Speaker, I go back to my colleague from St. Augustine, who today fulminated on the failed NAR policy. Remember it was the Member of Parliament, John Humphrey, who has the distinction in the Guinness Book of Records for misleading two administrations that were diametrically opposed to each other. Mr. John Humphrey somehow managed to mislead both administrations, the NAR and the UNC. He was a Minister of Housing who told this country: “The country does not need a Ministry of Housing.” He sold the policy, which was read out here by Members on that side, about giving land to persons. Yes, that was their policy but it did not result in houses!

They created some lots but after years those lots were overgrown. In one development in Buen Intento, a UNC development, they created lots infrastructure which was left for houses to spring up like mushrooms—on its own! When we embarked on the housing construction, we went to Buen Intento and there was a sewer treatment plant that was never used. Mr. Speaker, except for birds flying over and relieving themselves, it was never used. [*Laughter*] A brand new sewer treatment plant was abandoned in the black-sage bushes which had grown taller than I am. We had to redo it. If you go to Buen Intento now you would see houses. People want houses! [*Desk thumping*] Understand that! The problem is: shortage of houses! Watch me! Read my lips! Problem: shortage of houses! Solution: build houses! It is simple!

You may disagree with how we go about it but the bottom line is that the problem we are trying to solve in this country is the shortage of houses. In that situation, there are high prices for the ones that are available and lack of affordability for those who want houses. How difficult is that to understand? They spent two administrations trying to fight it. Give up; it does not work!

While my friend, the Member for St. Augustine, gave us this discourse—because he likes to give discourses—on how it was wrong for the PNM to spend Government’s money on a housing programme to solve a housing problem, because we are somehow off in leftfield, let me tell you what a developed country that has the same housing shortage problem is doing. I am reading from the 2005

[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

“Housing, planning and regeneration” of the British government. Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote a couple paragraphs. I think it is important to quote so that the discourse of my friend who gave us this philosophy of an attack on wealth to spend public money on housing would be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, the Member sees creating wealth through property ownership as a problem. The single largest investment most persons would make in their lives is the purchase of a house. For most families their single pot of gold is their house but this intellectual sees a problem with wealth creation with respect to house creation. The British government said, under low-cost home ownership and I quote one line:

“Since the 1980s the increase in the proportion of dwellings that are owner-occupied has in part been due to government schemes aimed at helping lower-income households into home ownership.”

That is exactly what we are doing now!

Mr. Imbert: They are doing that in England now?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Of course it costs money!

Mr. Imbert: No, man, it is free!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: For that statement to be made, it cost money! Listen to the kind of money they are talking about. I quote:

“The Sustainable Communities Plan (*Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*), published in February 2003, set out a 15- to 20-year programme of action that included £22 billion of investment...”

Mr. Imbert: How much TT is that?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Multiply that by \$12.

Mr. Imbert: TT \$250 billion.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I continue to quote:

“to improve housing and communities in England...”

That is only for improvement.

“between March 2004 and May 2006. In July 2004 the Government announced a further £16 billion for the Plan during the period 2006/07 to 2007/08.

To meet the demand for affordable housing in the South East, the Plan identified four growth areas where land can be accessed relatively inexpensively so that large numbers of homes can be built. The areas are Ashford in Kent; Milton Keynes and the South Midlands; the corridor from London to Stansted and Cambridgeshire and the Thames Gateway,...In July 2003, the Government committed £446 million over three years for projects in priority areas within the Thames Gateway.”

In one area, in the Thames Gateway, £446 million! I continue:

“This is expected to generate additional funds and to help produce an extra 200,000 homes by 2016.”

So the British, a developed country, the government expenditure of that magnitude is trying to solve a housing shortage problem; trying to get by 2016, 200,000 additional homes because they understand that the solution to housing shortage is to build houses. They have identified that there is a central, pivotal role for the Central Government in the provision of those houses. Yet, the distinguished gentleman from St. Augustine got up out of his slumber here this afternoon—frothing from his mouth—to give us the benefit of his intellect—which impresses them so much—that it is a failed policy for this Government to put money in the public sector housing programme. Insofar as they are beneficiaries to that programme, they are clients of the State relying on freeness. Those are clichés that we have heard all the time.

Mr. Speaker, we must remember how close we came to disaster in this country by that kind of philosophy that is so gratuitously offered to us. If we go to the NAR Manifesto in which he had a hand, I presume, and he operated as the Minister of Planning and Development, if my memory serves me right, I think it is on page 16 or 17, in not understanding the Point Lisas initiatives and badmouthing it in the same way they are badmouthing this housing programme now. They wrote in their manifesto that there was “Sunset Industries” and under their watch “there will be no further investment in any mega project in this country.” Thank God they only lasted one term because today we would not have been the world’s leading exporter of methanol; we would not have been the major exporter of ammonia, we would not have been the largest exporter of energy to the United States. [*Desk thumping*] Thank God they are where they are and thus they shall stay! [*Desk thumping*] If anybody has learnt nothing, it appears as though they do not intend to learn!

[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

I must congratulate my colleague from Diego Martin East because he made my job very easy. He gave a brilliant rationale here this afternoon for the public sector programme and the Government's programme. [*Desk thumping*] He said everything that was needed to be said to justify what we are doing! We would be judged, not by 16 Members on the other side who do not seem to understand logic, but by the 1.3 million people outside who have a need for housing and who have two brain cells in their heads.

Mr. Speaker, to come and tell us about "free", my colleague from Diego Martin East was at pains to point out that most of the applicants out of that 70,000 people, if they earn in the order of \$3,500 to \$4,000, they could qualify for a mortgage of a basic NHA house. We have a range of houses. Looking at a \$4,000 income, if we use the economists' yardstick of 1/3 going to housing, then we think that in some areas of the country we could build for that unsubsidized, and in other areas, we cannot. He talked about mortgage and ownership, and my friend got up and talked about freeness. While we are emphasizing mortgage and ownership, they are stuck in the rhetoric of the past, anything the PNM does they just bad mouth it, they even make the speaker look dotish. Even as they say so it reflected on them, not on the PNM.

Again, another cliché, the role of the State against the private sector probably sounds good. What is the State doing in this programme that is not private sector? You go out there and ask hardware dealers; ask the quarry operators; ask the truck drivers; ask the banks and ask the contractors—of course, all of a sudden, every contractor who is building in this programme is a PNM contractor. I am glad to hear that because the PNM is running the economy in a way that is giving them an involvement that they did not have under the UNC. Under the UNC there was one mega project, the airport, where a few sharks fed until they were bloated. We have tens of contractors across the country. I do not know who is PNM and I do not know who is UNC. [*Desk thumping*] What I do know is that if you could build houses in this country the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has work for you. [*Desk thumping*] Let them stay and talk about PNM contractor and UNC contractor and whatever, I do not know. Apparently, when they were in office their party owned the contractors. We do not operate so!

In fact, one of them made a big song and dance this afternoon about Winchester Industries being some favourite son of the PNM and getting some contract. I will tell you that I, in this House, in answer to a question from Members on the other side told the House that Winchester Industries was

dismissed. The contract was determined and the grounds for determination were that they were not performing up to standard. They were fired! But this evening my colleague from Nariva goes one better. He got up in this House and without a shred of evidence called Mr. McLeod's name; called persons' names and then went on to say that they ran away with \$15 million. He used the House to slander persons.

Mr. Speaker, a contractor having a problem and not being able to handle it on the site and getting fired, how does that make him a thief? He might be an inefficient contractor; the contract provides for determination; you are determined. Why does that give a Member of this House the right to call him a thief and to tell the country, without one shred of evidence, that those gentlemen ran away with \$15 million!

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is unfair; it is not right, and I say it again without fear of contradiction, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is populated by idiots. Because, how could you tell me you want to be called 'honourable' when you come to the House and do a thing like that, knowing full well that you are hurting people who cannot defend themselves, and think you are scoring political points?

I told this House what was done at Ramgoolie Trace; how much work was done, how the work was valued by independent quantity surveyors, what we paid for it. And then the Member went on to reason saying the original project was for 300-odd houses and we have now given six contractors the work to do 100 houses, and then jumps to the amazing conclusion that 200 houses missing. Because the original was for 334, I think it was, and now we awarded a contract for 100, therefore 200 houses were stolen.

What is the truth? The truth was told in this House to him, by me, in answer to a question from that side and the truth is this: The contractor was fired before a significant portion of the work was embarked upon, so that that work was not touched. We hired the six small contractors to finish what the contractor had at various stages of completion. The other work that was not touched upon I told this House that we were going out for bids to have those contracts awarded so the rest of the houses can be built. How could you come and tell the country that 200 houses are missing and, therefore, it involves corruption? Because unashamedly a Government that crashed under corruption; three senior members of the Government

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walked away under corruption with a Prime Minister before the court every Monday morning like a common or garden thief under corruption—all they could do is to come here and think that by repeating the word corruption, corruption, corruption it would change their political fortune. That is what they are doing.

So a Bill is brought to improve the management of part of the public sector in the country, and my friend from Nariva spent a whole 75 minutes pointing out how this Bill is to facilitate corruption. And some of his assertions were requiring some unparliamentary language. Mr. Speaker, I know you would not permit. Permit me to say that is an example of a seat in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, full of sound and fury signifying nothing and they believe that by saying that—and they know what they are doing. I would not be surprised at all if tomorrow the headline in one of the newspapers is that “\$15 million missing from Ramgoolie Trace project; contractor moved with \$15 million.”

Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. There is absolutely not one grain of truth in that. A contractor was fired for poor performance. You evaluate the work done and you see what you had paid so you can determine value for money and you do not leave it like that; you hire other contractors to finish it. Where does he get the evidence? On what basis is he saying that? Political expediency, trying to use the Parliament to grandstand, to grab headlines for a moment. That is their style.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The Member comes and says the houses at Tarouba, the floors and the walls are collapsing. We have allocated houses that are occupied down there.

In this country, with all these television stations and radio stations, and newspapers, have you seen one family complaining about any wall falling in Tarouba and any house floor falling out? The only person who knows that is the Member for Nariva who has some method of knowing something that nobody else knows. What bothers me about this is that I heard he is a preacher, a man of the cloth, and to think that there are people who expect to get to heaven through him. If they do that and follow him, they are going straight to hell because I do not know why he does not like to speak the truth—and the man says he is a member of the clergy. I could have interrupted him a million times today because three-quarters of what he was saying had no basis but I chose to let him go ahead.

Listen to his logic. I am the Minister of Housing, I am under investigation and, therefore, I should not have any right to deal with anything to do with any rules. I am disqualified according to him for dealing with rules but his leader, who is charged for money he cannot account for; he could make law in the Parliament. It is okay for the Member for Couva North who is charged and dragged before the court to make law, but ridiculous allegations made against me disqualify me from making rules. His colleague in the other place is charged for accounting for the airport money, he could make law but I cannot make rules. You understand!

I will tell you one thing, there is a signal difference between the PNM and the UNC, and I represent that difference. When they could not account for money in the airport and the public raised their voices and a commission of enquiry was asked for, they said no. When the commission of enquiry was actually put in place under the PNM and they served notice on Members of Parliament of the UNC to appear before the commission to answer questions with respect to their portfolio, Sadiq Baksh told the commission to go to hell, he was not coming. They refused to go. When they said they had allegations against me, I stood here in this space and I said enquire as much as you want, investigate as much as you want, I will cooperate fully and I stand by that. [*Desk thumping*]

So the commission of enquiry that engaged him this afternoon, is going to start next month. I welcome it. I look forward to it and my friend from Couva South who is offering me some gratuity as defence because my political leader and Prime Minister did me some injustice by having a Commission of Enquiry if he did have money, that would have been an injustice. Because I will tell you something, if there was not that commission of enquiry into the allegations, for the rest of their lives and their grandchildren's lives, they would have been saying that I did something in Tobago that was wrong. There is a commission of enquiry and only that will put that nonsense to bed. [*Desk thumping*]

I have no fear of any enquiry. You have two now, bring 22. Taxpayers paying for all of them. I told them before, a long, long time ago, any policeman coming to my house, they are coming to lime or to ask directions to their house. I stand by that. So they come to the Parliament on a Housing Bill and wasting Parliament's time, talking about a commission of enquiry, there is a difference between us. Allegations against a PNM Minister—I will appear before the commission any time to answer any questions. I can answer any question, but your record, two Ministers of the last Government refused to go to a commission

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of enquiry. Of course, when the police come with their handcuffs they cannot run. And of course, logic, I am a failed Minister because this Bill represents my admission that there is no value for money and therefore the Minister should resign.

Apparently, before 2001 there was value for money in this country. Everything was all right before 2001, problems only started in the morning of January 2002. So I as the Minister, am to resign or to accept failure—this Bill represents failure. But if he were here in the beginning—and I did admit that the NHA had gone off course and this is the rectification of that, but it started in 2001 apparently. Apparently before 2001 everything was okay with the NHA.

And again without a shred of evidence, public servants are doing yeoman duty in this country and they get up over there, and say the NHA is a bed of corruption. Where? Which one? Which project? Irresponsible Members of Parliament tarnishing the character of people who are doing their jobs and who deserve praise. I will tell you one thing. I am very proud of my staff, a staff that is changing at least one area in the public sector. NHA used to be a bad word in this country. Today, Atlantic LNG hired NHA as a subcontractor and I am proud of it. [Desk thumping]

The morale of the staff has never been higher and as we move to create the Housing Development Corporation we will keep strengthening the management and raising our standards. They do not understand that. I do not expect them to understand that. It was quite all right under the UNC when he was a Minister, in the face of a housing shortage for locals. My colleague made mention of the Glencoe NHA houses. Do you know what they were used for before their friends and family went in there? They used them to house migrant workers from China. I had to come to this Parliament and file motions and questions to shame them into changing that. They were using NHA houses to house migrant workers from China in my constituency. That is on *Hansard*. That was their housing policy and they have the gall to come today to talk about NHA corruption and then he goes to the sublime. We said three years ago we would build 10,000 houses a year, where are the 30,000 houses? No wonder you failed Math. In the first year, you announced you are going to build 10,000 houses, you strike a match and you get 10,000 houses. That is what they thought. So we must account for 10,000 houses in 2002.

I explained before but some people have a problem with comprehension. If you are embarking on such a major project it requires a certain amount of

gestation to prepare the ground to launch out. I can tell you—he said we are short of 28,000 because we only built 6,000. The 6,336 is the target for fiscal 2005 alone and the target for next year we are aiming to be 8,000 and maybe the following year, 12,000. I do not know as yet but I am telling you we are preparing the groundwork for 8,000 next year.

We are not paying much attention to the detractors on the other side because they have committed themselves to a housing policy that says you must build no house. Therefore, we will not be distracted by that. And all these allegations about corruption, corruption, corruption, except that we feel sorry for the innocent staff at the NHA who have to suffer those slings and arrows from Members of Parliament who maybe they represent. I do not know where my staff come from in terms of their constituencies but I will be very surprised indeed, if a large number of them are not constituents of Members on the other side, who without a shred of evidence come inside the House and use parliamentary cover to accuse them about corruption. But that is their style.

They are saying that contractors are fighting among themselves because we give big contractors the work and small contractors—nothing is further from the truth. Have you heard contractors saying they cannot get work in the housing programme? In fact, the opposite is true. We are having difficulty getting contractors to take work that we have. That is a fact. But he comes and puts on *Hansard* that contractors are fighting among themselves for NHA work. And then he goes on to prove his allegations of corruption; the NHA is violating Central Tenders Board Ordinance. You will think that a Member of Parliament who is in his second or third term would know that the National Housing Authority is not subject to the Central Tenders Board. They have their own tender rules under the board of the authority. Why then is the Member for Nariva coming in the House making a case about corruption, accusing the NHA of not following Central Tenders Board rules when, in fact, they are not required to? It is either ignorance or malice or both.

He goes further. He holds the NHA responsible for houses constructed by the private sector. The Member spent 15 minutes reading out a document about a home that had problems with its foundation, a home that was built by the Caribbean Housing Limited. Would you believe that Caribbean Housing Limited is a wholly-owned, 100 per cent private sector initiative that has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with NHA? The NHA has absolutely nothing to do with

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that company's project, yet this Member comes to the House and reads out page after page of complaint about bad houses. All that proves is that there are bad houses in the private sector. But he comes here, in seeking to overstate his case, with falsehood trying to give the country the impression that NHA houses in Tarouba, the floors are warping and capsizing—not true. And in Edinburgh water comes through the foundation and that is the Caribbean Housing Limited houses, a private sector housing project. What manner of man is that and he is to be called “hon. friend from Nariva”. And when I described him appropriately, I get a feedback that I do not care about.

To go to my colleague who led off from the other side, he always looks for nuances and avenues to call a fishing boat a battle ship and to call a house a mansion and to call a man a whale. He had a lot to say about recent statements I made in this House. The last time I checked, free speech was still available to me. I did not know that was the problem. However, he made a point that I was attacking the Minister of Education, trying to make mischief. I do not know that the Minister of Education needs any protection from my friend from Couva South. And all of a sudden, I made a speech in the Parliament, it is carried in the media, they jumped in to protect the Prime Minister. I do not know he had asked for that or he needs that and, of course, they love him. Even if I had attacked the Prime Minister, the last people in the world he would want to defend him is them, because as they offer him a cup of water to drink and soothe his thirst, it is a cup of hemlock they offer him. That is their philosophy.

All of a sudden, the opportunity to make mischief cannot go unnoticed by them. They cannot pass it up. So he is defending the Minister of Education, saying my comments about failings in the education system is an attack on the Minister of Education. Apparently, before she became Minister of Education, it was okay. In other words, my highlighting of shortcomings in the education system is not highlighting a longstanding problem, it is because she is the Minister and everything was good before and I am saying it is bad now so it is her fault, trying to make mischief, as if they could.

Stay out of PNM business. [*Desk thumping*] We are over here, a family. We could agree, we could disagree but as long as we see you in sight, we are one family. Enjoy yourself and think your analysis shows you that the PNM has problems. I do not know that a difference of opinion is something that should

cause you to think that there are problems in the PNM. We have different perspectives but we have one fundamental principle. We support the PNM fundamental principle. I am a PNM Minister. Watch me good. Try and deal with the mess on that side and stay out of PNM business.

He goes on to use the word, as they use the word corruption ad nauseum, with or without reason, nepotism. What is nepotism? I ask you to go to the dictionary and look at the meaning and you will see how silly you sound. I do not know anybody in the NHA hiring their family and friends. NHA is a state agency where, to get hired, you either get a contract, by advertisement, by the board or you are a Statutory Authorities Service Commission (SASC) employee. What is all this talk about nepotism? I have two children and they are unemployed, they are students. My wife does not work in the public sector. I have no family working there. Where is all this talk? In fact, one spokesman said he was throwing mud. I thought he was throwing manure and, of course, they cannot miss the opportunity to stoke the racial fire.

Caroni workers, when will they get a lot of land on which to build? In other words, we are doing all of these housing things and a commitment the Government made, Caroni workers cannot get a lot of land. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the gentlemen on the other side that is not right. It cannot stand scrutiny. If you are going to raise Caroni workers in the context of access to housing do not raise it in the context of victimization because Caroni workers are the only workers in this country who had their own system by the State to provide house, land and money under the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee, and it continues to this day. I am the Minister responsible for what you call SILWC, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee that provided the opportunity for only sugar workers. No other workers in this country ever had that. Not in Tobago, Diego Martin, Arima, Cedros. That was in Central Trinidad in the sugar industry. Yet he comes and is seeking to stoke fire and to create social and racial discord talking about Caroni workers being disadvantaged by not being given lands they were promised, knowing full well that the Vesting Bill is in the other place on their recommendations. They are mischief makers and their approach is this, not only will they not build any house but they will “mash up” any house in this country if they cannot run the country. That is their philosophy. That is a UNC philosophy. Understand that. The UNC has embarked on a philosophy to “mash up” Trinidad and Tobago if they cannot run it. And all these malicious attacks are meant to stoke social discord.

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Members of Parliament will not speak the truth and every time they speak an untruth it is an untruth that is meant to incite and to incense people. I must tell the House, there are a number of parcels of Caroni lands which have been earmarked for housing, which have been passed to the NHA. And as you may recall, we have said that this housing programme is a ten-year programme. We have spoken about last year; we are into next year, this year, so as we go down the road, fifth year, sixth year, seventh year, those lands are going to be brought into construction at different times.

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.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I would use this opportunity to move the Procedural Motion that this House continue to sit until the completion of this matter, as well as Bill No. 2 on the Order Paper, the Venture Capital (Amdt.) Bill.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATON BILL

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank Members for the extension. They have a habit that they are not prepared to learn from their past. There was a time when we came into the House they would taunt us: "Oh, you had a commission of Enquiry into the airport, and you waste money. Nothing happened!" But as soon as the police go to talk to them and have them under caution, they go on the political platform: "Look out, they intend to arrest me next week." Because they know that, the police told them so. So today, my friend from Couva South, having not heard me say anything about Roystonia before, stood in this House and told the House that the Roystonia project was the shining example of UNC

housing policy and it was the best thing ever and the Minister had ridiculed it and held it up as if I now had to retreat from that position I had taken earlier on that it was not in the State's interest. And having not heard anything, it means that they got away.

Mr. Speaker, I must tell this House that after the matter was raised about Roystonia in this House, I caused to be put in place operations to carry out a full audit on the project and I have been advised that work is complete and the audited documents are due today. What we are auditing is the question of resources to provide public sector housing in a situation where the State provided the land; the State provided the money; the land is being sold at the open market price. The arrangement, even though generous, required transmission of profits to the State—a declaration of losses throughout the project, no return to the State in a venture where the land was supplied at peppercorn rent and cash was provided and infrastructure was funded. That whole operation has been audited and very soon the audit report will be available to me and the rest of the Members of the House. So to get up and say that is the most shining example, I think that is a bit premature. Let us see what the auditors say. Mr. Speaker, I am ignoring my colleague from Nariva. He seems to be impervious to good sense.

To get back to my friend from Couva South. Two weeks ago I was in the United Kingdom and I learnt a word called nimbyism. It is associated with public sector housing policy. It means “not in my backyard”. They have the same thing here in Trinidad and Tobago. Everywhere you go where people feel that they are of a higher class and they associate NHA with low class, nimbyism takes over. Do not bring them here. So we, too, here in Trinidad and Tobago practise nimbyism.

When we were going to do the Bates Trace project, there was no end of opposition from persons who took the position that they did not want NHA within 10 miles of them and it would devalue their property. I can tell you they are stepping on tippy-toe in the dead of night to look at the project and they are calling and applying like anybody else, because they realize that the Bates Trace Project would be one of the shining examples of public sector housing in this country. [*Desk thumping*] But of course—

Hon. Member: Romain and Associates.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am glad the Member mentioned that. Another one of the lies told by my friend from Nariva, is that the project had been awarded to Romain and Associates without tender—two double-barrel lies. Firstly, the project had not been awarded to Romain and Associates. There is some involvement by Romain and Associates but the company is not Romain and Associates. Secondly, it was done by competitive bidding process, but the Member must come here and say the opposite. It is either he does not know, and if he does not know then shut up, and if you do know then do not speak untruths. But the man is a preacher.

Mr. Partap: I hope you are not lying to the Parliament.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Somebody on the other side said they heard nothing about East Port of Spain development. Obviously, I am not surprised because they do not listen when the Government speaks about housing because housing gives them diarrhoea and nobody likes diarrhoea.

7.45 p.m.

I have said on many occasions that a facet of our housing programme is called urban renewal. Suffice it for the moment to say that the Ministry of Housing and the NHA have active assignments under way with respect to the urban renewal programme focusing on East Port of Spain. You will hear more about that in the near future.

The UNC's policy for urban renewal can be found on page 14 of today's *Guardian*. It is quite different to the PNM's. Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan, who is a Senator in the other place—

“Break down Govt housing blocks”

Let me read the UNC's policy to deal with the housing and crime problem in East Port of Spain.

“Opposition Senator Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan wants the Government to demolish its housing blocks on Nelson Street and George Street, Port of Spain.

Seepersad-Bachan made the assertion as she linked government housing projects with high crime levels.”

And she goes on to talk about Maloney.

The UNC philosophy is that, if you have crime in an area, you demolish the buildings. I am not sure that that is not Mugabe's policy because he is saying and doing the same thing now in Zimbabwe. Hitler did that. The UNC is now saying that if you have heard the news and a few of the criminals came out of Nelson and George Streets, the way to deal with that is to demolish the buildings. *[Interruption]* Seepersad-Bachan is saying here to demolish the buildings. Beetham *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Singh: What happen to that?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I do not know what analysis she did to determine that there was a higher incidence of crime on George and Nelson Streets, but when I listen to the news and I hear about crime occurrences, it seems to me that it is happening all over the country. So, according to UNC philosophy, we must demolish Laventille, demolish Morvant, demolish Carenage, demolish Chaguanas and demolish Enterprise because there is crime there. Their philosophy tells them that if they live nowhere, they will not commit crime. *[Interruption]* If they do not live anywhere, they will not have an address to give to the police, so the crime would not be committed. That is UNC policy.

Mr. Speaker, if the blocks on Nelson Street and George Street are ever pulled down, rest assured, it is not because of the incidence of crime, it is because of an urban renewal programme. If the buildings have outlived their projected life and they need to be pulled down to be replaced by modern buildings or for a different land use arrangement, that will be the PNM's policy. It would not be this "dotishness" about crime being committed on George Street, so pull down the buildings. *[Interruption]*

Where do they get these people? Apparently their idea of crime is gunman crime. "Tiefing" government money is not crime, you know, because they will all be out under trees. With this policy of breaking down your house if you take government money, where they "woulda" sleep?

Somebody, again, on the other side—I cannot remember which one, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize for that—had a lot to say about the NHA's accounts, casting aspersions and feeding misinformation. My colleagues on the other side are Members of the House. They can make their points in a measured way and not make them as statements of fact when in fact they are wrong and they have no basis to know if they are wrong or right.

This is a copy of the latest financial statement of the National Housing Authority for the year ended December 31, 2004. That means that the NHA's

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financial statements are up-to-date. They are with the Auditor General and, as you know, they are in the hands of the Auditor General to have them audited and brought to this House.

Because they did not see it in the House does not give them the right to say that the NHA's finances are in disarray; that the accounts are not done and that it is a sea of corruption. That is irresponsible conduct and the Members on the other side are systematically using irresponsible conduct in the hope that it would bring them political benefit. All they do is diminish Members of Parliament in the eyes of the intelligent public. [*Interruption*]

How do they know that the NHA's finances are in disarray? Somebody told you that? You saw that? You smell that? But you came to the Parliament and said that. This is September 2004. That means that the last year is up-to-date. The next year, 2005, is not yet spent. We are up-to-date. We have made strides and I want to put on record today that Mr. Noel Garcia and his staff have transformed the NHA from what you, the UNC, knew, to what it is today. [*Desk thumping*] They deserve credit for that. Instead they are getting their characters assassinated by assassins on the other side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I could have said a lot, but they did not engage the Bill; they did not engage the whole idea of treating with the people's problems. Every time they sought to engage the Bill, it was to spread misinformation. My colleagues, the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin Central, dealt with those engagements. Therefore, I do not have much to which to respond, except to say that under no circumstances, as long as I have anything to do with it, will I come to this House and give Members on the other side the names of beneficiaries who are clients of the NHA, so that they can go and call people's names on platforms. [*Interruption*] They are already saying, without any evidence and information, that it is corrupt and that it is discriminatory. There is nothing I can tell them, but I think it is just basically wrong to provide people's names so that Members could bandy the names about on a political platform. They can get it however they get it, but they are not getting it from me. Under no circumstances am I going to bring the names of people here, telling you where they came from and where they are.

NHA is a mortgaging agency. Can they go to a bank in town and ask them about their mortgage portfolio? Can they do that? Because they are Members of Parliament, they want to abuse their authority. Not on my watch! Some other

Minister! They can tell the world that I did not answer the question and told them up front not to bother to ask; they are not going to get it.

My friend, the Member for St. Augustine, made the most amazing statements. He said, when he was giving his contribution, that the PNM-failed policies almost led the country into collapse. Mr. Speaker, do you know what led us to the brink of collapse? I wonder if you know that, while we are awash with rain and fresh water is flowing into the sea all over the country, every 13 months, you and I, not them, because their money is in Isle of Mann and “Isle of Woman”, are paying US \$30 million for water extracted from the Gulf of Paria, and we are stuck with that for the next 20 years. That kind of policy did not bring us to the brink of collapse, but building houses for people who cannot find houses is bringing the country to the brink of collapse.

I moved a motion in this House calling on the Member for Caroni East, who at the time was the Minister of Public Utilities and who instructed T&TEC to delink the companies that were supposed to go with the InnCogen plant.

Mr. Singh: Will the Member give way? Mr. Speaker, that simply is not true. It is simply not true.

Hon. Member: It is true!

Mr. Singh: It is not true!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I gave way to him only to be courteous. Mr. Speaker, I read the letter in this Parliament. It is on *Hansard*. He can jump up as often as he likes.

Mr. Singh: That is a lie! That is a lie!

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please!

Mr. Singh: I—

Mr. Speaker: No, not like that!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am not talking to them, you know; I am talking to you. I read the letter on *Hansard* where T&TEC was instructed by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Utilities, on the advice of the Minister. It is on *Hansard*, and as a result of that, I told them that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will have to pay higher prices for current while they get their money and bank it in the Isle of Mann, in Guernsey and elsewhere.

[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

[*Interruption*] Now he is getting up and telling me it is not true. He is too late! It is on *Hansard*. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, they went out and they forced T&TEC into that arrangement and T&TEC went from a situation of profitability—

Mr. Singh: With what? PowerGen? That is a lie! Nonsense!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Before InnCogen, T&TEC was in a much better position, like WASA. He was also the Minister. He was the Minister who had the report which showed that if WASA went into desalination it would bankrupt them. Tell me I am lying! Get up and tell me that! A report was done—

Mr. Singh: Will the Member give way? Mr. Speaker, all the water that the hon. Member is talking about in the desalination plant is bought by the Water and Sewerage Authority for US \$0.70 and sold to the estate for US \$1.05. I do not know what calculation the hon. Member is using. Obviously that is voodoo economics.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I would tell you one thing: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. He has just spoken about numbers as to imply a profit. If in fact there is a profit, why then is WASA running cap in hand every 13 months for the Cabinet to approve US \$30 million to pay the desalination plant?

Mr. Singh: Shut down the plant! Shut it down!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We will hear more about it in due course. The Member for Couva South said that we are doing this to remove the NHA from the SASC so as to create corruption. At the same time, he said that the current NHA, which is under the SASC, is corrupt to the core. Apparently, it is now under the SASC and according to him it is corrupt, but we want to take it out from where it is to put it in the Housing Development Corporation to make it corrupt. Do you understand how confused they are in their logic?

He goes on to talk about Hazel Rogers-Dick as a member of the board. Mr. Speaker, I am not aware, as I speak to you now, of any member of the NHA board who is contracted to the NHA to do any work. Given the volume of lies that made up the contributions, I would not be surprised if that allegation is just another one. I can tell you that the board of the NHA is not directly involved in allocations. Allocations at the NHA are done by the staff of the NHA and there is an executive

director there who is responsible for running that show. I am not aware that board members make allocations at the NHA. I go further. Board members do not make allocations at the NHA, so all that talk about Hazel Rogers-Dick, I do not know what they are talking about. She is a member of the board and whatever she does in San Fernando, it is not NHA contract work. I am not aware of that as I speak to you now.

Finder's fees for board members: I am not aware that any board member is paid any finders fee, but since it has been raised in the Parliament, it is so outrageous, I will have to investigate that. I would not be surprised if it turns out to be just another outlandish allegation.

Mr. Speaker, I end simply by taking you on a trip around the country to 21 neighbourhoods where public sector policies of housing construction resulted in the creation of communities and the provision of assets and comfort to families. We can start with Charlotteville, Tobago. They are Charlotteville, Speyside, Buccoo, Bon Accord, Carenage, Diamond Vale, River Estate, St. James, Port of Spain—many sites in Port of Spain—Morvant, Mount Hope, Mt. d'Or, Maloney, Malabar, Valencia, Couva, Point Lisas, Pleasantville, Embacadere, Point Fortin, Debe, and I can go on.

These are all areas where significant numbers of public sector houses were constructed under PNM administration. We have been assisting people in housing themselves since 1957, and today is just another step moving to another level because we intend to make this country a developed country by the year 2020, and no country can claim that status without having its citizens properly housed to the standards befitting a developed country. That is our assignment.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12.

[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Question proposed, That clause 12 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Singh: Having regard to the fact that we are making new paradigm legislation, clause 12, and I read it:

“The Minister may give to the Board directions of a specific or general nature to be followed in the performance of its functions or the exercise of its powers under this Act, with which the Board shall comply.”

This is the old statutory authority formula, which you find for WASA, T&TEC and the other areas. This really makes the board the creature of the Minister, in that there is mandatory compliance. In the Postal Corporation Act, it says that the Minister may give directions in writing. It adds a new dimension because it takes it away from the realm of nuances and speculation. It says that the Minister may give directions in writing to the Board on matters of broad public policy and the Board shall give effect to that policy. It removes direct political control from the Minister and from the board, so that it protects the Minister, but it also insulates the board. You cannot have a development corporation and have a statutory authority approach. I recommend that.

Mr. Chairman: May I suggest to Members that, in future, when you have proposed amendments, the Standing Orders do speak to your producing them in writing and circulating them. Even if you were to make a suggestion, which would be acceptable, then we would be back to having that done.

Mr. Singh: I take your point.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Chairman, this matter was the subject of extensive discourse in the preparation of this Bill. We finalized it in this way and I am satisfied that this would be acceptable. It is interesting that the Member should say that because the Minister is always held accountable. It does not necessarily mean interference, but to say that the Minister will have a role that is detrimental to the agency, I am sure he will be the first one to hold the Minister accountable for what the agency does. That policy is spelt out in the Postal Corporation Act, sure, but I expect that even if it were not written there in that language, an agency would expect to function under broad government policy. We did discuss this at great length and it was felt in the end that this was the—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, clause 13(c) specifies that:

“Subject to this Act it shall be the function and duty of the Corporation to—

(c) implement the broad policy of the government in relation to housing as may be directed by the Minister from time to time.”

That certainly takes into account what the Member for Caroni East is suggesting and that, in conjunction with clause 12, deals with what he is suggesting.

Mr. Singh: I noted (c). In this new paradigm of legislation, Ministers ought to give members of the board a policy position, in writing. That is what was arrived at.

Mr. Valley: One has to see this housing corporation or even the Land Settlement Agency (LSA) as the implementation arm of the Ministry of Housing. The concept is that the Ministry proper will not implement the policy, but the Minister is still responsible. He is still in charge. Clause 12(b) and (e) reflect that fact.

Mr. Singh: I hear what you say, and clearly there is a difference in perspective. I stand by my position. This is the old statutory formula. It is one that has given rise to problems in its operations and the question in writing is certainly a matter that is at a higher level.

Mr. Valley: Although “in writing” is not stated there, if the board feels a particular way about a thing, they can say: “Could you put that in writing for me?”

Mr. Singh: If that is your position, I am not convinced of it.

Dr. Rowley: After a long, long discussion on this matter, a board that can take the position that it is not beholden to the Minister can be more problematic than the Minister interfering with the corporation.

Mr. Singh: I am saying that to protect the Minister and to protect the Board, public policy directions ought to be given in writing and it is incorporated in the Postal Corporation Act. If you have decided to go with the old statutory formula, you are the majority—

Mr. Valley: I do not know why you say the Postal Corporation Act. I see that as important in the Telecommunications Act, but with the postal corporation and housing, those are merely external agencies doing the Ministry’s work.

Mr. Singh: Public policy is not a nebulous issue; it is a clear issue, as you have enunciated and ventilated. Therefore, if you have a clear public policy position, then you ought to have it in writing and the board is guided by that.

Dr. Rowley: The key to the whole thing is the implementation role that this corporation has to play and you cannot leave that implementation to the whim of a board that may want to walk a different route in a different time frame. For example, if there is a board in place now that does not subscribe to the need for 10,000 houses a year and think that maybe we should do 5,000, you will have to tell them something.

Mr. Singh: No, but if you put it in writing and say that it is the public policy position of the government, then—

Dr. Rowley: Writing is as good as the people who are going to react to it. Writing does not change anything.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 12 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 13 to 28 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 29.

Question proposed, That clause 29 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, in dealing with clause 29(5):

“Rules made under this section shall be available to any person on request and on payment of the prescribed fee.”

What is emerging in the whole context of transparency is that we must make rules of this nature more easily available. I do not know whether the prescribed fee is going to be a high fee, but in other legislation we did previously is to eliminate the issue of a fee.

Dr. Rowley: It is a peppercorn.

Mr. Singh: The prescribed fee might be peppercorn and in your instance it might not be peppercorn, but the larger point I want to make in this area is something we did in other legislation, that we shall have every tender open in public and indicate the parties and contents of each tender received in respect of its function. In other words, in the postal corporation, for example, every tender must be opened in the public and indicate the parties to—

Mr. Valley: But would that be included in the rules?

Mr. Singh: It was in the law.

Mr. Valley: Under (3)—

Mr. Singh: You may have it in the rules, but—

Mr. Valley: It says here:

“Until the rules are made under subsection (2), the Corporation should follow the procedures detailed in the Central Tenders Board Ordinance.”

Mr. Singh: This has to go to the Upper House and I want you to take a look. The same point you are making all evening about the allegations of corruption, it is better if we have a chance to make legislation, it is better if you put into the law as we did in the Postal Corporation Act—and I am just paraphrasing here because obviously the drafters may want to look at it—should open every tender in public and indicate the parties to and contents of each tender received in respect of its function.

8.15 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, could I say two things in relation to the issue of fees? The fees are specifically in relation to the tender rules and this is a normal process. When persons apply for a tender or ask for the tender rules they would pay a fee. In addition to that, the second point that I would like to make is that the rules specify how tenders are to be dealt with, including what the Member is saying. So you do not have to put it in the legislation. It would be dealt with in the rules and the rules would come to the Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 29 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 30 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 31.

Question proposed, That clause 31 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Breaux: Mr. Chairman, there is a typographical error in clause 31(2)(a). Actually, it is a language correction. In respect of clause 31(2)(a), it should really read: “to retire voluntarily from the service of the authority” and remove the word “public”. The officers of the National Housing Authority are not public officers.

Dr. Rowley: So, we would just reorganize some words there. It should read: “to retire voluntarily from the service of the authority”.

Mr. Chairman: Clause 31(2)(a) is amended as follows: “to retire voluntarily

[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

from the service of the authority.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 31, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 32 to 45 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

First, Second and Third Schedules ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

VENTURE CAPITAL (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL

Order for second reading read.

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

That a Bill to amend the Venture Capital Act, 1994, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, we have done this before. On Friday, May 21, 2004, we debated this Bill in this place. First of all, I should say that we were pleased on that day to report the support of the Opposition on this Bill. We had one speaker from the Opposition and that was the Member for St. Augustine. After saying a few things, in conclusion he said and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, generally, there is little controversy with most of the issues in this Bill but I have raised these issues if only to put into context the relevance of dealing with the bigger issues surrounding these Bills in the Parliament.

We have raised these issues only to suggest to you that in the final analysis, one can put as much as one can in the legislative agenda but the critical issue is good governance, transparency and political management. That is where more emphasis is needed to be placed in this country if we are to make use of the measures that are being passed in this Parliament. Thank you.”

Mr. Speaker, so we got the support of the Opposition on the Bill.

The Bill was passed and it went to the Senate and it was debated in that other place on July 06, 2004, which was the last day of that session. In that debate, my

colleague, Minister Sahadeo, who piloted the Bill in the Senate, gave a commitment to Sen. Mary King who had raised the issue of corporate venturing, and she indicated that the Government would take that on board.

The concept of corporate venturing speaks to a situation where a large firm such as Neal & Massy Holdings Limited would invest in a project by providing funding for that specific project, and the funds so invested by the company would receive a tax credit in a manner similar to what obtains under the Venture Capital legislation.

Mr. Speaker, what happened is that the Bill lapsed in the Senate and it was reintroduced on September 28, 2004. So while the Bill was debated in the Lower House on one occasion, it was debated in the Senate on three occasions—the second occasion being Tuesday, September 28, 2004 and I piloted the Bill.

In opening I made the point and I quote:

“I am sure you are aware that this amending legislation was, in fact, passed in this Senate, with amendments, on the last day that this Senate sat before we went on the recess, and subsequently the House was prorogued and thus the Bill lapsed and that is why we are back here...”

Mr. Singh: Tell us about the amendments.

Hon. K. Valley: They were nominal. The amendments are contained in the Bill that is before you. They are really minor things. In fact, the Bill lapsed and it was supposed to come back to the Lower House but Parliament was prorogued. It was taken up in the Senate on September 28, 2004, and at that time we sent it to a select committee, in accordance with the commitment given by my colleague.

The committee met on some three occasions. After listening to the technical persons and so forth, the committee concluded that they could not include that concept of corporate venturing in the legislation and that it really would have to be done otherwise.

Basically, the committee recommended that the Bill not be amended further at this time to include the concept of corporate venturing, and that this concept would be best included in another legislative framework. They are currently looking at that and the Bill was passed in the Senate on May 03, 2005. That was the third time that the Bill was in the Senate and, accordingly, we are back here.

[HON. K. VALLEY]

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to give Members some indication of what occurred in the Senate on May 03, 2005 when the Senate adopted the report of the special select committee on this Bill.

The Motion to adopt the report was moved by the Attorney General. He reported that at the sitting of September 28, 2004 that Members would recall that the Bill was referred to a special select committee of this Chamber and that he was appointed chairman of the committee.

The committee was mandated to report within 21 days. What happened is that after about three meetings—they also had me before the committee—the report simply noted, as I said, based on advice, that it would be dealt with differently.

I am going to read the conclusion and it says:

“Your Committee accordingly unanimously recommended in a report circulated before in this Senate:

- (i) that the Venture Capital (Amdt.) Bill, (No. 2), 2004 should not be amended further at this time to include the concept of corporate venturing;
- (ii) that the Government should request the Attorney General and the Cabinet to undertake the necessary research to determine an appropriate legislative framework for the introduction of the concept of corporate venturing, which was found to be desirable; and
- (iii) that the Government give the undertaking to introduce, at the earliest possible opportunity, legislation along the principles enunciated by the Committee.

That was the decision of the committee. The Bill was passed in the Senate on that day, and the Bill that was passed in this House on May 03, 2004, it is before us for approval.

Members would recall that the basic concept of this amendment is to widen the provisions of the legislation. We are increasing the equity capital of a venture capital company from \$20 million to \$100 million. In other words, a venture capital company can now have equity capital of \$100 million.

Similarly, we are increasing the amount of equity capital that an investee company can have—that is a company which obtains equity investment from a venture capital company—to \$50 million. In other words, we are taking into consideration the broad span of companies in Trinidad and Tobago. I think there are a few companies in Trinidad and Tobago—outside of the energy sector and the financial sector—with equity capital in excess of \$50 million. Therefore, we are saying that most of the medium sized companies can now qualify for venture capital investing.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the tax credit that applies to venture capital investment is at the marginal rate. In other words, if an individual or a company were to invest in a venture capital company, they would receive a tax credit equal to the marginal rate which is at present 30 per cent. So, in effect, you are investing 70 cents but getting one dollar.

The other thing that we have done in the Bill is to say that the investment in a venture capital company would only be by way of equity capital.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, and given the lateness of the hour, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East): Mr. Speaker, having regard to what the Leader of Government Business indicated—the process that the Bill lapsed in the Senate and that a special select committee was appointed, and there has been no substantive change in the Bill—I think the eloquence of the contribution by the hon. Member for St. Augustine still stands as our position when we supported the Bill. Therefore, with these few words, I wish to commend this Bill to the House. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated on May 21, 2005, again, I am indebted to Members on the other side. [*Desk thumping*]

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 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

[HON. K. VALLEY]

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

House resumed.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, July 08, 2005 at 1:30 p.m. I wish to inform Members that on that day the Government plans to debate Bill No. 3 on today's Order Paper which is the Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Bill, as well as Motion No. 2 on today's Order Paper—I am sorry, Motion No. 1 on the Order Paper, which is the Senate Amendments to the Tourism Development (Amdt.) Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.40 p.m.