

*Leave of Absence**Wednesday, July 05, 2006***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, July 05, 2006*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House: Mr. Gerald Yetming, Member of Parliament for St. Joseph and Mr. Eric Williams, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

**TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Tourism Development Act, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Tourism*]; read the first time.

**PAPER LAID**

The Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation (Vesting) (Amendment) Order, 2006. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS****Occupational Safety and Health Act  
(Implementation of)**

**21. Mr. Harry Partap** (*Nariva*) asked the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) whether there are regulations for the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act and if so, when will these regulations be laid in Parliament;
- (b) what administrative measures have been undertaken to implement the Occupational Safety and Health Act;
- (c) whether more Labour and Safety Officers are being recruited and trained to monitor the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act; and
- (d) when will members of the Occupational Safety and Health Authority be appointed?

**The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano):** Mr. Speaker, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) provides in section 98(2) that notwithstanding the repeal of the Factories Ordinance, the Employment of Women Night-Work Act, the Gas Cylinders Use, Conveyance and Storage Act, any regulation order or instrument made under the Factories Ordinance, shall continue in force and be deemed to have been made under sections 99 and 100 of the Act. The issue of regulations is also tied to standards and the Bureau of Standards has been working on standards for the Occupational Safety and Health Act. To date the following standards have been completed:

- (1) Contractor safety
- (2) Risk assessment
- (3) Work-place design indoor office lighting
- (4) Personal protective equipment: gloves, head, face and eye protection

Other standards being developed are work-place design indoor air quality, working at heights, occupational safety and health management systems, mobile equipment, and hazardous materials.

The arrangements for the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Authority are in train, and nominees have been provided by the organization specified in the Act. The names of the individuals nominated have been forwarded to the relevant Cabinet appointed committee for consideration.

The Cabinet has agreed to the recruitment of the Executive Director of the Occupational Safety and Health Agency, by way of international advertisement, to assist with the early establishment of the agency and the development of the appropriate codes and regulations. It would facilitate its functioning as an internationally benchmarked entity. The international search and recruitment of the Executive Director is in progress.

With respect to other areas, Cabinet has also agreed to establish an occupational safety and health division within the Industrial Court for the enhanced exercise of the court's jurisdiction under OSHA. The new division of the court would be accommodated at its south office, which is located at Irving Street, San Fernando. In addition, the ministry is working closely with the Government's Property and Management Division to identify suitable accommodation for the authority.

With respect to recruitment, prior to the passage through both Houses of Parliament of the amendments to the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Cabinet was approached to approve the recruitment of 38 officers to be assigned, initially, to the Factory Inspectorate, but with a view to the ultimate secondment to the agency.

These positions that are to be filled immediately include two deputy supervisors, 30 health safety officers I, and six health and safety officers II. Over 200 applications have been received for the aforementioned positions and interviews should commence in July, 2007 at the end of the short-listing of applicants.

With respect to training, the process of enhancing the current skills of the staff of the Factory Inspectorate is on the way, and this would be continued with the hiring of new officers. Recently, the ministry, in collaboration with the Organization of American States and the International Labour Organization, trained a number of professionals in the area of occupational safety and health. The training programme was extended to participants from a number of Caricom countries to help build competence within the Caricom region. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** The nominations for the OSHA authority have been forwarded to the Cabinet-appointed boards committee and the authority would be constituted as soon as the considerations are completed and Cabinet has looked at the matter.

### **Employment Injury and Disability Benefit (Introduction of)**

**22. Mr. Harry Partap** asked the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development:

Could the Minister advise how soon the Employment Injury and Disability Benefit Bill will be introduced in Parliament?

**The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano):** Mr. Speaker, the Employee Injury and Disability Bill has been redrafted and will be presented as the Employee Compensation Bill, reflecting a shift from the proposed fund-based system to what presently obtains, which is a private insurance scheme. The policy in the draft bill has been completed.

In November, 2005, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development began discussions with the Association of Trinidad and Tobago Insurance Companies with a view to determining what the new premiums might be, based on the proposed improved benefits and changes in the methods and factors of computation.

Discussions have been held and we are awaiting conclusive advice on the matter. This information is necessary to inform Cabinet on the matter. Upon receipt of this advice, the Bill will be presented to Cabinet.

### **British Law Enforcement Personnel**

**23. Dr. Fuad Khan** (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) Whether the British law enforcement personnel, presently in this country assisting the police, are from Scotland Yard?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is negative, could the Minister indicate from which international crime fighting organization were they recruited?
- (c) What are the terms and conditions of their engagement?

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I ask the leave of the House to have this question postponed for one week.

*Question, by leave, deferred.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have given leave to Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith, the Minister of Energy and Acting Prime Minister to make a statement.

### **ETHYLENE COMPLEX AND MALEIC ANHYDRIDE PROCESSING FACILITY (ESTABLISHMENT OF)**

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Acting Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to make a statement on behalf of the Government to this honourable House on two very significant developments in the energy sector. In our view, these initiatives mark the beginning of a new era in natural gas-based industrial activity in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government has now concluded two agreements, which will for the first time, generate downstream industries in second stage processing of petrochemicals in this country. These developments represent important strategic steps in our efforts to further diversify our nation's economy. As Members may recall, in 1958 a small ammonia plant, Federation Chemicals, was established in Trinidad and Tobago. Today, Trinidad and Tobago is the home of over 25 world-scale petrochemical plants, with several major additional plants at an advanced stage of development.

The agreements, which I announce today, are for the establishment of an Ethylene Complex and a Maleic Anhydride Processing Facility. The development of an ethylene production facility has been an aspiration in Trinidad and Tobago for some time. On April 18, 2006 Westlake International Investments Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Westlake Chemical Corporation, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a consortium comprising of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago and the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago. This MOU established the framework for the project evaluation of the proposal tabled by Westlake for the construction, operation and ownership of an ethane-based, ethylene/polyethylene plant in Trinidad and Tobago.

Westlake Chemical Corporation is a publicly traded company in the United States of America. To date, this company has constructed 11 ethylene crackers and polyethylene plants in locations throughout the world. Among the company's competitive strengths are its world-class assets, state-of-the-art technology and manufacturing, effective and efficient plant management processes, disciplined growth strategy, strategic market positioning, and its global presence.

The ethylene complex will be constructed on 250 acres of land at a site to be identified; and will be done in three phases with construction scheduled to start in the last quarter of 2007. Production is expected to start three years later in 2010. The capital cost is estimated at US \$1.5 billion, subject to further definition of the venture. The project will be financed by equity 30 per cent and debt 70 per cent with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago having the option of acquiring not less than 10 per cent, and up to 30 per cent equity in the project.

Mr. Speaker, ethylene is one of the world's leading chemical products used as a raw material in the manufacture of polymers for the fabrication of plastic and fibres for the packaging, transportation and construction industries. We expect the

*Ethylene Complex (Establishment of)*  
[SEN THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

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ethylene complex to trigger the development of a whole new range of downstream manufacturing activity in medium and small enterprises for the production of plastic film, bags, cups, appliance parts, pipes and related products

The establishment of a maleic anhydride processing facility is to be undertaken by ISEGEN (PTY) Limited, a wholly-owned private company incorporated in South Africa. This company is a global manufacturer of chemicals for food additives with 32 years in food acid manufacture. Its major clients include Pepsi Cola, Coca Cola, Cadbury, Schweppes, Unilever, Kraft, Arcor and many other multinational food manufacturers spanning some 42 countries.

Maleic anhydride is an intermediate chemical widely used in the industries for food and beverage products, pharmaceuticals, resins, oil additives, detergents and agricultural products. It will serve as a base product creating opportunities for the establishment of many new business ventures in all these processing industries in Trinidad and Tobago.

Discussions for this project began in mid 2005 and an MOU to establish the commercial terms was signed in December 2005, between ISEGEN and Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited (PPGPL). The capital cost of the project is estimated at US \$64 million; and construction is scheduled to commence in the third and fourth quarters of 2008.

The establishment of the ethylene complex and the maleic anhydride processing facility together represent investments in excess of US \$1.564 billion in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. This is further evidence of the continuing positive reputation of the country as an attractive location for foreign direct investment, a reputation that has been significantly increasing in recent times.

Great benefits will accrue to the country from these two projects. They will generate new wealth for the country, contribute very significantly to sustainable growth and create substantial employment in Trinidad and Tobago. It is expected that both projects will produce over 5,600 jobs during construction and a total of 540 permanent positions. More importantly, close to 6,000 sustainable jobs will be generated through the stimulation of new businesses in a wide range of new downstream manufacturing activity. These are most positive developments, which the Government is pleased to bring to the attention of this honourable House and the entire nation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, 2006 is to extend the term of municipal councils for a period of 12 months with effect from July 14, 2006. More specifically, the Bill seeks to amend the Municipal Corporations Act 1990 as follows:

Section 273 is amended by inserting after subsection (1C) the following subsections:

“(1D) Notwithstanding section 11(4) and (4A) and sections 12(5) and 15(1), for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2006—

- (a) the term of office of each Councillor shall continue for twelve months from the date of the expiry of the existing term of office, as though each Councillor had been elected for an additional period of one year; and
- (b) the term of office of each Mayor, Chairman and Alderman shall expire at the end of the existing term and
  - (1) the Councillors shall elect new Aldermen for a term of twelve months, in accordance with section 13;
  - (2) the Councillors and Aldermen shall elect a Mayor or Chairman of the Council for a term of twelve months, in accordance with section 14.

(1E) All powers exercisable by Councillors, Mayors and Aldermen, under the Act, shall be exercisable by them during the period referred to in subsection (1D).”

Mr. Speaker, this Government has embarked on a programme of local government reform and in this regard has published a Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform 2006, which was laid in the House of Representatives on May 26, 2006, and in the Senate on June 06, 2006.

The Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform, 2006 contains policy proposals for not only the restructuring of the system of local governance but also enhancing the nature of the relationship between central and local government and the constitutional arrangements for the sharing of responsibilities in the governance of the country.

These policy prescriptions for the reform of the system of local government, which will be elaborated upon later, are all geared towards accomplishing the following key objectives:

- Modernizing our governance structures and systems;
- improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of operations;
- delivering quality services to our citizens;
- increasing the participation and involvement of our citizens in Governmental affairs;
- attaining the highest possible standard of living and quality of life for all our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, a historical overview of reform efforts in this country since Independence in 1962 to present, will demonstrate that the resolve of this Government is to bring about meaningful change in the local government system of our country, and within the timeframe established by this Bill.

On the attainment of Independence in 1962, the then government was quite clear that its National Development Thrust could not be pursued efficiently without the concomitant restructuring of the local government system. Therefore, in 1965, the government appointed the Sinanan Committee to make recommendations for the restructuring of the local system in the context of Independence.

In its report, the Sinanan Committee advocated a greater role and prominence for local government in the democratic and development process. Among its recommendations, was the empowerment of communities to play a more meaningful role in the management of community assets and democratization of more functions, and decentralization to local government bodies.

Consequent to the report of the Sinanan Committee, the County Councils Act was enacted in 1967, which consolidated the executive positions of the seven county councils namely: St. Patrick, Victoria, Nariva/Mayaro, St. George, St.



Andrew/St. David, Caroni and Tobago. The roles and functions of the county councils were also redefined.

Another attempt at local government reform was made in 1974 with the appointment of the Hugh Wooding Constitution Commission to examine and make recommendations pertaining to constitutional reform at both central and local government levels.

The Hugh Wooding Constitution Commission recommended sweeping changes, including the extension of local government boundaries, the expansion of local government bodies functional base, and the provision of facilities and greater authority for the control of funds appropriated by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, there was no specific recommendations pertaining to the nature of the local government institutional structure for the carrying out of these additional responsibilities and the implications for the role of central government in the governance process. After careful consideration of these recommendations, the Government thought that under the boundary extension recommendation was feasible, which resulted in the creation of the St. George East County Council in 1980.

In 1980, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) Act was passed, which replaced the Tobago County Council. The THA commenced operations in 1982, and could be regarded as the first genuine island model of local self-government within the framework of unitary statehood in the post independence Caribbean. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, Member, take your seat. I can only listen to the Member who is on his feet contributing in the debate. Other Members who wish to speak to one another, may I suggest that you use the corridor. Please continue. *[Laughter]*

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, local government reform as a specific policy initiative, was formally placed on the national agenda in 1983, with the publication for public discussion of a draft Policy Paper on Community Development and Local Government Reform. This was done by the George Chambers administration.

The thrust of this paper was the enlisting of local government bodies as a partner in the national development process, through greater community involvement and participation in national policy making, community development and development planning. Two significant institutional mechanisms were recommended to accomplish these objectives. One was an area advisory committee and the other a national advisory committee.

In 1989, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) published a Draft Local Government Reform Policy Paper: the decentralization process; regional administration and regional development proposals for reform, which culminated into the passage of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 after a round of public consultation. The essential features of this local government legislation were:

- The consolidation of the local government legislation into one Act; and
- a significant increase in the number of local government bodies.

The current local government system operates under the framework of this Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, which was amended by Act No. 8 of 1992, the main amendment being the reduction of the number of regions to nine. This Act was intended to be the main catalyst for transforming the local government bodies into relatively autonomous, financially self-sufficient, efficient and effective entities, delivering quality services to citizens with a high level of community participation in local government affairs. However, these ends have not materialized after more than 14 years of operation under this legislation. In particular, anomalies still exist despite the actions of administrations since.

Some of these anomalies or unsatisfactory features include:

- The corporate structure and establishment including the governance structure of the councils;
- the absence of the required professional and administrative staff;
- the absence of sufficiently defined parameters for establishing a mutually beneficial partnership relationship between central and local government;
- service delivery is generally under what the public perceives to be satisfactory;
- the almost total dependence on central government subventions;
- the fact that the seal that operational performance in terms of value for money expended needs to be improved beyond the current levels;
- citizens participation, involvement and awareness of local government affairs are not at the desired standards;
- the current boundary demarcations do not facilitate effective administrative co-ordination between central and local government, effective service

delivery and the promotion of regional planning and the growth of sustainable communities;

- certain aspects of the current legislation are ambiguous and do not facilitate easy dispute resolution and clarity of policy formulation responsibilities between central and local government.

This present People's National Movement (PNM) administration, having assumed the responsibility for Government after the collapse of the United National Congress (UNC), and the acceptance of our proposals for governance in our manifesto of 1992, has made it very clear that we need to reform the system.

Our manifesto of 2002 articulated some very specific policy perspectives, which were accepted by the population. We pledged that a PNM Government would deliver public sector services in an efficient, effective and timely manner, through consultations with the national community, so as to correct market failures and to ensure prompt governmental intervention.

We argued that this position would only be achieved by the decentralization of the system of governance to accept that local government would play a functional part in the governance of this country.

Mr. Speaker, even as we acknowledge the problems in the system of local government, a number of interventions were made by this administration to improve the administration of local government systems. Among these we could number monthly collaborative meetings that included all corporations regardless of which political party managed them.

An enhanced budgetary allocation: we saw the budgetary allocation for local government increasing by three times. The refit or renewal of vehicles or equipment used to replace those that were rundown over the previous six years. The search for the support for chairmen and mayors by the provision of staff for these individuals and officers. An institutional strengthening exercise that took in all corporations. Making particular arrangements for what was seen as the most urgent matter in some corporations, that is the issue of drainage with a provision of substantial budgetary allocation over the last three years. A number of projects including infrastructure renewal, improvement and development programmes; a bridges programme; a landslip programme; a secondary roads development and maintenance programme; the town centre programmes across the country; the fixing of recreational facilities; the start-up and development of municipal corporation complexes as well as attention to public cemeteries and crematoriums.

Mr. Speaker, we are quite clear that this administration is committed to addressing these local government reform issues. We demonstrated our commitment by the publication of a Draft Policy Paper on Local Government Reform in 2004, which was subjected to widespread public consultations, both national and regional, between August and September 2004. In fact, a two-day national consultation and four one-day regional consultations were held between August and September 2004. During these public consultations more than 1,000 persons from a wide cross-section of the national community attended these public consultations.

These persons represented over 35 groups, organizations and institutions including non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, village councils, women's groups, religious bodies, trade unions, political parties and the business sector. The Ministry of Local Government also received and reviewed commentaries and suggestions of individuals and institutions on the Green Paper. This Green Paper was laid in the Senate on October 22, 2004 and in the House of Representatives on October 29, 2004.

**2.00 p.m.**

The consensual issues and positions that emanated from these consultations were reported to Cabinet in August 2005, together with the findings and recommendations of the Local Government Inter-ministerial Transitional Task Force on Functions and Responsibilities to be Decentralized to Local Government Bodies.

The Cabinet agreed that a revised Green Paper be produced incorporating both reports. In April 2006, a draft of this document was presented to Cabinet and found acceptance. The document was subsequently amended as a draft White Paper, which was endorsed. The Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform was laid in Parliament on May 26, 2006, accompanied by a statement by the hon. Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. It was laid in the Senate on June 06, 2006 by the Minister of Local Government. The draft policy paper on local government reform is a revolutionary document grounded in a philosophy of decentralization and informed by the imperatives of Vision 2020, our national restructuring and sustainable development strategy, to achieve developed country status by 2020.

On the question of the choice of decentralization, the administration is quite clear that for this particular time, at this particular junction of our system of governance, decentralization is the best option. In this context, the Draft White

Paper on Local Government Reform, this administration's overarching philosophy is that local government bodies are to become more active partners in the governance and development process of the country. The core of this philosophy is the notion of shared responsibility between central and local government in Trinidad and Tobago. Under this arrangement the Government would be the policy making body of the country and local government would be the principal executing arm of the State, except in portfolios such as national defence, foreign affairs, foreign trade and energy, which would remain under the purview of the central government.

There will also be revised arrangements in other functional areas and in this regard, national agencies shall carry out certain functions such as the supply of electricity through the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC); provision of water and sewage disposal through the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA); civil aviation and air transport through the Civil Aviation and Airports Authority and the development and maintenance of the roads and highways network through a roads authority. The system contemplated will ensure the effective decentralization of authority for delivery of services at the community level, where there is close proximity between the decision makers and those whom they serve.

Another key aspect of the local government reform policy prescription is a review of our system of representative government through broadening of the representation of people, community and regional interest in the country. In this context, we are proposing an enlarged Senate of Trinidad and Tobago to include all the mayors and chairmen of the municipal corporations. Though without a vote, they shall have the additional opportunity to speak at a national forum on matters specifically affecting their cities, boroughs and regions. Community concerns and issues would be ventilated in the nation's highest forum, the Parliament, providing the opportunity for much greater influence and input in national legislation, policies and programmes.

The third philosophical pillar of the local government reform agenda is the introduction of executive councils in the local government system in Trinidad similar to the Tobago House of Assembly model. Building on the experiences of the Tobago House of Assembly these executive councils shall constitute the leadership of the local government body with the elected and nominated officials performing assigned roles and functions and being responsible to the respective local government bodies for the management of particular departments or

portfolios. The executive council shall take collective responsibility for management of the local government body as it implements the policy of the central government.

One local government dictum is that the level of local autonomy is implicitly related to the degree of local financial self-sufficiency. The reform proposals therefore, seek to enhance financial self-sufficiency to a level by guaranteeing a degree of self-financing for local government bodies. The expectation is that through the collection of appropriate municipal rates and taxes, all local government bodies would be able to finance a greater part of their annual budget than currently obtains.

The necessary administrative and legal requirements would be put in place to establish functional property taxation and house rate collection units where they do not now exist. A realistic formula would also be developed for allocations from the central government based on demographics and social infrastructural needs, as well as other appropriate considerations.

Another key component of the local government reform policy is the review of local government boundaries to ensure that they are functional, rational, and user-friendly, as well as coterminous with central government administrative district arrangements. Municipal boundaries must facilitate regional identification and mobilization; programme coordination among various agencies, as well as efficient and effective service delivery to our sustainable communities. The intention is to ensure more effective, national, regional and local area planning as well as growth and development of sustainable communities.

The concept of sustainable communities embodies the view, that citizens living within that community should be able to have most of their needs serviced within, or in close proximity to that particular community. We believe that it is the function of any local government system. These are the five major policy positions of our local government reform agenda. We have planned a definite programme of activities to give effect to these policy proposals within the proposed 12-month period by which the life of the councils are to be extended.

The programme of activities include inter alia the following: National, regional and community consultations on the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform; the determination of the actual functions and responsibilities of local government bodies; the determination of an appropriate structure both governance and corporate for local government bodies; the boundary demarcations for local government bodies

inclusive of the types and numbers; the drafting and presentation to Parliament of appropriate legislative programmes.

With the publication of the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform, we engaged the population in further national dialogue and towards this end, a programme of public exposition has been developed and would be executed very soon. In this context the Government urges every citizen, organization, group and institution to participate in this national dialogue to express their views passionately, objectively and sincerely. Furthermore, the complete package of local government reform policy prescription would require new legislative provisions, both primary and secondary and moreover, must be seen as an integral part of the challenging issue of constitutional reform.

Recognizing the importance of this matter in the context of the reshaping of and restructuring of our government structure and systems, the Government persists that the new arrangement should be formulated and put in place before new local government elections are held. The proposals of this legislation speak to the urgency of reform measures and the need to schedule the programmes in the furtherance of the process of local government reform. This will give the new elected local government officials not only a fresh start, but also allow them to enter a newly reformed local government system with an expanded range of functions and responsibilities—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this is the second and last time, I note the Member for Chaguanas is carrying on a caucus all by himself and I noticed the middle bench of the Government's side is doing likewise. I am trying to listen to the hon. Minister and so too, the Hansard reporter is trying to get down what he is saying. So please, show some respect to the Minister, the Hansard reporter and most of all to yourself.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, the newly elected local government officials will therefore receive not only a fresh start but also an opportunity to enter a newly reformed local government system with an expanded range of functions and responsibilities; enjoy a decentralized authority over implementing government functions and responsibilities at the local level; more resources for deployment to community; opportunities for more effective representation in decision making and a greater measure of contribution to national legislation, policy and programmes.

In light of the foregoing, the Government is proposing that the Municipal Corporations Act, No. 21 of 1990, and its attendant amendment Act, No. 8 of 1992, be amended accordingly to reflect the following:

The term of office of each council shall continue for 12 months;

The term of office of each mayor, chairman and alderman shall expire at the end of the existing term;

The councillors shall elect new aldermen for a term of 12 months in accordance with section 13. [*Interruption*]

I am mindful that I am a guest in this House so I will contain myself. The councillors and aldermen will elect a mayor or chairman of the council for a term of 12 month.

All powers exercisable by councillors, mayors and aldermen under the Act shall be exercisable by them during the period referred to in subsection (1D).

The rationale is quite clear. Councillors were elected and while continued service for an additional year may be onerous, since they have a direct mandate from the people, we expect them to continue for the next year and contribute to the future development of the local government system, accepting that their sacrifice now will lay the foundation for improvement in the system of governance of the nation. On the question of the expiration of the term of office of mayors, chairmen and aldermen and the election of new aldermen, chairmen and mayors, we are simply providing a window of opportunity for those who would have accepted the secondary mandates from the councils and their respective parties to shoulder the responsibility for an expected three years, but do not wish to continue to serve at the local government level to exit the system.

Significantly, several mayors, chairmen and aldermen have expressed the desire to be relieved of the responsibility occasioned by the introduction of new responsibilities and an increased workload developed over the last three years and they wish to be relieved of the portfolio, which they hold at the expiration of the current term. They have variously indicated that among the reasons are: the increase in the responsibilities they shoulder; the increase in the expectations of the services they should render and the requirement for filing various declarations. As a caring and understanding Government and as one that also subscribes to the respect for individual rights and freedoms, we have provided an avenue for these office holders who do not wish to continue to demit office gracefully, rather than leaving it up to forced resignations, thereby possibly disrupting the smooth function of the system, not to mention denying communities democratic representation and adequate and prompt service delivery, to which they have been accustomed over the last four years.



I urge those on the other side to support the amendments to the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, which shall also allow the councillors to continue in office, thereby, ensuring effective democratic representation and the election of new aldermen, mayors and chairmen to provide political leadership, continuous service delivery to our communities, whilst we put the new arrangement in place for a more effective, efficient, dynamic and progressive system of government. You will also notice that all power and responsibility during the transition process shall lie with the councillors representing their respective communities, the aldermen, mayors and chairmen they select and the members of those municipalities. This exercise in local democracy, we believe, deserves the support of the entire House.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Privy Council ruled in a very historic matter in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] Why do you not listen and learn? The Privy Council said that the courts in Trinidad and Tobago were misled for want of a better word, one can say, deceived. What we just observed in this Parliament is an act of deceit, deception to a large extent.

**Mr. Speaker:** I hope you are not accusing the hon. Minister of deception or deceit because that would be unparliamentary.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** No, no. I am not accusing the Minister of deceit. I am just saying he is an instrument.

The Minister made several references in advancing his case. One must be very careful when Parliament is used in this manner, by a minister, or sometimes by others. When the hon. Prime Minister spoke on May 26, what did he say then and how is it relevant today? The Prime Minister indicated that the Government therefore, proposed to bring legislation to Parliament to extend the present term of local government bodies for a period of one year. When I talk of deception or deceit, whichever is correct, what do we understand by incorporation?

Section 10(2) of the Act says that:

“The council shall consist of the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors.”

Mayor here will include chairmen. How could the Minister tell us differently today? The Minister is saying that the council—according to the PNM, which changes the law every Monday morning to suit themselves—does not include the mayor anymore. If you are going to exclude the life of the council it has to be as

the Act says. This is flawed! This is how the PNM deceives this country on a daily basis. This is a very sad situation.

Here you have people who have committed themselves to serve. This foolishness that the Minister tells us that there are mayors who do not wish to continue is PNM's story. That is their in-house business. If they do not want to continue all they have to do is resign. Is this what you have reduced this Parliament to? You have brought legislation according to your good self to accommodate your friend who might be a mayor or chairman? That is what you are saying. This is flawed! This is a good time for the Leader of Government Business to suspend the sitting and let us revisit.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please address me.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I certainly will. I am hearing no one else.

If the purpose of the Bill is to extend the term of the council, let us agree what is the council. That is the first thing we have to agree to. The council comprises the mayor, chairmen, aldermen and councillors. You have outsmarted yourself. Since a council consists, according to the Act—this is not me. We have done this a number of times. I will go back to the history. I do not understand; the PNM is not improving at all. No wonder the country is in the state it finds itself. The level of contributions and research—here is a Minister who pays millions of dollars to get all kinds of opinions from friends and others and this is the nonsense he comes here with.

**Sen. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, if the Member would care to be enlightened, the concept of the council by definition, the primary election is the number of councillors. They have a direct relationship with the electorate; they constitute the council, both in their being and by their actions.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister was doing very good when he sat down and said nothing. Now he has exposed himself. I suggest that we be very careful when we go public to broadcast. Can you imagine the children of this country hearing this Minister? *[Laughter]* Can you imagine on the Internet somebody in New York who is doing some research in local government and hears this Minister, this foolishness? Twice you have done it.

What does section 10(2) say? Have you looked at the Act? Let me repeat it:

“The council shall consist of the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors.”

If that is correct, then the Minister's argument is flawed and cannot be proceeded with. I hope that the Leader of Government Business is listening. You cannot do that in Parliament. In my private moments sometimes I question whether the Speaker could intervene and say, "Listen, you guys seem to be doing something wrong." Why do you not go behind the Speaker's Chair and revisit it and make sure that is what we want to achieve?

Clause 2 of the Bill states that the amendments are being made for the purpose only of the election during 2006. This is what you have said to us. This is what the Prime Minister said to us. Today you are saying that it is to accommodate your friends who are mayors and might have gotten themselves in trouble and are looking for a way out. You do not bring legislation for friends. That is a dangerous thing to do. This is the only government in the world that does this.

It is difficult to see why it is necessary to elect new chairmen, mayors and aldermen in order to achieve the above purpose. You want the council to continue because you are unprepared for the local government election. Let the council continue. We will lend you support if you let the councils continue, not this half-way approach. You cannot do it. If you had done your research and gone back to the previous times, you would have seen that this never obtained. I cannot understand how you can go to a Cabinet and say, "Next Wednesday this is what I will say in Parliament." When I was in the other place we could not do that. We had a Leader of Government Business; we had to dot the i's and cross the t's. That is why my friend from Caroni East speaks so well. He became a very good chief whip. [*Laughter*]

According to the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, mayors, chairmen, aldermen and councillors hold office for the equivalent term. You cannot short-change it. You cannot do it. The law does not allow it. You cannot do it for some and not for all.

Section 15(1) of the Municipal Corporations Act states that the mayor shall hold office for a term, which shall be the same as that of the councillors and aldermen. You are going against the Act. You cannot change things like that. This is not a party group meeting. This is the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. You have made so many errors.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can I address the Leader of Government Business? I am very serious that we need to revisit this. Let us take a 10-minute suspension and come back and decide what is proper. You are going against the law. You may not need the support, but it is not the proper thing to do. I am certain that somebody will challenge this in court. Why do you wish to go there?

Furthermore, in order that there would be continuity and no gap in the position of mayor, section 15(2) of the Act provides for a mayor/chairman to continue in office until a successor is appointed. You would obtain that when you have the local government election. It makes absolutely no administrative sense to extend the term of councillors and not that of the mayors, chairmen and aldermen.

Let us look at the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. Why would you want to move the chairman to re-elect him? You will have a new chairman for less than a year. Already the council is under tremendous pressure. You have said that on numerous occasions. I go back and tell you the provisions we made. I do not know why you are trying to mislead the national community. You are not receiving services. In the case of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, you had 1,900 employees; you have now reduced that to 900. For 265,000 persons who live in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, you give them \$19 million to provide goods and services for a whole year. That is 8 cents per day. That is the truth.

It appears that this amendment is setting the stage for the removal of some mayors, chairmen and aldermen. Why do you wish to do that? Why are you using Parliament to do your dirty work? I cannot be a part of this. We on this side cannot be part of this. While this may make political sense to the PNM, it flies in the face of common sense and good administration. Parliament must do things that add value to the lives of people. We must not be part of a parliament that came to pass legislation to get rid of somebody they have a fall-out with.

Notwithstanding the provisions of any written law relating to the term of office of mayors, aldermen and councillors, the term of office of mayors, aldermen and councillors, holding office on May 13, is extended for one year. It has to be for one year. You have made an error there. I hope it is an error.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You see the improvement in the quality of delivery?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** And with very little research available to us.

The amendment makes no mention of the office of the deputy mayor and vice chairman. Already, the Bill is flawed. The deputy mayor and vice-chairman hold office during the term of the office of mayor and chairman. That is section 21(1) of the Act, which you referred to. The term of the office of deputy mayor and vice-chairman will expire at the end of the existing term of mayors and chairmen.

**2.30 p.m.**

So you see what we have done. As the amendment makes no provision for the election of deputy mayor/vice chairman, it would appear that there would be no deputy mayor or vice chairman for the extended period of the Bill if it is passed in its present form. Look at what you have brought to the Parliament. Further, the council must have a mayor where a mayor obtains, and a deputy mayor or a chairman and a vice chairman, but the Minister, in presenting this Bill, made no provisions—unless that is the Government's intention, to do away with the office of deputy mayor or the office of vice chairman, which they cannot do so easily as well. I do not understand how this Minister could come with this. This would pose a serious problem because the Municipal Corporations Act provides for the deputy mayor, vice chairman to act for the mayor and chairman when he or she is absent or ill—section 21(1) of the Act. So how is it, the Minister has come to us for approval to pass the legislation and leaves out the deputy mayor and vice chairman when the Act is very specific of their existence? I cannot understand why there are so many errors in a simple Bill. He spoke for so long and said very little.

Moreover, in the event of death, resignation, removal or disqualification of a mayor or chairman for any cause, the deputy mayor/vice chairman shall forthwith succeed to the office of mayor/chairman. And we have seen this. This, again, is under section 21(4) of the Act. It is therefore, very important to have the office of deputy mayor/vice chairman filled. Again, we cannot lend support to this because you are making a fundamental shift. I want to suggest the following change:

“Notwithstanding the provision of any written law relating to the term of office of Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors, the term of office of Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors holding office on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2006, is hereby extended for a period of one year.”

**Mr. Valley:** You sure Kamla wants that?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I speak with the authority of the official Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago on matters of local government. The amendment proposed above is based on precedent. In 1990 the life of the councils was extended by using the above formula. That is in section 273(1) of the same Act. You see, I made the point that there was precedent. It happened before, so, when you come today to indicate differently—

The Bill brought by the hon. Minister is flawed in many areas. The Minister said so many things in moving this Bill; 95 per cent not related, no bearing, but

while it does not require a response—there were a lot of irrelevancies— I think it is important to refer to when the hon. Prime Minister made an attempt on Friday, May 26, 2006, when he indicated to us on that day—he spoke about the Green Paper—that the intention was to make local government more useful to the national community. He also indicated—because the question was raised; I recall my getting up and asking “would the extension be for all office holders” and the reply of the hon. Prime Minister was, yes.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You got up and asked that?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Yes. In fact, the hon. Prime Minister clearly indicated, and I quote:

“The Government, therefore, proposes to bring legislation to Parliament to extend the present term of local government bodies for a period of one year.”

The Prime Minister did not indicate on that day that it would be for the election of new mayors, chairmen, et cetera. So, we have to be guided by what the hon. Prime Minister said on that day. He also made reference to Act 13 of 2003. This took place right here. What it said in section 273, which I referred to a minute ago:

“By inserting after subsection (1A) the following subsections:

Subject to subsection (1C) the Councillors and Aldermen of each Corporation whose term of office expired on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2002 are deemed to have become an Advisory Committee of that Corporation, from the 13<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2002...”

So, there is precedent. It was done in the past and the aldermen and chairmen continued in office—this was passed right here—on the same terms and conditions of service that they enjoyed as councillors and aldermen, except that each advisory council shall cease to exist upon the election of councillors and the appointment of aldermen. This is after an election. So, there is precedent, so, one has to be guided by what obtained in the past and we have to agree whether that was useful then, and it certainly was. The Members opposite supported it then.

“The person who held the office of Deputy Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2002 is deemed to have assumed the office of the Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation...”

And this is the provision for the existence of deputy mayors and vice chairmen, and we had this situation in San Juan/Laventille. I think it was on the election of

our former Minister, Anthony Roberts. The Government has made so many silly mistakes in a simple piece of legislation and I do not know why we need to go over this so long.

Let us revisit what has happened. Sometime ago the Prime Minister came to the Parliament and indicated that the life of the councils needs to be extended because elections are due in a few days. So, we agreed in principle. The question was asked of the hon. Prime Minister: "Will this mean the life of all members?" And his answer was, "yes", because we referred to what obtained in the past with the advisory council. These were the words of the Prime Minister. It is a pity you all do not listen to your Prime Minister. So, you have come today and you have changed everything. We are saying we are not prepared to lend support. This is an act of deception; this is a disservice to the national community and I want to revisit simply by saying that we are prepared to lend support if you are prepared to make that change to agree to the amendment which I propose, which is a very simple one and it will make us all happy and it would serve all. And any mayor who wishes to resign for one reason or the other, all he has to do is to tender his resignation and either the deputy mayor can go in or a new person. The proposed amendment reads:

"Notwithstanding the provisions of any written law relating to the term of office of Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors, the term of office of Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors holding office on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2006 is hereby extended for a period of one year."

If I was on the other side I would have said: I so move.

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

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, the legislation before this honourable House is extremely simple. It says very clearly that what is being sought is an extension of the term of office of the councillors for a period of 12 months. Now, to deal with the Member for Fyzabad, one had different options with respect to the delay in elections for the local government system. One could have, as has been done in the past, allowed the period to run out and then put in place advisory councils, which is what has been done in the past. When the Prime Minister came to the House, when we brought the Draft White Paper, that option was put forward. There was opposition to that and it was clear that the Government's intention was to extend the life, in some sort, of the council.

In doing that, one had the option of extending the life of everyone: the mayor, aldermen and so on; in other words, the elected as well as the nominated persons. The Government considered this and came to the view that our democracy required the extension of the life of only the elected members—[*Crosstalk*] allowing the councils, as they do at the start of any local government body, to elect aldermen and the mayor. [*Crosstalk*] This is what we would do—the PNM. If we want to keep the same aldermen and the same mayors, we are going to keep them. If not, we are going to change. They are elected representatives of the people; persons who face the electorate. They were voted for, and we are saying because we have the reform agenda in front of us, we do not think it is wise to have elections at this time; we will therefore, extend the term of their office, leaving—

**Mr. Ramnath:** You are repeating what the Minister said. You are not adding any value. He said all of that.

**Hon. K. Valley:** I am answering the point made by the Member for Fyzabad, because he is arguing that section 10(2) talks about the council shall consist of the mayor, aldermen and councillors. That is correct. But he should look also at section 11(4) which says that the term of office of councillors shall be three years and they shall retire together, and so on.

**Mr. S. Panday:** “And so on”; retire together.

**Hon. K. Valley:** And we are extending the life of the councillors referred to under section 11(4) by one year. That is all that is happening. And one is free to reappoint the aldermen and the mayors. But if one sees what is happening, I am sure they know that their leader may want the option. If she did not have the option to remove Senators, consider the position the hon. Member would have been in today. So, we are giving her that option; we are giving the right—[*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** She did not ask you for it. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Valley:** I do not know why they are arguing. Why do you want us to tie her hands? If she is so inclined, she would put back every one of them. That is not my decision, is it? And I should not take it upon myself to make that decision on her behalf. So, I do not know what the argument is about. [*Crosstalk*]



**Mr. Speaker:** Please. [*Crosstalk*] Order! Again, on behalf of the Hansard reporter, please exercise some restraint. Everybody would have an opportunity to contribute to this debate; a full 75 minutes. Please, continue.

**Hon. K. Valley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Ramnath:** You want to interfere in our business?

**Hon. K. Valley:** I am not. That is what I am saying. I am not interfering. I am leaving it up to you; I am giving you your democratic right to leave them if you want, to change them if you wish; to change some and leave some; to bring “Shastri” in the Parliament to sleep, or what have you. It is not my business!

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you cannot refer to a Member of the other place in such a way, please.

**Hon. K. Valley:** My apologies, Mr. Speaker. It is withdrawn. I really do not understand what the noise is about. Here they are given all the options and they are annoyed with us.

I think, given the trend taken by the Member for Fyzabad, it is clear that Members accept, that given there is a Draft White Paper on the table on local government reform, that it is unwise at this time to proceed with local government elections; that, in fact, we should pursue the reform agenda before having new councils. I think that is accepted because I know the Member did not deal with that aspect at all, while the Minister, in his opening, outlined clearly what the reform agenda was about.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you for giving way, hon. Minister. I am not speaking, just asking a question. Could I ask the Minister to indicate to us what is anticipated to happen in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation where, I think, there is a tie with elected officers but the incumbent office-holders there belong to the UNC? What do you anticipate would take place there?

**Hon. K. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, the councillors would have to determine that. That is the point I am trying to make. It is not for us in this democracy, that is Trinidad and Tobago, to tell people what to do. The councillors are there; they have been elected by the people. All we are saying is that: “Listen, we have this reform agenda and we are extending their term, but the people who were appointed, should have a say as to whether they should also come back.” So, you have that choice. If we had said clearly in this legislation that they had to remain, you would have been arguing differently. You can leave them if you wish; you

have that choice. If you want to remove them, you can remove them. You can eat your cake and have it—bottom line. Let me continue.

I am saying that, for me, this local government reform is extremely critical and it could not come sooner. I had the pleasure of serving in local government in the period 1992, I think, until 1993 or 1994—I cannot remember; I am getting old—but at that time we had started on this reform agenda, which was continued by my colleague, the Minister of Works and Transport and, perhaps, was put into hiatus, as it were, in the period 1995—2001, and restarted when we came back into office in 2002. It is in keeping with our policy document, Vision 2020, in which we stated quite clearly that as we engage the world, as we move to globalization, then our communities become even so much more important; that, as a fact, since what is around the corner is, perhaps, of just as much importance as what is around the world and one can obtain that knowledge in the same period of time; that as we move towards globalization, that we should also engage our communities, build sustainability and improve the decision-making capability of citizens at the community level, and that we should, in fact, be using our communities or the local government system—

**Mr. Ramnath:** You are trying to convince yourself. You do not believe that.

**Hon. K. Valley:** I have always believed this.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You have failed at the community level.

**Hon. K. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I would let the Member for Couva South know that our local government manifesto, since 1992, evidenced that concept communities in partnership. Every one of them emphasized the importance of communities in what we do. I can tell them if they come to my community in Diego Martin Central, in every area you would see either an operating village council or a community council or some resident association. I make the point that I do not know how they operate, but as a Member of Parliament, I find it so much more efficient working with a group, whether it is the resident association, village council or what have you, allowing them to set their priorities and then tackling their priorities, one by one, to satisfy their requirement. We have done that in Cocorite; we have done that in Ross Lands, throughout the constituency. This is a believer in communities, in the local government system operating at the base for the delivery of all types of community services. That is how it ought to be.

But there is something else that is extremely important as we move in this direction, as the Prime Minister stated quite clearly that, look, we are talking

about constitutional reform and this local government reform is, in fact, part of that overall constitutional reform, because what is envisaged here is a partnership between the central authorities and the local government bodies.

My colleague made the point, where the central government authority would maintain the policy-making role and allow for that decentralization—for implementation, in the main, at the local level, bearing in mind that different localities would want to implement that policy in different ways; in other words, that all our communities are not alike.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Does that apply to Tobago as well?

**Hon. K. Valley:** It is happening in Tobago.

**Dr. Khan:** Based on what you just said, could you clarify what policies the Tobago West and the Tobago East constituencies make at the central level that has an impact on the Tobago House of Assembly, as what is going to happen in this local government reform?

**Hon. K. Valley:** No. I am saying, you cannot ask Tobago East and Tobago West. They would be part of the decision-making as Ministers in the Government. They are part of the Executive.

**Dr. Khan:** But not in Cabinet.

**Hon. K. Valley:** They may not be in Cabinet but they are still part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] We are not debating the White Paper—I hear you—but I think this is an appropriate time to touch on the White Paper because, you see, the White Paper is still a Draft White Paper and we have an obligation to look at this White Paper and say—perhaps this is the only time some of us would be looking at it, really—do we really like everything that is here? This is the last opportunity we have to say whether we agree with what is written in the White Paper.

**Mr. Ramnath:** The last opportunity? What are you talking about?

**Hon. K. Valley:** But this is the Draft White Paper.

**Dr. Rafeeq:** It would come back.

**Hon. K. Valley:** Well, it would come back to the Parliament. But let us use this opportunity; let us start the debate in our communities and say: “Listen, let us look at this; let us make sure this is what we want as we move to have a reform system of local government in Trinidad and Tobago.” Given the manner in which

local government bodies are divided at present between the parties, one sees that the decentralization model is appropriate for Trinidad and Tobago.

From time to time we have heard about power-sharing and what is envisaged here is a level of power-sharing between the central authorities and the local authorities. So that the Diego Martin Regional Corporation would have a certain level of authority to do things in accordance with how the burgesses in Diego Martin want. Similarly, the burgesses in Penal/Debe would have a—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** It is borough; the borough of San Fernando; the borough of Arima.

**Hon. K. Valley:** Whatever; the citizens. I thought they were burgesses. If I am corrected, I am corrected. But the people of that region would be able to influence the decision-making of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation and so, have that region do things in accordance with their wishes. That is what this reform agenda hopes to do.

It talks also of a transition from full central government financing to financing at the local level.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You want to tax the people now. After all the high taxes you want to put more taxes. You have failed to provide the services, now you want to tax them.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. K. Valley:** Yes, and you ought to, because you ought to say what you want for the local government system. And when one shifts, because even if one is talking about—there is property tax at present, the person in Penal/Debe, the householder, has to pay rates and taxes. He pays it to some councillor or something at the Treasury and what we are saying is that that fund ought to go to the local government. So, it is a redirection of funds rather than new taxation we are talking about.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You could transfer that fund.

**Hon. K. Valley:** We do not want to do it. We want to give a nexus between the person in the municipal region and his council. He must know that he is paying it to them and that they are accountable to him. Right now it is so indirect—the nexus—that he pays his house rates to the Treasury and he does not see that he is really paying it for these people at the local level to provide a certain level of service to him, and that is what we want to do.

This is a crying need; it is overdue. I am saying that one expects to have the support of all Members for this legislation when it comes and this is the rationale for seeking an extension in the life of the councillors so that we can debate; we can pass this reform; we can have a new system of local government and then go to elections. Therefore, I ask all Members to support the legislation before us. [Desk thumping]

**3.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Manohar Ramsaran** (*Chaguanas*): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Minister and when I examined this in my own mind, I realized that the PNM demonstrates an attitude towards this democratic institution. When people talk about democracy, I am confused. Democracy is the voice of the people. I think that if one really believes in democracy, one would hold elections when they are due. The election is due on July 12 and that should be happening. They should not be coming to this Parliament and asking for an extension of one year. The argument that is being put forward is this White Paper. We have to wait on this White Paper to deal with the issue.

I go back to 1990. This is what the hon. Leader of the People's National Movement, Mr. Patrick Manning, said then. He said:

“We knew that local government elections would have been postponed. It was clear to us because of the attitude of the Government.”

—the National Alliance for Reconstruction government in 1990—

“It was very clear to us. When we looked at the situation, we could...”

see that this would have been done. The leader went on to say—and I would continue quoting because it is important to know that sometimes when people come to Parliament, they do not know what has happened before and they come back with the same nonsense time after time.

“PNM wants local government elections on time.”

shouted Patrick Manning.

“That is what it was entitled. I just want to put it into the record because there are people who will come in due course and search for records that they will see that the country today is being run by a government that says one thing and seeks to do another.”

They were talking about democracy, but they come back to this House and say we should wait on a White Paper while the electorate—maybe they want changes.

*Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MR. RAMSARAN]

*Wednesday, July 05, 2006*

They want to have the results of an election without having elections. They want to deal with sections 13 and 14 of the Act as if elections have been held and only the councillors were elected and you got rid of everybody else. Think about it!

What happened in the past is that the Parliament would appoint the mayors and chairmen to continue and everybody else as advisors and we had no problem. Maybe if they came to this Parliament and said they had problems—money was missing and so on—we would accept their argument; but there is no argument. They come now to change this willy-nilly.

The Member for Diego Martin Central spoke about democracy and communities. I was surprised to learn that local government is not enshrined in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. It is just willy-nilly, a simple vote in Parliament and you postpone elections. Maybe this is a test set by our predecessors to see who is really dictator enough to come here and postpone elections for one year—not three months; not one week. The same thing happened before and it was condemned by the then Leader of the Opposition.

“Political leader of the PNM met yesterday with the party’s central executive at Balisier House and brought the party up to date on the latest, as it relates to the local government elections. As a consequence, the central executive agreed to express the PNM’s concern over the determination of the Government to implement a new system of local government prior to local government elections.”

**Mr. S. Panday:** What year is that?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** 1990.

“The PNM reaffirmed its stand that the local government elections should be held on the basis of existing arrangements and that by the due date of September this year. As a result the PNM and the central executive agreed to accelerate the speed at which candidates are being screened with a view to completing the screening exercise in the shortest possible time.”

Mr. Speaker, the Parliament of this country has gone that route. Maybe they did not research their work properly. I want, when they say something in opposition, that they remember what they said. They must now face what is before them with the reality it deserves.

**Hon. Dumas:** I am asking who will screen it. You?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Before I go further, I would like the Government to withdraw this Bill. I would like to see the continuation of councils and if they have any reasons to dissolve them, let us know. Do not say that you will give the Leader of the Opposition or the Leader of the PNM an opportunity to change whom they want to change. We want to see democracy, not only deemed to be practised, but practised. Tell us if you have problems with your chairmen, mayors or aldermen and we would, maybe, support you. But when you come here with a hidden agenda to deal with the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, I am very worried.

Nothing is compelling, as far as I am concerned, to remove the aldermen and chairmen of councils. Nothing in my mind could be causing that. I think something is wrong here and if you want to remove your mayors and chairmen, do that.

The Member for Diego Martin Central accused the Leader of the Opposition of wanting the opportunity to remove people she does not like. [*Crosstalk*] This Parliament must not be used by parties, Opposition or Government, to deal with their personal agendas. They have a problem, deal with it! Do not use the people's Parliament, the highest court in the land, to deal with our petty squabbles. They want to deal with it, deal with it as a man. Do not hide behind the cover of Parliament.

When the Minister talks about this White Papers and what will happen, and that we must postpone elections for one year, it is not, in my mind, really important to our development. Call the elections as they are due. This is a democracy that we live in, love, and want to keep for our family. Maybe, we want to change candidates and councillors. How could they determine they want to keep the councillors and fire the aldermen and mayors? That is nonsense! If you are keeping one, keep all.

If you go to Act No. 21 of 1990 and you want to remove your mayor, there is provision here. I want to remind the Minister—maybe he does not read this too often:

“The Mayor shall hold office for a term of one year but, subject to subsection (3), shall be eligible for re-election.”

There is a provision in our Act to deal with the removal of a mayor:

“A Mayor shall be removed as Chairman of a Council upon the resolution passed by the Council and supported by the votes of not less than three-fourths of all members of the Council.”

*Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MR. RAMSARAN]

*Wednesday, July 05, 2006*

If they have internal problems and they want to remove a mayor, it is provided for here. They should not come here and decide they want to deal with this *carte blanche*. We must not allow that.

I have not yet fully read the White Paper, but is there a provision in that that local government should be enshrined in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, so that no future government can come here and deal with local government as they see fit?

The Member for Diego Martin Central talked about communities. When you look at this country and what the PNM has done over time—it has eroded local government. Local government now has no resources to deal with the problems at hand. Everything is centralized. Even in the Minister's office, he now controls the major projects that take place in our communities. He has the bulk of the money in the Ministry of Local Government and in the corporations they are running on a minimal budget. Year after year it is the same problem for all of us as Members of Parliament. You have to write the Minister directly to get things done and they are talking about community development and local government.

Mr. Speaker, they are talking about this, let them go back to their White Paper and enshrine local government in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. I make that call so that nobody would believe that local government belongs to them and decide that they want to fire a mayor; that they want to gain a corporation in Mayaro. Maybe that is their intention; I do not know. General election may be around the corner, so, they want to strengthen their hand in Mayaro, so, they draw lots, fire the chairman and control Mayaro. Suddenly money will be available for the development of Mayaro. Cheap politics! I warn the Government! Please, let us deal with the country in such a way as to ensure our future.

Prime Minister Manning was prophetic. When he read his speech in 1990, he said that people later on would do research and understand what the PNM stood for. Call elections when they are due! They cannot postpone elections for one year. I am sure the political animals would know that if you appoint someone for three years—maybe that is a position you believe he can hold for three years—but in three years, in looking at his performance, you may want to replace or re-elect him. They say they are giving the party a choice, but there is no choice. We will be saddled with these people for another year, whether they are performers or non-performers.



In all cases, the people nominated as aldermen are loyal to the party. You put that person there knowing you could remove him or her easily. Maybe, they have to remove someone and they want to use this. Tell us, when you are winding up, whom you want to remove and maybe we will support.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, I would like to call on this Government, please, to remove these two clauses. Maybe, in their minds they have already postponed elections. Okay! But I believe it is unfair and unjust to the people who have been working for their parties and for their communities to be removed because their leader does not like them.

**Hon. Dumas:** Who suggested that?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I do not know. [*Interruption*] It was suggested by the Member for Diego Martin Central.

**Hon. Dumas:** The councillors.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** No. Okay, but it does not make sense to me. Maybe when you are winding up, you will tell us.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Bill—and I want to stick to the Bill because I believe that, according to the Member for Fyzabad, for such a short Bill with two clauses, it is dangerous. They come like a thief in the night. Clause 2:

“The Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 is amended in section 273...”

They do not say the number of the Act. We are parliamentarians. We want to research, tell us it is Act 21 of 1990. You will have people looking through all the Acts of 1990, if they are not familiar with the Acts, to find that particular Act. If you are doing the work and want to get it right, you have to read all the Acts from 1990. This is the style of this Government—underhand. They do everything in a way to mislead people. [*Interruption*] We know all that, but we are doing a bill. What is wrong with putting the number of the Act, which we normally do?

I see something sinister in this. This is not as simple as it appears. If they do not want this sinister behaviour to continue, I ask them please to remove subclause 2(b) immediately and let us allow every member of every council in Trinidad to continue the work for one year.

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I draw to the attention of the Member for Chaguanas, if he reads the title of the Bill and the explanations at the side, he would see all the information he says he is seeking.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I am so glad that you see that. Why do you not see the bigger picture? The bigger picture is that we must not interfere with the parliamentary

work done before. If this was the intention, it should have been put into the Act, but nobody would expect a responsible government—you do not care about local government; I am convinced about that. Look at it and see the scenario. Things that local government is supposed to do are now being done by every sector of the Government—Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA), the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). As a matter of fact, CEPEP spends more money in Trinidad and Tobago than local government. We give importance to local government by lip service.

We have election for a mayor, according to Mr. Atherly, a ceremonial idiot, running a corporation with no money to spend. Yet we have, on the side, CEPEP and so on, dealing with money. The Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) gets more money than local government. If they are serious about local government, let them get up and say so. As the Member for Diego Martin Central said, let us give our communities that power. Let us allow them to build their communities so that we can build Trinidad and Tobago. Do not hold a big stick.

The Minister is in charge of IRID and other expenses. I always say it is “I raid”. You sit in central government and you want to raid an electoral district in Chaguanas, you work with “I raid”, raid the electoral district, give it all the services and goods. It is happening with us. Self-help is doing the same thing. Self-help is an important community development tool.

When I was Minister, I met with the Governor of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and I was told that it must not be politicized. Now what is happening in self-help is that it is so politicized that I understand that the IDB has pulled its funding. If that is not true, get up and say it.

**Hon. Member:** It is not true!

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Unless we find out these things, we are not told. Why was funding by IDB taken from self-help?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Will the Member give way? [*Assent indicated*]

Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The IDB was never funding self-help. It is funded by the Government. The project I assume he is talking about is CDF-funded and that fund came to an end. It was the end of the programme. He is misleading the Parliament.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, the CDF funded self-help because its chairman and members were responsible for administering that project. Would it

not have been prudent to come to Parliament and say that because of "X, Y, and Z", the IDB has pulled its CDF funding?

**Mr. Imbert:** They did not pull it!

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Well it ended. If you are dealing with communities, Mr. Speaker, and there are people depending on this type of funding to build communities, it is missing; you have to find the hardware. What are we hiding?

I continue the point that local government bodies are being eroded by this Government. They only come here and give lip service. They appoint mayors, aldermen, councillors—big elections and ceremonial openings of corporations; people wearing big chains—but when they dip into their resources, there is nothing.

I want them to tell us, that is why my common call in this little speech I am making is let us enshrine local government into the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, so that they would be dealt with properly. As far as I am concerned, the Ministry of Finance is guided by the Constitution in funding the budget of Trinidad and Tobago and local government must be given funding.

In preparing for this debate, I went through the 2006 debate presentation by the hon. Prime Minister and there was not a single line from the Ministry of Local Government. I read it twice to make sure that I was not making a mistake. Local government, which is so important in the development of a country, was left out by the Prime Minister in his budget debate. Did the Minister not give him some information to put into the budget or does the Prime Minister not care?

When I talk about local government, it bothers us. This morning, somebody called me to say that the rainy season is upon us and there is a drain that, if not cleaned within the next two or three days, would cause flooding. If you call local government, it has no funding. Maybe, that drain was not on the programme. *[Interruption]* There is no money, I said that; no resources, yet we give lip service. We deliver because we care. I think that it is really a whole disgrace in Trinidad and Tobago.

I came here this evening expecting that some good sense would prevail. I believe it is not fair to everybody out there; not only the elected members—the aldermen, the chairmen and mayors—but the people who elected them. Maybe, there is a programme of works because when they heard about the extension and that there would be no election, maybe the mayors and chairmen would have had something to do and maybe they would have stayed an extra year and tried to do something—get some funding somewhere. Now they are going to stop that in

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midstream. Could any mayor or chairman plan and deal with works for one year? This is impossible!

I believe we have a Bill that is flawed. I prepared much more to say about the whole question of agencies competing with the local government, which is eroding our local government system. If we are serious about local government, bring the White Paper quickly, let us deal with it. In the meantime, we should not allow excuses to be made, using the White Paper to come up with this flawed Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I call on you to let us get together and deal with this. As the Member for Diego Martin Central says, let us not allow political parties to use these amendments to deal with certain Members. This is bigger than that. Let us get together; let us say that this is flawed. It has never happened before, if it is going to happen now, let us get the reasons for it and understand it. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, the Member talked about decentralization. I have been hearing this for as long as I can remember. Could the Minister tell us what has been decentralized since he came into office? I know things were centralized. I know that decisions to pave roads in a constituency would now come from the Minister's office because of the fact—[*Interruption*] Exactly! More power! He cannot deal with anything in a constituency and this is causing problems in our country.

I will give an example. There is a councillor in the Penal/Debe corporation, who won on a PNM ticket. There is equity or equality. The corporation deals, as far as I know—and I believe that they divide the resources amongst all the councillors for their particular district.

Mr. Speaker, in that district, the PNM, under their Ministers, has given that person much more help to deal with his electoral district than he has now. He would spend 10 times, more and much more than that, than the other councillors in his district. Is that not against natural justice in this country? It is unfair. He would pick up the phone and call any Minister. I heard with my very own ears that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs has done several projects in that electoral district and they boast about it, whereas the larger area of Penal/Debe is neglected.

Is this the democracy that we talk about? Is this the equality that we talk about? The whole question of PNM funding must stop if we want to be serious about local government, each corporation must be given what is necessary for the

development of our country and not only by the political directorate. It is confusing; it is worrying and with the money that is being spent in this country, I still hear—my friend, the Member for Couva South, said it recently—that the whole corporation will squabble for \$250,000 to deal with a whole lot of things. *[Interruption]* In the Couva corporation. *[Interruption]* Couva South. He is my friend. I might have different views but people in this country and my colleagues, are my friends until they say they are not my friends. So, they are my friends.

Mr. Speaker, I want you to understand that it is a big waste of time. You have to understand that we have to deal fairly with our people. I listened to a friend from Tobago recently talking about what is happening there. The whole question of local government, whether it is the THA or our councils must be dealt with seriously.

We do not have to reinvent the wheel. There have been many studies done in this country to deal with local government. We come here as if the Minister is now reinventing the wheel. Every Minister will do that, the Minister of Local Government especially—go in there and change everything. Nothing has happened.

I want to tell you, as MP for Chaguanas, that if I did not deal directly with the Ministers, especially the Minister of Works and Transport, nothing would happen—no road, no pavement, no nothing. If we deal through the council, nothing would happen. *[Interruption]* It is not the mayor. You might want to use your tongue to say that it is because of certain things; it is not that. It is because of moneys available to our local corporation; nothing is happening. We drive through the constituency and no road is paved, so, nobody can say they took it and spent it in a particular area. Nothing is happening.

Mr. Speaker, I seriously ask, once more, that the Government use its good sense and withdraw this Bill. If they are magnanimous, they will do as we say. I will leave this Chamber this evening believing this was done with some very selfish and ulterior motive to undermine some people within your organization. I could bet—you know I like to bet in this Parliament; I would wager anything—that when this is passed, I would see the firing of chairmen of the PNM in our regional corporations. Maybe this is the tool to deal with that.

This is very sinister. If they want to create a country that we want, there must be equality and fairness. If they want to show that they really care, they will withdraw this Bill.

I thank you.

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine):** Mr. Speaker, having been a local government representative for eight years and a Minister of Local Government, I think it is a privilege to stand here this afternoon to correct some of the misconceptions or perceptions they on the other side have.

Firstly, I would like to say that under section 15(2) of the existing Act, the mayors and aldermen remain in office until their successors are elected. I am certain that there will be some minor amendments, so that we will make those to ensure that they also occur in this Bill. That was a matter that was raised before today.

My Act states that the “mayors”, include chairmen and “deputy mayors”, include vice-chairmen, according to Act No. 21 of 1990. That is in the definition. Although you were an alderman at one time, you were never elected at local government, so that you were not on the transition team of 1990. *[Interruption]* You are a nonentity as far as that is concerned. *[Crosstalk]*

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

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** What is your point of order?

**Dr. Nanan:** 36(7).

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** What is it?

**Hon. Member:** Look in the book!

**Mr. Speaker:** There is learning in *Hansard* that says if you raise a frivolous point, that itself is unparliamentary. Please continue.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I have to say today, they would not like to hear, so, you will find much more of that coming across.

The other part is that “mayors” mean “chairmen” and “deputy mayors” mean “vice-chairmen”. We will make another minor amendment, I am certain, to ensure that deputy mayors are covered by this Bill. *[Interruption]* The Leader of the Opposition raised this and it occurred to me that there was reason for doing this and we will do that.

**3.30 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, we should amend these Bills. Last night I heard the Leader of the Opposition screaming and saying that the Government is seeking to take over the UNC-controlled councils. May I remind this House that I was a local government

representative, was elected into office on August 08, 1983 and served two four-year terms. I was there when local government election was postponed after a three-year period from 1983—1986. In 1986, the alliance, which then became the NAR, fought the election and won 33/3.

I would like to recall that in 1983, when I was elected to the St. George East County Council, there was no singular party involved in that council; there were four parties, ONR, ULF, DAC and Tapia. The four parties got together in an alliance and won six out of the 11 seats in St. George East County in 1983. The PNM won five seats because they had an alliance and the councillors then were from Tapia, DAC, ULF and ONR. I was certainly in opposition for the eight years that I served in local government. At that time, two aldermen were elected. Therefore, the alliance had eight persons and we had five persons.

I would like to recall what happened in 1988. The Member for St. Augustine remained, others dropped out and some played defence. If you recall, there was Club 88 in 1988. In the Club 88 arrangement, three members of the NAR's Club 88, with their alliance, became independent of the situation in Tunapuna/Piarco. At that time we were approached, since we had five members, for Councillors Hardial, Chaeboo and Rampersad to join with us and we would have a majority. It was suggested, at that time, that your humble servant would be the chairman and we would share the positions. PNM never fought for power at any time. PNM does not intend to fight for power at this time. As a matter of fact, the UNC is very fortunate that election was not called. I was the Minister of Local Government for the last election. We won nine corporations and the UNC won five. Of the five, they won only four and there was a lotto system for Mayaro/Rio Claro. You would understand that with their present situation today, if the PNM should call an election—we won 83 seats of 126 at that time and the UNC won 43—at this point in time they may not even get three seats. *[Interruption]* You have no councillors. Sangre Grande has no councillors for you. Even in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, Councillors Ottley, Matthews and others are there. You are just standing, mumbling and grumbling. Mr. Dhansook can vote for you and we would still win.

They are very fortunate that an election was not called because we have to do reform. The PNM is well prepared. We have worked throughout the entire country and I am certain that the people were waiting for us to call the local government election so that other councils could get this support.

Mr. Speaker, when that occurred, we in the PNM decided, when we were called to caucus—a disciplined organization with councillors who are disciplined.

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We had no aldermen at that time and we were told to take over the corporation and no, it would not be fair, we have not won an election and we are not fighting for power. That is when we voted for Mr. Rampersad to be Chairman of the St. George East County Council. We are fortunate today to have the person who was thrown out sitting in the gallery. I would not call names.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, it is not permitted to refer to anybody sitting in the public gallery. Please continue.

**Hon. J. Narine:** I have not referred to anybody. There are so many persons there.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, you said so many persons sitting in the public gallery. You did not call the name but you cannot refer to anybody sitting in the public gallery, whether by name or otherwise. Please continue.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At that time, the Member for Couva North indicated to his councillors that they were prepared to take two positions on the committees and that we would have the rest. We decided, never; we would not do that. We gave Mr. Rampersad the post of chairman of the corporation. Mr. Harry Goordial became Vice-Chairman; we voted for him. All the committees went to the alliance. Some went to the NAR at the time and some went to Club 88 at the time. Councillor Hardial was in charge of infrastructure. He belonged to Club 88. Councillor O'Neil, who was a member of the NAR, was on one of the committees. They all got positions; we did not want any. To say that the PNM is fighting power, we never fought for power when we did not win a clear-cut majority. PNM is a party that will win elections. *[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Is the hon. Member saying that he is going to do the same in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation; you will follow your previous precedent; they would allow the persons who are in charge of the corporation, which is the UNC, to remain there? *[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is not what he said.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** That is what he is saying.

**Hon. J. Narine:** No, when that time comes we would make a decision. We have a legislative group which meets every month, which you do not have. All our councillors and aldermen—*[Interruption]* You have that and you do not invite the Member for St. Augustine? I did not know that. What I do know is that every third Wednesday you can come to Balisier House and you can meet all the



councillors, Members of Parliament and Ministers. If you wish, you can go to Balisier House and check the records.

Mr. Speaker, we are not interested in power-sharing because we did not share power at that time in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation; neither did we try to take over by a coup d'état as was said by Alderman Israel Khan. At the time he said that the corporation was taken over by a coup d'état. [*Interruption*] Israel Khan said that and I am repeating what he said. Because we are democratic and we are trying to treat with dignity, persons who have won elections, as against persons who have been nominated—my Act says that after three years you need to re-elect mayors, chairmen and councillors; the councillors who would be given the privilege for one year and the aldermen would be re-elected. I am not seeing anything with that. There may be many more coup d'états on that side with their five corporations. I do not know what will happen. I have been hearing that for a long time now they wanted to move the Chairman of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. You now have an opportunity to do that. Your councillors said that. You would have an opportunity to do that. If you want to move them, that is not our business. Our business is that we are going to sit and determine, as a political organization, whether—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** You are a failed Minister.

**Hon. J. Narine:** You were Minister for one day. You have been a failure for all of your life. What are you talking about?

**Mr. Ramnath:** Monumental failure!

**Mr. Speaker:** Take your seat, please. Hon. Member for Couva South, I think you are about to leave, I see that you are packing your bags. I am waiting to hear you. Please, Member for Princes Town, you have been interrupting the Parliament. Please, continue Minister.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I am sure you are enjoying it.

**Hon. J. Narine:** It is normal; I have no problem with that, even with his Members. We did not take any control at that time because we are a solid political organization. We have a Constitution, which we follow and we deal with our Constitution as a democracy. We have no cabal, black, red, or green caucuses. We sit with our councils, whether it is the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, Diego Martin Regional Corporation or the Port of Spain City Corporation and we deal with matters of state fairly. I think that should be placed to rest.

The UNC-controlled corporations are free to nominate the same aldermen and subsequently the mayors and chairmen. We are not getting into their business. They are free to do that. They have 43 elected councillors from the last election and we have 86. We have nine corporations, they have five and may soon have four, I do not know. There are many other corporations.

As a matter of fact, they made an accommodation with a political organization for the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. The chairman and vice-chairman did not belong to their organization but they tried to pull them in. I do not know; I am hearing that this would no longer happen.

The Member for Chaguanas ranted and raved because the Mayor of Chaguanas is in support of the Member for St. Augustine; I do not know. If there are divisions and they have gone back to NAR and Club 88, that is not our business; that is your business. If you are seeing problems, wait until that time comes and solve them. Do not leave and run, solve your problems when that time comes.

The stepping stone for politicians in Trinidad and Tobago has always been: if you get good training at the local government level, you would become a Member of Parliament. On the PNM's Benches, we have approximately eight Members of Parliament who have been involved in local government before. That is a lot. We use that seriously and the reform of local government will now have managers who can be promoted into Parliament. I am one of those. The others are as follows: my colleague, Ms. Beckles, the Member for Arima; Ministers Roberts and Rahael and Mr. Achong; my colleague, from Tobago West belonged to the THA, and my colleague from Laventille West. We have a lot and we continue to have persons from local government, who would certainly be nominated for any election we have at the general election level. At this point in time, out of the 14 seats, we are not asking people to apply to go up for elections for us. We have people from which to choose. We do not have to take persons from the general public for screening in our party. We simply have to go through our Constitution and do it legally to select Members of Parliament.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Anybody in Trinidad and Tobago can join them.

**Hon. J. Narine:** My neighbour, a vagrant said that he applied to go up for elections in D'Abadie/Omeara for the UNC. [*Interruption*] It is open in the newspapers. If you see somebody from Samaroo Village applying to go up for elections in that area, since they may not have any candidates, they may have to

take him. *[Interruption]* When I say my neighbour I mean neighbouring village. I live at Samaroo Village.

You would recall that there was a lone UNC councillor in the Arima Borough Corporation at one time. He was our member. He said he could not go up for the PNM because the screening process was too tough and he got a chance with the UNC. He was popular enough and won the election but lasted only one term.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Like Birchall.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Birchall did very well. You are really in the black caucus of the UNC. You know nothing about football. All of a sudden everybody in Trinidad and Tobago knows about football. He knows about Birchall now, but he does not know how to elect an alderman. I do not have anything about Birchall. Birchall is probably spending holidays with his brother in London. I do not know.

**Mr. S. Panday:** “You is ah man who does mine yuh own business!”

**Hon. J. Narine:** That is what is happening.

At a subsequent press conference, the Member for Siparia reported that the postponement was intended to give the Government an advantage by empowering the Minister of Local Government in personally managing the municipal corporations and allowing the Government to use the State's resources.

I recall when we moved over in 1990, the Member for Chaguanas did not give the other side what he quoted. In 1990, we had a transition team. I was a councillor in the St. George East County Council at the time and it was intended that Tunapuna/Piarco would be the new electoral area. Mr. Winston Suite was appointed by the NAR as chairman of the transition team. There were no mayors and chairmen. We kept meetings once per month. The public service ran the corporation for that period, because we were not advisors; we were on a committee seeking the transition from county councils to regional corporations. That happened in 1990.

I also recall that during the tenure of Minister Dhanraj, the election was put off. The Minister ran all the corporations for an entire year. What happened at that time? All the PNM-controlled corporations, seven of them, did not get one single cent for infrastructure development. *[Interruption]* No, no, he ran it when he was outside, not inside. Eventually, he went inside. I will come to that with the Sumairsingh problems we had at that time. It is not the first time and it is not power when a Minister ran the corporation for an entire year. The public servants had to bring every month—It was a tedious exercise, because I did it too. For one

reason or another it happened. We had to sign their programme of works every month. We had to go through the programme of works for 14 corporations, make sure that the funding was available and that they did not hide anything inside there to do any illegal activities in the corporations. It is a difficult thing. I did it for a year. This is not what we are about to do at this time. The mayors and chairmen would be in place. There would be no lapse. They would be in transit; as soon as they elect the aldermen, mayors, chairmen, and the various committee chairmen would be elected.

We have always had by-elections for local government. At one time we had one in La Romain and New Grant. We fought those by-elections in Mr. Sumairsingh's case and we lost, but we fought the elections as a national, political organization. We never back down from elections and we are not going to back down from elections. I think that sufficient reason—I need to compliment the Minister of Local Government and the Leader of Government Business in this House for the explanations given.

When we were advisors for the transition, we did a lot of work looking at the boundaries in Trinidad and Tobago. At that time, we decided that 18 regional corporations were too many for a small country like Trinidad and Tobago, so it came down to 14. The Member for Diego Martin Central was the Minister at the time, when we did the amendments to bring down the corporation to an acceptable size. It is unfortunate that no matter how you look at the map and the boundaries, for example Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo is wide and there are spaces in between Brazil/San Rafael/Talparo, which is very close to Arima, has their head office in Couva. It is really unfair to persons who want to go to their head office to address a situation that they need to address. I welcome having a team of persons during this year to look at the various boundaries because there is a situation such as Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, from Blanchisseuse on the north, to Munroe Road on the south, to Hutton Street, St. Joseph, on the west, right up to Valencia in the east.

**Mr. S. Panday:** You agree that the EBC is a failure?

**Hon. J. Narine:** Not the Elections and Boundaries Commission. There was a committee that sat, at that time when you were involved in local government, and recommended those boundaries. When you were involved in the transition team, I am certain, you looked and it was recommended to the Elections and Boundaries Commission. While it was recommended to the EBC, we came and because of Act 21 of 1990, there were amendments to certain parts of the Act. We brought them down from 18 to 14 and we are comfortable with that. We can now sit and look at

developed areas in Trinidad and Tobago because a number of years have passed and there are many communities in Trinidad and Tobago that have expanded.

As a matter of fact, when I started in local government, Laventille Regional Corporation was the highest populated area in local government. Because of certain reasons, which I would not repeat today and because of elections, Tunapuna/Piarco became the highest with 126,000 electors, whereas Laventille is still at 93,000. The Elections and Boundaries Commission can do its job but the Minister of Local Government would have to have a team of persons looking at these boundaries with respect to where we should divide and where we should put certain areas into it.

The reform of local government will certainly take place and the recommendations of these committees will then go to the Elections and Boundaries Commission for its approval. As a matter of fact, we would not have anything to do with it. The Elections and Boundaries Commission has already decided that in the local government process of elections to come, there will be additional seats from the 126, I think it is six more areas, and areas that are highly populated would get additional seats. For example, Tunapuna/Piarco will have additional seats with what they have at the present time. There will be new electoral areas and boundaries. The Elections and Boundaries Commission determined that in the last Elections and Boundaries Commission's report to this Parliament.

In forming the Elections and Boundaries Commission, we need to put things in place for people who know Trinidad and Tobago; to know the various cultures within these areas. The Sangre Grande Regional Corporation may well be the next borough. It was at that time we decided that Chaguanas area—which was Caroni County Council at the time, was going beyond and bursting at its—become a borough. There are other areas in Trinidad where we would have to look to ensure that some of them can become boroughs. My colleague from Tunapuna has always been asking for Tunapuna/Piarco to become a borough within the corporation of Tunapuna/Piarco. We are looking at the population growth and the amenities that have been placed in that area and maybe, Tunapuna/Piarco or Sangre Grande may be the next borough after having made Chaguanas a borough.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is also presenting a time frame of one year within which it expects to deliver on the local government reform agenda.

As you have heard, in 1965 there was the Sinanan Committee. We also had the Hugh Wooding Committee, and the Harera Committee for local government reform. As a matter of fact, we probably had more than 15 or 16 reports over the

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last 50 years. This has happened because this is a need to reform local government. We have recognized that throughout the years.

In 2003, as Minister of Local Government we had a draft policy paper on local government and we asked TTCAN to do some work and this is the report that was presented to me as the Minister of Local Government at the time. At that time, approximately 423 persons attended the two-day programme at Macoya. There were persons from the CBOs and NGOs from all over the country and this was the result. These are the same recommendations we are seeing today. There are recommendations in this new document for the reform of local government; the Draft White Paper. We are allowing the nation to look at these and see where we have faltered. There will be mistakes in these documents, but we can correct them before they become law. They can be corrected within a year. Much work has been taking place before now.

Mr. Speaker, in 1990 the NAR government made an attempt at local government reform. We will agree that the initiative fell very short of its mark. *[Interruption]* Sorry, Mr. Speaker, he is normally like that. He is missing a screw or something. This Government is also presenting a time frame of one year within which this should be done. The local government reform agenda has been on the table for decades. In 1990, the NAR tried and it did not take place. We have started this reform again. It is passing strange that during their tenure in office, they never made an attempt at reform in local government. *[Interruption]* Are you NAR, UNC, ULF or PDP?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Why not mind your own business?

**Hon. J. Narine:** I am asking who did that. They keep jumping ship every week. Every week they are in a different party. *[Interruption]* He was a DAP too.

Mr. Speaker, our current initiative of reform is serious and we are going to do the work within the year, and we are certainly going to have local government elections in that year. With the speed that this government is doing infrastructure works and other things, by that time, they may not control any corporation. The people in Central are saying, as they are saying to the Member for St. Augustine when he goes all over the country, that they do not like the division. What will happen? We do not want complacency; we are working hard and we will win any election. The PNM is a well oiled machinery to win any election. We have given you an opportunity to save yourself. You are doing house cleaning. This is an opportunity to continue your house cleaning. Some of you are sitting here and you already have persons working in your constituencies as candidates who have

applied through the newspaper advertisement to replace you for the next general election. You have no problem. Your name, you will know; whether it is Nariva or Tabaquite. He is not, because his father bought that seat for him. Do not worry about that. They could not move him. They could not move “paradigm”. His seat was paid for.

**Mr. S. Panday:** But we would move “breakfastes”!

**Hon. J. Narine:** Do you understand? “Take care you eh go back for any elections”.

After 24 years in elected politics and having won seven elections I am certain that because of my performance I am still here. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Couva South never stays in Parliament any Friday for the full period. Nobody could discipline him; he disciplines himself. That is the type of organization you belong to. I would not belong to that type of organization. If I have to miss any appointments I must call before. He does not care about whosoever would be your leader. He was a Minister for one week. If he was really good he would not be an emergency relief man down in the oil industry; looking at emergencies and who should wear helmets, goggles or gloves. He is not that bright and we know that.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I hope when you get back your blows you would take them.

**Hon. J. Narine:** You could say what you want after. You are accustomed telling untruths in this Parliament, it does not matter. I am just—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, you cannot accuse a Member like that. I am sure you did not mean it. Continue.

**Miss Beckles:** He did not mean it.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for your guidance. In the last budget—I would try to draw one example—the Member of Parliament for Princes Town said that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources got \$16 million for infrastructure and asked if I can show him where the rest of money went, because I said we had \$38 million, he would apologize to me. I am certain in the next budget he would have to apologize because we have already spent the \$38 million for agricultural access roads.

**Mr. S. Panday:** You cannot understand English language.

**Hon. J. Narine:** It is simple; I will bring the *Hansard* and we would see who is telling untruth and who is not. He could not read a document to see where the next \$21 million was. I told him about it. He was a Member of Parliament once and he was fired for five years and then brought back. He is not worth his salt, but

they have him there. *[Interruption]* That is public business; they fire you when they want and bring you back when they want. This time “yuh gone again”.

Mr. Speaker, I know exactly what I am talking about because I was a Member of Parliament and the Minister of Local Government three years ago, when we had elections, because of the performance of local government, we were able to win nine of the 14 corporations and tied for one; that was 10 out of 14. We won 83 seats and the Opposition won 43 seats and they were not as they are today; in shambles. They fought an election but could only win 43 seats.

If you look at the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, there is no representation. If you look at Port of Spain, they have no one; Laventille, no one; Tunapuna has a couple from the Warrentville end. Maybe there are one or two councillors. I have no problem with that. Arima has nil; Sangre Grande, nil; Point Fortin was always nil. We have created history. Since that borough was formed we have not lost a seat as yet.

**Mr. S. Panday:** That is because of Larry.

**Hon. J. Narine:** That is because of good representation and service. We do not work against our councillors. In our areas where we have councillors, we work hand in hand and we make sure that our programmes and yearly activities coincide with the councillors, the Members of Parliament and the constituency executives. We do not have an executive that throws out people just like that without any reason.

**Mr. Hinds:** Cabal or clique.

**Hon. J. Narine:** We have no cabal. This is why I joined the PNM in 1963. When I was 18 years old that is the only time I could have joined the PNM. Right now you can join at the age of 12 so you can send your grandchildren to join the PNM. They would have a future in politics, not with a party that changes its name every 10 years for the most. We are celebrating 50 years this year. Fifty years mean that we have experience. We have a Constitution.

**Mr. Partap:** We are making 17 years.

**Hon. J. Narine:** You are making 17 years? Are you counting Club 88 in that? Your name would have been Club 88. He does not have a history of his party. Every other year they go for another name and that will continue to happen. You would be long gone and that would continue to happen.



Mr. Speaker, going around this country since the PNM assumed office, I visit different areas in Trinidad and Tobago twice per week because the Ministry, for which I have responsibility at this time, is doing a tremendous amount of work opening the lands in the country districts to boost production in agriculture. The statistics may show that GDP has fallen but we are getting US \$74 per barrel of oil. Obviously that will happen. You have to look at the amount of money we had in GDP last year as against what we have this year, then you would know about production.

We also have a problem with that in that NAMDEVCO, Southern Wholesale Market and Macoya Market are the ones from which they take the statistics. That is unfair to the Macoya farmers who go to the Tunapuna Market to sell their produce. It does not go through the system, so, you do not get a true reflection of the percentage or how much money was generated for the year in GDP. It is the same thing in Sangre Grande. The Member for Nariva will tell you that we have opened 17 roads there and there are 1,000 more farmers doing agriculture in that area. Obviously, production will go up.

There is a situation in local government that people cry down local government, such as some of the Members who spoke today. They are the same councillors they depend on to do the daily things. *[Interruption]*

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. J. Narine:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The councillors and Members of Parliament are supposed to work hand in hand. I do not know about other parties but in my constituency the PNM councillors meet with their Members of Parliament on a regular basis and they work out their plans and projections for the year.

You would recall there was a gun-toting Minister on their side when they were in government. He called himself "the Sheriff". The amount of cooperation that took place under that administration in local government, I had the magnanimous task of cleaning up local government when we came back into office this time. You would recall why Mr. Sumairsingh died. This was because the Sheriff built a hard surface court at Burket Corner, which is called "Bucket" Corner by some of the local people in Rio Claro. He built some bleachers and one

hard surface court, which was not properly surfaced, and put four lights and the bill was \$1.4 million. He wanted that to be handed over to the local government corporation because he was finished and Mr. Sumairsingh said: "No way. I am not taking that and I am not condoning \$1.4 million for that place." He was a decent man who knew that he was not going to condone corruption. There were Ministers whose family had equipment in these corporations parked up, without engines, which were not working, and they were being paid every day. That is what took place. We inherited a bill of \$14 million. The Member for Sipara will tell you that I did not send police to that office. I sent the auditors and a police officer from our Ministry to safeguard the person who is the auditor.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall I came here and brought the information. On the first page it showed the Member of Parliament's office that was being refurbished. Way down on the second page there was the old nurses' quarters being refurbished and on the third page there was the post office opposite the Penal/Debe Market. Right away, I knew that these three payments were for one building. That is why we sent the auditors. We saved approximately \$3 million on that project. I would tell you why. This is what was taking place. They gave out contracts without Central Tenders Board and by word of mouth. When we came into office I am certain that the present Minister of Local Government is still receiving bills that were not paid. We cannot see what they did.

**Mr. Hinds:** A bunch of thieves.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Many things that happened in local government at that time took a long time to clean up. I am happy that I was part of that and I was able to do some cleansing of the mess that they made when they were in office. It was a deliberate policy to manipulate and control everybody and everything. This resulted in the further corruption of the local government system and brought local government into disrepute.

Today they are blaming everyone else for the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago; that did not happen overnight. The Soca Warriors did not go to Germany overnight; it was years of planning and work that was placed into the Soca Warriors for that to happen.

**Mr. Partap:** Thank God for Jack Warner.

**Hon. J. Narine:** The chairman of your black caucus has something to be told here today. With respect to the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), the Member for Nariva was the last Minister who had all kinds of characters running the programme. Mr. Arnim Smith, deceased, was a director of the URP receiving

\$15,000 per month with travelling and all that. Rupert Griffith's brother from Arima was a manager who could not manage anything in his whole life. [Interruption] You had him in URP before we came into office. We met him in office in URP. You can call his name, you know him well.

**Mr. Partap:** Guerra.

**Hon. J. Narine:** You employed him. We inherited that. That was your programme to reform the URP programme. The URP programme is now reformed and we have 41 constituencies and everybody is getting something. It is not happening in one area and not in the next. The present Minister and I have fought to get rid of all those ghost gangs. We cannot say that they are totally gone but we have done quite a good job over the last period. We are now getting production out of URP.

You are getting drains out of the URP; drains that you never expected to get. You did nothing for six years and come here to ask questions every week and our Ministers have to stand and say: "I am building three bridges in Guaico and I am paving 2 kilometres of roadway." He then goes and piggybacks and says that he is coming to do this and that. We would deal with that. I have already dealt with it. I have passed through those tricks in my 24 years of politics. That was the reform that the UNC wanted. [Interruption]

**Mr. Partap:** We are waiting for you.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Waiting for whom? I can go to any part of the country. He went on the roads that we were building and said that he was going to pave the next week; I stopped the paving. The roads would be paved when I am ready to do so. He said that he was going to pave them.

This Government had the experience of contractors making claims for payments and, however, there were no tendering processes; it was by word of mouth. The reform programme was to ensure that PNM councils got nothing and that Ministers decided where they would spend money.

The manner in which the UNC government allocated the Road Improvement Fund gave a very clear indication that their approach to local government reform was not there. During their tenure, there was no consultation for local government. They had no intention of moving local government forward. As a matter of fact, they were thinking about shutting down local government as other countries in the Caribbean have done. The other countries in the Caribbean are smaller countries. We have a system in Trinidad and Tobago where we need local government. We need the

people to do the everyday jobs. I will come to that. Consistently, we have given the corporations money.

Recently, I passed through Kelly Village, St. Helena and El Carmen, and was very much pleased to see the amount of work that was done in these areas. If you go to Moruga or Guayaguayare—I was in the Maracas area yesterday looking at some agricultural access roads—you would see the amount of work that is being done throughout the country that has never been seen in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. At local government, there are advertisements for contractors. The contractors are screened and they check to see that they have the equipment and workforce for the job. They do not give a contractor or friend who does not have a hoe or cutlass. We are looking for heavy equipment. The performance is getting better, because we demand of them that they perform for the money and give us value for the money they are being paid. When I go throughout the country, I am so happy to see the work that is being done.

We heard Members from the other side saying that they did not say where to go, what to do and how to do the job. They are in opposition. They are fortunate that we are doing work all over the country, so that every part of Trinidad and Tobago will get service.

The Land Distribution Programme is taking place at a pace now. They were there for six years with an average of 30 leases per year. The Member for St. Augustine would tell you that almost every farmer in Macoya has gotten their lease. We have fixed roads. The river is dredged. We expect that farmers would not get the type of flooding that they got last year. Up till now, a lot of rain has fallen, but maybe, the saturation point has not been reached. I am not saying that there would not be any floods but there were none with the amount of rain that fell over the last two weeks.

I am happy to know that an executive member of the UNC went on television and thanked the Minister of Works and Transport for clearing the drains and doing works at Caroni. This was not done for years. We should not have had flooding. I do not know if it is your side or which side it is, I think the gentleman's name is Mr. Vasant Bharath, the NFM man. I wonder if he voted against my colleague from St. Augustine? He is now praising the Ministry and Minister of Works and Transport for the work that took place in Caroni. They would have been flooded out already. He said that he is hoping with the work that has been done, there will be no more flooding this year. I am happy about that. Every time there is flooding, we have to leave where we are and go to ensure that the

corporation—local government staff are the first people to get there to try and clean and distribute hampers and make sure that the people are safe.

I looked at India on television last night where there were widespread deaths in Mumbai, what used to be Bombay. There were typhoons and the monsoon rains are coming. They cannot get rid of the water. We are small but I am certain when we get new equipment by October, and they are placed in the Drainage Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport, there would be other areas in Trinidad and Tobago getting relief that they have never gotten for years. That is why this Government is not afraid of calling elections. This Government is saying that the elected Members would be able to stay on and they would have the opportunity to elect aldermen and if they are satisfied with the mayors and chairmen, of course, they would be re-elected. This Government is not about squeezing anybody. You are an elected member. According to my colleague from Diego Martin, if you can make changes in the Senate, you can make changes at the corporation level. We may not like them, but you are allowed to make changes.

I notice your colleague behind you is very serious, because if he can get thrown out who is next? *[Interruption]* We are not saying that. You do your work and we would do ours. I am certain that we would not have a problem. We are giving you a free hand to do it.

The Soca Warriors did not get there just like that. The hundreds of recreation grounds in local government and the preparation—take from the Tacarigua Savannah, better known as the Eddy Hart Savannah, all those players played through Mr. Eddy Hart's League. Almost 40 years he has been running a league in Tacarigua. I think he has the oldest league in Trinidad and Tobago after the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association. These recreation grounds played an important role in fostering sportsmen in this country, not only for football but also cricket and other disciplines in sports.

**Mr. Hinds:** Six of those players are from Morvant/Laventille.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Six of the players are from Malick. The leader of their black caucus had nothing to do with that because had it not been for Mr. Bertille St. Clair, Dwight Yorke and Russell Latapy would not have been on the Trinidad and Tobago's Soca Warriors squad. He should apologize to them at this time.

**Mr. Sharma:** What nonsense are you talking?

**Hon. J. Narine:** Their Minister of Sport, the Member for Chaguanas, took the leader of the black caucus and came here in Parliament and criticized Dwight Yorke, Russell Latapy and Brian Lara. Today you are talking about—

**Mr. Sharma:** Comedy hour is over, you have two minutes more.

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

**Hon. J. Narine:** He spoke for five minutes. He had nothing more to say. Look at this—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Sharma:** You are a disgrace.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Fyzabad, you are sitting in the wrong place in the first instance. When we come back from the tea break you will sit in your correct seat. The Member has approximately two minutes more, let him continue.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Thank you very much. I know the Member for Fyzabad has been trying to speak in this Parliament, but everything he says is about race. His black caucus should not have criticized Russell Latapy and Mr. Dwight Yorke because they were the ones who made the backbone of the team that took us to the World Cup. I can apologize on behalf of the president of the black caucus, because he is a constituent of mine. Russell Latapy and Dwight Yorke came back to play football for Trinidad and Tobago. There is collaboration between local government and the Ministries of Works and Transport and Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and all the other ministries. When PNM is in government, local government does not stand alone like it was in their administration; local government will stand with the other Ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources for agricultural access roads; the Ministry of Works and Transport with the IRNID Programme and all the other things. The Ministries of Works and Transport and Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources have given 100 per cent support to the corporations and we are about to do other things that would enhance local government and they would get more funding from time to time. This Government has increased the funding to local government and I am certain that the Minister would deal with that in his winding up, because somebody gave false information today and stated that the Ministry of Local Government is still not getting the right amount.

Mr. Speaker, I would not want to delay but I would like to wind up at this point in time. This is a very simple decision that can be taken by us here today. The councillors will stay on. This is an opportunity to have new aldermen, and those persons who have performed during the last three years, stay on. This is an opportunity to get new and fresh blood. However you look at it, the councillors were elected and they would stay on; the 126 of them.

I ask that we support this Bill and we move on with local government. This is the better decision taken. On the last occasion, the Ministry ran local government. On this occasion, the councillors and the corporations will run local government. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**4.32 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The incompetence of this PNM Government is manifested by the fact that in a two-clause Bill you have two amendments. [*Laughter*] It shows how little thinking has gone into this legislation. Mr. Speaker, do not watch a two-clause Bill and say that it is innocuous. There is a sting in the tail in that Bill. The PNM's clandestine thinking! I would show you that in a minute.

Before I go on to deal with the Bill, first of all, I must congratulate all the Members on this side, front and back Benches, for their contributions. They were relevant and on the topic. However, I cannot say that for the Member for Diego Martin Central. The Member for Arouca North was away in a Fishing Pond fishing. No nexus; no relevance at all in his debate.

My Speaker, I find it strange to hear the Member for Diego Martin Central talking about local government and how the PNM wants to develop local government. The Member for Diego Martin Central said that local government is a waste of time.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, at no time did I ever say that. I would never say that local government is a waste of time.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Have you ever said anything about local government workers?

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, that is something else. [*Laughter*] He is misrepresenting, and you know this. I said that daily-paid workers in local government do not give justice to their salaries. I maintain that. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** That is what I mean. He ties in the workers at local government with local government. If you made a statement that the workers are not working, you are casting aspersions on the political and administrative arms of local government.

**Hon. Member:** No.

**Mr. S. Panday:** You are like the Member for Arouca North; you do not understand English. So, to come here and cry or pretend that they love local government and democracy, that is not so. The PNM has a trick in this legislation.

**Mr. Valley:** I do not want to hear you. I have changed my mind.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Arouca North boasted that he is working with local government, but how many agricultural roads has he built? I do not want to call him a stranger to the truth; I would never do such a thing. The Princes Town Regional Corporation has written a number of letters to him about agricultural access roads, and that Member for Arouca North never had the courtesy or the decency to respond, and he comes here and says that he is working closely with local government! How far from the truth that is.

He also said that when Mr. Dhanraj Singh was a Minister he discriminated. I want to ask this PNM Government today, in the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, have they built any roads in any electoral district, except in the electoral district in which the PNM is in control? You want to come here and paint a pretty picture of yourself and say that you are sharing things evenly. Not true PNM is discriminating!

When they talk about how they are working, ask them what kind of shameless activity is being done in the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. They are suffering, all the members of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, except the electoral district, which is controlled by the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, the Member talked about corruption. May I ask him if he ever owned a white Telster? I want to ask him if he knows anybody by the name "Tram Ramlal". I am going to say no on that. He pretends that he is not hearing. That is a good sign of a good politician.

The Member for Arouca North went on to say that in the 1990s, the then UNC government extended the life of local government and we made the councils regional councils, and that is why the Minister had the opportunity to do what he did. I want to ask him if he really reads everything. What about what happened in 2003? What did this PNM Government do in 2003, in terms of extending the life of local government? Do you want to answer?

**Mr. Narine:** I said it.

**Mr. S. Panday:** You did not say it. By Act No. 13 of 2003, the Municipal Corporations Act says in section 2:



“(a) in section 11(4), by inserting after 4(B)...

‘(4C) Notwithstanding subsection (4A), for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2002, under this section, such election shall be held within one year of the expiry of the terms of office of the Councillors and Aldermen...’”

It went on to say:

“Subject to subsection (1C) the Councillors and Aldermen of each Corporation, whose term of office expired on the 12th day July, 2002...”

When you were boasting that your government was in power:

“...are deemed to have become an Advisory Committee...”

So, you are blaming people and you did the same thing. Why did you do that? That is not fair to the Parliament! [*Interruption*]

“...on the same terms and conditions of service that they enjoyed as Councillors and Aldermen...”

So when the hon. Members on the other side are casting aspersions and criticisms on Members on this side, they must do their homework properly. That is all we are asking of them. You see, this exercise is going to lead us to a situation—undermining the democracy—by not holding an election, but pretending that an election took place. This is what this legislation is about; not having an election but pretending that an election took place. They are wiping the slate. You are getting rid of people, and you want new faces in these councils. You want that without an election! That is undermining the electoral process; that is undermining democracy.

**Mr. Valley:** What is the Member talking about?

**Mr. S. Panday:** I am going to tell you. I know you do not understand, but I am going to help you. I think you did not read it, but I am going to read it for you one day—I am happy to see that you are listening—sections 11(4), 12(5) and 15(1)—

“...for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2006—

- (a) the term of office of each Councillor shall continue for twelve months from the date of the expiry of the existing term of office, as though each Councillor had been elected for an additional...year...”

The point is, that you are treating a situation as though an election was held.

- “(b) the term of office of each Mayor, Chairman and Alderman shall expire at the end of the existing term and—
- (i) the Councillors shall elect new Aldermen for a term of twelve months, in accordance with section 13;
  - (ii) Councillors and Aldermen shall elect a Mayor or Chairman of the Council for a term of twelve months, in accordance with section 14.”

The point I am making is that this kind of power that is being given to councilors, is in the old Act—after you have faced the polls; after you have put down the democratic process in train and you become a councillor—

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, if the Member would permit a question, I simply want to ask him, would he have preferred if we had allowed the whole council to lapse and simply have advisory committees? Would you have appreciated that? In other words, what is your recommendation?

**Mr. S. Panday:** My recommendation is section 273. I am happy that you have asked me. I hope that when you ask for counsel and advice, and good counsel and advice is given, you are going to accept it.

**Mr. Sharma:** You all do not listen. That is the problem.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, section 273(1) says:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of any written law relating to the term of office of members of the councils constituting the local authorities, the term of office of members of local authorities holding office on the 13th September, 1990, is hereby extended for a period of one year or to such date as the President may specify by order published in the *Gazette*...”

Mr. Speaker, I am saying to delete “13th September 1990” and insert “July 2006”, and this would have dealt with the matter. This is what we want. You have asked for advice and what I would have recommended, and I have so done.

**Mr. Valley:** I simply want further clarification, if the Member would permit. How would that correct the flaw that he has found in the existing situation? The fact that we are extending the life of the councillors, all the same, all that you are adding is the extended life of the mayors and aldermen also. Our position is simply that, but one should have a choice. One has to make a distinction between

persons who were elected—persons who faced the electorate—and persons who were appointed. How does your solution answer the democratic argument that you are attempting to make?

**Mr. S. Panday:** I just want to advise the Member to do his own work and read section 10(2) of the present Act. Furthermore, I want to tell you today that they have only extended the life of the councillors, so the PNM has something up its sleeves, and the national community must be made aware of it.

**Mr. Valley:** We are giving you a choice.

**Mr. S. Panday:** You have that under the removal of aldermen and chairmen. You have section 16 of the Act. If you do not want Mayor Atherly or you do not want the Chairman in Tunapuna, section 16 says:

“A Mayor shall be removed as Chairman of a Council upon the resolution passed by the Council and supported by the votes of not less than three-fourths of all the members...”

You have that. Why do you not want to remove them? If you want choice, look the choice is in the legislation. Whom are you trying to fool? Are you trying to fool the Parliament and the national community that you are giving us choice? Do us a favour; do not do us any favour. [*Laughter*] Any favour from you is like poison.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central went on to give a long history of local government. He only spent about 45 seconds on the Bill itself. I want to remind this honourable House where the genesis of this piece of legislation came from. I would take this opportunity to redirect his mind to what happened in this House.

On Friday, May 26, 2006 the Prime Minister made a statement in this House, giving the reasons why this legislation is coming. There is nowhere in that speech by the Prime Minister, on that date, where he indicated that it was a halfway piece of legislation. He gave the impression that the life of the councils would be extended. As the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central was trying to define council—or was it the Member for Arouca North?

**Mr. Sharma:** Both of them.

**Mr. S. Panday:** They said that “council” means mayors, aldermen councillors. When the Prime Minister came and talked about all those beautiful ideas that he had—he said that they wanted to extend the life of the council—why did they not extend the life of the whole council? Why did they come with this trickery today?

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[MR. S. PANDAY]

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I am going to tell you why they are coming here to extend the life in this Parliament. The Member did not have to talk for 49 minutes and try to justify why this legislation was coming before this Parliament.

The hon. Prime Minister said on Friday, March 26, 2000:

“The matter of constitution reform is...the most important issues facing our country at this time. We on this side note the growing comments in the media and from the national community on the need for the country to embark upon this process.”

So, what he is saying is that he wants to embark upon constitutional reform and wants to deal with it. He said that a new draft Constitution would be prepared by certain people. At the same time, they have produced their own draft.

The Member for Arouca North, I do not know if he listens when the Prime Minister is talking. He boasted that since 1990 they had local government reform on the front burner, but yet they waited until two days before the life of the local government comes to an end to ask the House to extend the life to give them time. That is what the PNM is! From 1956 to 2006, they could not do it. That is an indictment you are inflicting and imposing upon the PNM, the same PNM that you have boasted about, but all of us know that is only window dressing.

In the manifesto of 2002, he said that they would embark upon the most transparent process to chart the way forward, but yet they come at the last minute to extend the life of the councils, which would come to an end on Thursday, July 13, 2006. They come here on the 5th to ask for an extension. If they were so competent and properly well oiled—they are well oiled to thief the election, but they are not well oiled to do the peoples’ work. They come here at the last minute to ask for an extension.

Mr. Speaker, hear what this local government reform entails. I want to say that when the hon. Prime Minister talked about power sharing, that was the sweetest part of his speech, but he did not let you know what was in the sting of the tail of the scorpion. He thought that having used the words “power sharing”, we would say, yes, and we would go for it, but we could see through the PNM; we could see through the deceit of the PNM, and that is why today we are dealing with this issue.

He said that under this system the central government should be the policy making body whilst local government would be the executing arm. You do not have to extend the life of local government for that. You do not have to do it. You

said that you want a clean slate. Do you not have faith in your councillors that you could give them that power now? Do you not have faith in your aldermen and chairmen to give them that power at this point in time? You said you are giving them more power.

He went on to say that other functions would be discharged by local government bodies, which would be structured and given a significant project management capability. They are talking about local government reform, and very few of the technical posts in local government have been filled by this Government. What about engineers in local government? Have you all appointed any? What about the surveyors in local government? Have you all appointed them? You have been sitting there for over four years now, and you have not done anything for local government. You have put nothing in place and you are saying that you intend to restructure it. The law is already there to give local government that power; to give them those functions. Why did you come with this legislation? You are trying to hoodwink somebody and we on this side must delve into it. That is why I want to congratulate the Member for Chaguanas who has seen where they are going.

They went on to confuse you and to talk about power sharing is going to ensure decentralization. I do not know if the hon. Minister would compare this with the other principle called “devolution”. I do not know. I think he said they do not want devolution, they want centralization. The law is already in place to give effect to that, and they have not done it. They have come here to fool the nation and the Parliament.

He said:

“...through local government...we intend to improve representation of the people’s interest in this country. We are proposing an enlarged Senate of Trinidad and Tobago to include all mayors and chairmen of municipal corporations...”

Like what Lloyd Best used to call a “maco Senate”:

They are fooling people to give them the impression that they have something nice for them, and not to question what they are doing. It is something nice; a nice cherry is coming. Well, we are going to show them.

“Their contributions will serve to enhance the representational function now being discharged by parliamentary representatives.”

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I ask the question: Does that need local government reform or reform of the parliamentary system? This does not impact upon local government. You do not need to say that you are going to reform local government in order to have this. All we could do is a simple constitutional amendment. That is not local government reform. You do not have to hold back local government elections for one year! You should come to the Parliament and deal with the Constitution. We think that more is in the mortar than the pestle. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, the sugar is going, but this is the sting coming now. In order to understand the big picture one has to read the speech made by the hon. Prime Minister in this honourable House on May 26, 2006 and compare it with the legislation and you would get a composite idea. This is the sting in the tail.

The fourth proposal recommends a review of local government boundaries. The Member for Arouca North talked about the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, but have they ever made representation to the Elections and Boundaries Commission complaining about the boundaries? Has this Government ever made representation to local government about the people in Brazil having to go to Couva to deal with local government? What did the Elections and Boundaries Commission say?

**Mr. Narine:** Thank you very much. You would recall that when we went out of office in 1995, there was a committee, which was put in place with Mr. Signoret as the chairman. We had mayors and chairmen from all the corporations dealing with that matter. It was submitted, but between 1995, and when you went out of office, you did nothing for local government. We had submitted that. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. S. Panday:** I did not ask you what I did, but I asked what you did. You have done nothing. If you did send it, then you are agreeing with the Member for Diego Martin East that the EBC is incompetent. Do you remember that he went on television and attacked the EBC in a most vicious manner? They feel that the EBC is not doing a good enough job for them. That could be gleaned from the boundaries where the EBC has organized Trinidad and Tobago in such a way—they took away certain polling divisions, strong polling divisions, and they locked them in UNC areas—the ones that they feel that the PNM could win they send it in the PNM area. That happened in Princes Town, it happened in Nariva, it happened in Mayaro. You could see how the EBC has a concerted plan to ensure that the PNM gets a better deal.

**Hon. Dumas:** That is ridiculous.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Ridiculous! You did not hear the Member for Diego Martin East! You are from a different place; you are a guest in this House. You should have been here to hear when the Member for Diego Martin East talked on this issue. They feel that the EBC is not doing enough. The EBC is an independent body, but they want to usurp the function of the EBC. The Government wants them now to demarcate the local government boundaries.

I am going to read one of the catches in this legislation. He said the fourth proposal recommends a review of local government boundaries. Is the Executive going to interfere with the boundaries? That is democracy! They are undermining the electoral process; they are undermining the democratic process and that is a frightening thing. This nation should be alerted about this matter. They went on to tell you how they have decided to do it.

At the level of central government, there is an administrative district arrangement, the boundaries for which do not coincide. He said that one of the proposed strategies for reviewing and rewriting—that is the function that they are usurping from the Elections and Boundaries Commission—the local government boundaries, is a thorough examination of a number of factors including the emerging new growth poles. Who could decide that? When you hear the Member for Arouca North say that he made Tunapuna a growth pole; he made Sangre Grande a growth pole, he is not making places like Couva a growth pole where you have heavy industrialization; and he is not making Princes Town a growth pole.

Today you have let it out when the Government indicated where they are going to set up the boundaries—new patterns of settlement and new centres of industrial and commercial activity. The point about this is that the Executive should not have that power to interfere with any boundary, whether it is for the general election or local government election. Do not undermine the electoral process! This is what they have planned to do.

They went on. They are setting up their own growth poles; they are setting up their new patterns. We cannot depend on the PNM for that. The Princes Town Regional Corporation has written a number of letters begging the Minister to fix the roads in Princes Town and he never had the courtesy to apply. I am sure you understand the English language and you could read those letters.

The Member for Diego Martin Central talked about house rates and house taxes, but he knows fully well that is minuscule in relation to the amount of money that local government requires. Tobago got \$2 billion. How many taxes could you collect from property in Tobago? How much taxes could you collect

from property in rural areas? Mr. Speaker, you must read the last line in that paragraph it says:

“We must also develop a realistic formula for the allocations from central government based on demographics and social and infrastructural needs.”

Mr. Speaker, do not forget that in last year’s budget debate we found out in the budget document that this Government said that it was going to identify a certain kind of people between the ages of 16 to 25 to give them preference. How could you trust a Government which is dealing with the disbursement of moneys, when the records revealed that they are biased? This is what this PNM Government is! You cannot trust them; the nation cannot trust them.

Mr. Speaker, he said that this local government reform is a precursor to the greater and more complex and challenging matter of constitution reform. If we get this right we could take the bigger one. The question is: could you do it in a year? These are the questions we must ask. Why a year? Why did they not do it in months? Why did they not do it in three months? But they want a year! Do you know why? They really want to call general election before local government election. The crime rate is so high and they cannot deal with it. You could have how much money you want, you could pave how much you want, once we go to the population and tell them that you are killing young people in this country, the country would deal with you all. You cannot deal with crime.

This matter here is a trick to postpone local government election and to call general election. They know that they cannot do it now. This Government has permitted 200 young persons to be killed to date in 180 something days. You have blimp and limp, inter-ministerial task force and Scotland Yard, but they are not thinking about one thing and that is, they are the cause of crime. Look at the pattern of killings—URP foreman, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, Holastic, Peter Murrain—CEPEP contractors and URP foremen. The Minister is checking statistics; check the statistics and see what is causing crime in this country and you would see the answer is “rummmp PNM”. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is merely to play for time. You are saying that you are ready for election; your machinery is well oiled, but the people are waiting for you on crime. They are waiting for you outside there. Whenever some little aspect of crime decreases, the Minister would jump up and boast on the television and say that they are dealing with it. You should read the article today of Greg Chapel, when he told India that little wind would not help them. You must not get too excited because you are not there as yet. This is the PNM! So when you jump up and say in the newspapers that crime is on the decrease, people are laughing at you.



Mr. Speaker, those are the issues of local government reform; those are the issues of constitutional reform as they relate to local government. We ask you here today, do you need to extend the life of local government for one year to put into effect those proposals made by the Prime Minister in this honourable House on local government reform on May 26, 2006? These are the questions. When one looks at the whole big picture one would see this is a scam.

They are trying to fool this country. He said that:

“... in light of this... matter and recognizing that it is not in the best interest of the country to simply continue with the present arrangement...”

This is an arrangement that we have been working with since 1956.

“...we feel that we should clearly chart the new way forward before the impending... elections are held.”

They are saying that they are going to do it in a year. From 1956 to 2006 they could not get it right, but they are going to get it right in a year. No! They are fooling us. They are just doing this to get general election in front of local government election. They feel that by bringing down Scotland Yard and buying a new blimp they would control crime, but crime would never be controlled in this country until all of them walk through that door.

All the money that we have, as we get richer, the crime is increasing. Why? They are talking about constitutional reform! Why did they not have an amnesty to bring in guns so that we could take the guns off the streets? We are asking them on that side today, how many of the 200 young, brilliant men in this country have been killed? What instrument was used to kill them? This Government has refused to have a gun amnesty. We recommend a gun amnesty. If you do not know how to do it we are going to tell you how to do it.

The Member for Diego Martin Central is sleeping, but if he wants advice I am going to give him advice on how to deal with a gun amnesty.

**Mr. Valley:** I am not sleeping.

**Mr. S. Panday:** The Member is concentrating so much that he has decided to close his eyes. Mr. Speaker, this is what we are talking about here today.

“...we feel that we should clearly chart the new way forward before the impending local government elections are held.”

He said:

“The life of the existing councils will expire on July 13 of this year. We should seriously attempt to give those who would be our newly elected local

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government officials a fresh start in a newly energized, dynamic and progressive system. We should not be satisfied...with a situation that denies the full effectiveness of our representatives...”

Mr. Speaker, they want to deal with the full effectiveness of our representatives, so why did they not increase the allocation to local government? In certain areas, I think in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, the Government’s allocation is 16 cents per individual, and you are talking about effective deployment to local government. You do not need to postpone the election for that.

Mr. Speaker, we must do like Tobago. Let the councils say what they want. You could do it now. You do not need constitutional reform for that. When local government bodies put forward their proposals, do you give them what they want or do you cut it in half? When you talk about you want to deploy local government resources, you could do it without constitutional reform and without the extension of the life of councils. So, you are fooling us with this legislation.

**Mr. Valley:** I just want to inform the Member that in Tobago, local government is controlled by the Tobago House of Assembly Act, which was, in effect, the reform of what was in Tobago. Secondly, I do not think that there has been any year when Tobago got all that it asked for. So, there is no difference in the manner in which we treat Tobago.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, indeed, he was not only closing his eyes, but he was really sleeping. He did not understand what I said. The Government proposes to bring legislation to Parliament to extend the life of local government. So, when you look at it, I humbly submit that this two-clause piece of legislation is a trick by the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, coming to the other point now on the legislation, you are saying to let councillors remain, but you want to give people the opportunity to get rid of the aldermen. The question is, if somebody comes in for three years and that person is working on a plan—you have boasted that you have won local government—do you know what that person’s plan for local government is? Do you know if that person has a programme for periods of three months? You are putting a new person there who would sit on three programmes! I am just telling you the stupidity—I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize—the fallacy in the legislation; the false premise upon which you are arguing. So you are going to bring a new chairman and a new alderman who does not know anything about the system, and who would take nine months to settle in and then the year would be

up. You have a trick up your sleeves. [*Interruption*] Keep it for yourself. We do not know, but Mayor Atherly said that he wants to go. Mr. Atherly said that at the end of the term he wants to go. What Mr. Atherly is telling you is: “You do not need this legislation for me to go. At the end of the term I shall resign.” So, you do not need this legislation if you want to bump Mayor Ian Atherly out! He is going.

**Mr. Sharma:** To fight San Fernando West.

**Mr. S. Panday:** We do not need this. You could appoint your new aldermen and chairmen. Why do you need this? Do you have something up your sleeves? Is it that in another regional corporation you have two persons who are staunch PNM; one is the CEO, and the other is the chairman of the council? Since they have realized that they could not move Marlene Coudray, they cannot touch the CEO, they have decided that they are moving the chairman. Is that the purpose of the legislation? Pettiness and small mindedness on the part of the PNM! Is that their plan? I do not know. We do not have any plans to move any of our chairmen.

**Mr. Valley:** Ask Kamla! [*Laughter*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** The point I was making at the beginning is the point I want to make now. The reason the status quo should remain is that when there was an election in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation and the people voted in that election—the democracy and the electoral system—and with that system the lottery system took place and the UNC got the chairman and aldermen. What they are doing is simulating an election. There is no election, but they want to pretend, by this Bill, that there has been an election, so, that they would be given an opportunity to go into that lottery system without an election.

Mr. Speaker, they are undermining the democracy; they are undermining the electoral process. This is what they are doing. That is another sting in the tail. Therefore, they could jump up and boast in the country and say—how many corporations they are controlling; is it 19 or 15 corporations? We are controlling five—that they are controlling 15 corporations now, but the people in the society must see how you have abused Parliament; how you have abused the electoral process; how you have abused the democracy to hold on to power. You then come to this Parliament and say that you do not want power! That is a shameless argument! Fallacy! That was the argument.

Mr. Speaker, they did not want it then, but now they want it. They want an opportunity to “hoff” and snatch Ortoire/Mayaro. You want to be given that opportunity without having to work for it. That is why we are saying if you want Ortoire/Mayaro you could take it if you want it, but work for it. Go to the polls! That is why we are

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saying that you are afraid of local government elections. When you say that your machinery is oiled, why did you not go and fight for Ortoire/Mayaro! Mr. Speaker, to tell you how this PNM is wicked—

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. S. Panday:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am certain that I got my 45 minutes. The point I am making is, look at how they are going for Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. They have a man there by the name of Dansam Dhansook and there is a 3/3 situation. What they are doing is the PNM is giving Dansam Dhansook—although he is a pariah, not only in the PNM—the opportunity that they are ready to embrace him for local government.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro got 11 charges. You see how politics is hard! You see how politics is wicked! You see how politics is nasty! The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is being brutalized by the PNM so that they would hold that local government council. When the time comes they would ensure that they have the 3/3. Do you understand it? The Member for San Fernando West understands it, because I hear the Member is also in trouble. [Laughter] Mr. Speaker, she understands it. That is why the PNM is going with full force, full fire power, against the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro.

Imagine, look how long after they have charged him, they return on a day when the man was out of the country and brought him a summons for trying to subvert the course of justice by filing an affidavit to cause Dansam Dhansook—poor, little, nice Dansam Dhansook, who they are hoping would join their clique to undermine the UNC and the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. That is the politics and that is the way the PNM operates.

Mr. Speaker, in the process of trying to grab power, they would sacrifice and murder their own. That is what the PNM is doing. That is why the Member for Arouca North said that he does not know which faction and which black caucus. I had to tell him that the PNM is the only party that has a white man in the black caucus. [Laughter] That is why they are talking about factions and who with this one and that one, hoping that our councillors would split and make deals.

**Mr. Partap:** They did it already.

**Mr. S. Panday:** That is the point. They are hoping to make deals with certain councillors and they would undermine the democratic process to take UNC controlled councils. The Member said that he is using a slush fund. We want to tell our own Members that the will of the people and the voice of the people would be the voice of God. In politics, although they do not believe in God in politics, God speaks in politics and time is longer than twine.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the two motives are really to get control of more councils, having regard to the fact that they talked about giving more resources—slush money—in Mayaro to win those seats. They intend to use this legislation to get that toe hole in and extend the life of the councils and spend that slush money in those areas to win the elections, and then they are talking about the oiled machinery! It is “scampishness” and “thiefishness” they are hoping to win this election with.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we would like to see an amendment which says:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of any written law relating to the term of office of Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors and the term of office of Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors holding office on 13th July, 2006 is hereby extended for a period of one year.”

We are saying that you believe that it is a two-pronged attack you have, because you want to deal with your own councillors and your own aldermen, and since we are not dealing with councillors, we could identify your alderman and chairmen who you want to “lick up” and, at the same time, you are trying to undermine the UNC councillors. We want to tell you two things: that you would not see and God’s face.

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

**The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas):** Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is always good to be educated. I think I just got an education in exactly what I should not learn. The mind that could think like that, I certainly do not want to be so advised.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Time would tell.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, there is a saying that a war demonstrates a system of old men and bitterness, boiling young men in the sulphur and oil and phosphorous of the machinery that pulps them and ploughs them under foot.

**Mr. S. Panday:** And gun powder.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** I think, I just saw a demonstration of that. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Hinds:** That is right. You are absolutely right.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, the provisions of this amendment Bill are quite simple and they bear no relationship to the kind of machinations and interpretations that have just come from the last speaker. In an attempt to clarify the intentions of the Government, I would want to propose these amendments that have been circulated to clarify that the intentions of the Government in no way mirror or reflect what was said before.

In the proposed subsection (ID), No. 1, we want to insert the words “subject to sections 15(2) and 12(6)” at the commencement of paragraph (b). In No. 2, delete the word “Chairman” wherever it occurs and substitute the words “Deputy Mayor”. The second is with the understanding of the provisions of the interpretations as given in the Act.

Having clarified that, by proposing these two amendments, I think it is important to answer a few things that were said. Firstly, the issue of reviewing the boundaries, as was raised by the Member for Princes Town. I think it is important for us to remember that the external boundaries of the boroughs and local government areas were set by the legislation and, therefore, they were a matter that was set by the Parliament and, therefore they are not under the purview of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Since they were so set, it is expected that any change of them would be done by the Parliament and, of course, driven by appropriate review and study as established by the Executive.

**6.00 p.m.**

The Member also sought to deride the concept of funding, suggesting that property taxes, et cetera, are quite miniscule and therefore, bear no relationship to the funding of local government. I want to suggest that he should look again. Even in the present system, the experience of Point Fortin would tell us that there can be substantial benefit to that system, especially where it is driven by a government development strategy as mirrored by this administration’s strategy, of ensuring that commercial and industrial activity is disbursed throughout the country and, therefore, the issue of what can be raised is a reflection of the expected development in industrial, commercial and housing activities of the State as well as the private sector.

It is quite unfortunate that in the discussion, I had a disconnect, to put it that way, in which you have the Member suggesting on the one hand that the people who may have been victims of crime are unworthy participants in a certain programme and yet are described by him in the next second as brilliant young men, and somehow, I have a feeling that these brilliant young men, whom he referred to, are not necessarily the same people whom he derides in the minute exactly before. It seems also that it is unfortunate that there is an unseemingly enthusiasm when the Member speaks about the pain and problems that the country faces.

I want to suggest that the intentions that were laid, as the intentions of the Act are quite clear, that the purposes to be served are quite well identified and, therefore, it leaves me with no other responsibility than to repeat that the provisions that we suggest, subject to the amendments that have been proposed, should be moved.

I so move, Mr. Speaker. [*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.*

*Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 2.*

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

**Mr. Dumas:** Clause 2, amended as circulated, reads as follows:

“In the proposed subsection (ID)—

- (i) insert the words ‘Subject to sections 15(2) and 12(6)’ at the commencement of paragraph (b); and
- (ii) delete the word ‘Chairman’ wherever it occurs and substitute the words ‘Deputy Mayor’.”

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

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

*House resumed.*

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

*Brasso Police Station (Closure of)*

*Wednesday, July 05, 2006*

**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 07, 2006 at 1.30 p.m. and to inform Members that on that day the Government plans to debate Motions one and two on the Order Paper and given time, we would move on to Bill No. 2 on today's Order Paper, that is the amendment to the Financial Institutions Act.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, before I propose the Motion for the Adjournment, I now call upon the hon. Member for Caroni Central.

**Brasso Police Station  
(Closure of)**

**Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (Caroni Central):** Mr. Speaker, it is already late and I do not want to be confrontational, but this matter has been raised about two months ago and by mutual consent it has been postponed quite a few times. On behalf of the people who are affected, I want to raise this matter today to elicit a response from the Government. It concerns the Brasso Police Station. That police station is an old wooden building; it may have been constructed some 50 or 60 years ago and about seven or eight years ago it has been closed. That particular police station serves a large area, coming from Rio Claro right down to Longdenville, areas including: Tabaquite, Brasso, Mamoral, Caparo, Palmiste, Flanagin Town, and many other areas. We know the crime situation that occurs in the country today, but in that particular area there have been several murders, six kidnappings, including that of a little girl, and without wanting to raise memories, we know that the body of the nephew of the Minister of Health was found in that area as well.

In addition to that, that area serves as a passage for arms, ammunition and drugs coming from the Rio Claro area into central and north Trinidad, and they are given a free passage because, as I said, the police station is not functioning. After many reports and meetings with the authorities, a mobile police station was established in the Caparo area but after one month it was removed. Recently, the residents of those areas in Caparo, Palmiste and Flanagin Town, and so on, held a five-mile march from Caparo down to Brasso and they have given me a mandate to raise this issue in Parliament.

**Mr. Imbert:** Brasso is your area?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Caparo and Palmiste are my areas. The Member for Tabaquite and myself share those areas.



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Mr. Speaker, allocations have been made in several budgets for the Brasso Police Station, but still we have seen nothing done so far and I would like to elicit a response from the Government as to how soon the residents in that area can expect to see the construction of the Brasso Police Station.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security and Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Mr. Speaker, the Brasso Police Station district extends on the north from the junction of Freeport/Todds Road to the county boundary on the south, and to the west from the eastern county boundary to the Brasso/Caparo Valley Road. The Brasso district hosts a population of approximately 7,000 residents. The station is located at the Brasso Main Road and it was constructed approximately 100 years ago. It was declared unfit for habitation in 1999 and was vacated.

At that time, all the police officers stationed there were assigned to the Gran Couva Police Station, which is located approximately 10 kilometres away. From that time to the present, the Gran Couva Station has been offering coverage to both the Gran Couva Station district, as well as the Brasso Police Station district, with all reports related to Brasso being received at Gran Couva. This arrangement was deemed to be the best available course of action at the time, due in large part to the relatively low levels of criminal activity in the areas involved, as revealed by a study of comparative crime statistics of districts across the country at that time. This is still the case today, contrary to what the Member has said, and this is the reason I took the time to define the station district, so that the hon. Member would understand that while we have issues with crime in the country, in terms of that police station district, his analysis is inaccurate. In fact, for the period January 01 to April 30, 2006, only one crime was reported in that police station district. This is refreshing news. As a matter of fact, over the years 2003 to 2005, there was a continuous decrease in the level of crime and criminal activity, with a high of 42 reported crimes in 2003 and 25 in 2005.

This outstanding fact, notwithstanding, the Ministry of National Security has not wavered in its commitment to the people of Brasso, with the construction of a new police station being part of the Public Sector Investment Programme estimates as early as 2001, as the Member alluded to. The Ministry has noted, however, that a reallocation of funds from 2001 to the present was deemed necessary to address increasing crime rates in eight other police station districts across the country. As

a direct result, there has been a prioritization of the PSIP spending over the five-year period, 2001—2006, to focus on the areas more gravely affected by crime.

In this regard, the construction of the Brasso Police Station would commence in fiscal 2007. This is a scientific way of approaching things, because it is not a bottomless pit. So you focus the resources where they are most required until, of course, you can cover all the areas across the country. As such, the construction of that station, as I stated, is down for fiscal 2007. A new site has already been identified and approved at the corner of Marshall Street and Mamoral Road, and old School Street in Mamoral. This new station building will comprise two floors for both male and female police officers, who would be performing general police duties on a 24-hour basis. The station would be fully equipped and manned by one inspector, four sergeants, four corporals and 26 constables. Construction is expected to be completed within a period of 15 months.

A similar trend exists in the Gran Couva Police Station district where the statistics over the same period indicate a decline in reported crime, from 25 in 2003 to 22 in 2005. In addition, for the period January 01 to April 30, 2006, there has, again, interestingly enough, been only one reported crime in the Gran Couva district.

Mr. Speaker, I want the citizens who live in the Brasso station district and in the Gran Couva station district and, indeed, all across Trinidad and Tobago, to be assured that the Government, and specifically the Ministry of National Security, is deeply committed to arresting the problem of crime across the country. I think it is common sense; it is obvious for all those who have a straight mind, that there can be no quick-fix to the crime situation. As a result, this Government continues to take a systematic and scientifically-based approach to resolving the issues, identifying the problems, identifying solutions and applying them where necessary. This approach would and must include the refurbishment and upgrade of all police stations and posts across Trinidad and Tobago in keeping, again, with our 2020 vision.

We have a different vision for our police stations now and all the stations that we have modeled for construction are brand new designs, fitted to suit modern policing in this time. It may take a little longer than we all would like, for reasons that we all ought to know, because some of us had had an opportunity to be on the other side of the Parliament from time to time. But we are confident that the end result would be a sustainable reduction in crime and criminal activity across that country, and in the meantime we are exerting best efforts, using all the resources that are now available to us to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is

*Brasso Police Station (Closure of)*

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our commitment to Trinidad and Tobago and, of course, to the citizens who live in the Brasso Police Station district.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.15 p.m.*