

*Leave of Absence**Friday, October 13, 2006***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, October 13, 2006*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**CELLPHONE DEACTIVATION**

**Mr. Speaker:** I would appeal to the person whose cellphone has just rung and to all others with cellphones that are on, to take them off immediately.

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for Point Fortin indicating that he may be absent from today's sitting of the House. He is somehow stranded in the deep south and he has asked me to indicate to you that he may be here; if he is not here, well he would be excused.

**PAPERS LAID**

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2006. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER  
(LEAVE)****Upsurge in Criminal Activities  
(University of the West Indies)**

**Dr. Adesh Nanan** (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House for purpose of discussing the following matter as a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the upsurge in criminal activities against students of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

The matter is definite as it pertains to an upsurge in criminal activity involving robbery, rape and other assaults on UWI students, resident in and around the campus.

The matter is urgent because there appears to be no serious attempt by the relevant authorities to introduce appropriate measures to ensure security of students, treatment and counselling for victims and proper investigative procedures to apprehend the perpetrators.

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The matter is of public importance because the students and their families are of the view that the authorities have failed to deal effectively with the issue which will undermine the public faith, trust and confidence in the protective services and in the University of the West Indies, and may result in students abandoning their studies.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Motion does not qualify under Standing Order 12 and the hon. Member may consider Standing Order 11.

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

[Third Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [October 09, 2006]:

That the Bill be read a second time

*Question again proposed.*

**Hon. P. Manning:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The debate on the budget of fiscal year 2007 ended prematurely in Parliament on Monday last, when we took the adjournment. Because of the comments on this matter, much of which have found itself in the public domain and because of the ill informed nature of some of it, I thought that before proceeding this evening we will do well to revisit the circumstances that led to the truncation of the debate for fiscal year 2007, the budget debate for that year.

Mr. Speaker, you recall that last week Wednesday in the normal course the Minister of Finance presented the budget, Parliament was adjourned until Monday last at 10.00 a.m. at which time, the budget debate resumed as it customary is with a contribution by the hon. Member for Siparia and Leader of the Opposition on this occasion.

Mr. Speaker, it is normal in a debate of that nature and particularly relevant at this time in circumstances where in the Opposition there is now more than one political party, the original party having mutated into two at this time, that some kind of arrangement would have been arrived at between Government and Opposition on the debate and it is normal in all debates on the budget that that is so. It was critical on this occasion because there was more than one political party in opposition. It is my understanding that such an agreement was arrived at in part.

After the Member for Siparia made her contribution, she was followed by the very distinguished Minister of Planning and Development and Member for Arouca South on our side; who was followed by the Member for St. Joseph who is the former Minister of Finance, the hon. Gerald Yetming; who was followed by the Member for St. Ann's East, hon. Minister of Social Development, Mr. Anthony Roberts; who was then followed by the Member for Naparima and then who was followed by our own Member for La Brea who incidentally gave a discourse on which I wish to congratulate him. His contribution was a lesson especially to backbenchers and to all representatives as to how one's constituency ought to be represented in a budget debate—the Member for La Brea. [*Desk thumping*]

In the normal course, what would have come next would have been a contribution from some one of the hon. Members opposite. It is quite clear that whatever agreement might have been arrived at on that side of the House was not communicated to the Speaker, because had that been done, the Speaker, in accordance with parliamentary tradition, would have then called on a particular person in respect of whom he was notified would have been the next speaker. Our understanding was, it was due to be the Member for Caroni East, but it is clear, ladies and gentlemen—that is our understanding of the situation—that that was not communicated to the Speaker, because had it been communicated to the Speaker, the Speaker would then have called on the hon. Member for Caroni East to make his contribution. That was not done.

Mr. Speaker, what the Speaker did at that time and quite properly so may I add—and quite properly so—was following the contribution from a Member of the Government side, was to look to the Members of the Opposition. We sat here in amazement at what then transpired; nobody moved. The Speaker called once; the Speaker called twice; the Speaker called three times and then the Member for Diego Martin Central and the hon. Leader of Government Business, speaking across the floor to hon. Members opposite, made it clear, if you all do not rise then we would have no choice to close the debate. We would close it. That is the parliamentary practice; that is the established procedure. That is the procedure as has obtained in this Parliament, certainly in the 35 years I have been a Member of Parliament, this budget debate being my 35th budget debate in which I have participated in this Parliament. That is how it has been. That is the practice in Westminster from which we draw our tradition.

Mr. Speaker, nobody moved and I was absolutely astounded because as you could see, from what subsequently transpired, hon. Members on this side—

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certainly the Minister of Finance was not prepared to close the debate, just was not prepared for it. So that it could not be that there was any collusion between the Government and anybody else. The Government was as unprepared, certainly, the Minister of Finance was as unprepared as anyone of our Members on the Front Benches or on this side and he was unprepared to close the debate because we were in no position to anticipate what was to happen next.

I sat in consternation and saw nobody move. What was even worse was this, that the Leader of the Opposition was not in her seat; the Leader of the Opposition was not here; the seat that normally was occupied by the Chief Whip was vacant, he was not there. It is my understanding that he was indeed in the House sitting elsewhere; he was not in his seat and therefore I did not know where to look for Opposition Chief Whip and that it appeared as though nobody on that side was in a position to take a decision. The Member for St. Augustine on whom a lot rests was not in this honourable House, he was not here and therefore, you ask yourself the question, if this is a debate and if it is that hon. Members opposite are expected to respond to what the Government has had to say, in circumstances, you could in fact excuse the Member for Siparia, if anybody could be excused from excusing themselves from the House. But what the Member for St. Augustine has done was unforgivable because he had not yet spoken.

What it would have meant is that the hon. Member for St. Augustine should have been present here to hear what the Government had to say, if you do not hear what we had to say, how could you respond. That is what we understand debating to be, that the Government proposes its position; that hon. Members opposite give us their alternative, you examine what the Government has to say; they tear it apart if they feel that is not worthy of further consideration or if they are able to identify flaws in what the Government has had to say and then they make alternative proposals so that we could get some kind of idea of what they would have done in similar circumstances and so that the national community, having alternatives available to them can now decide, well I prefer this rather than that and therefore I would support this group rather than that group. That is how the debate goes.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Member for St. Augustine was not here was a great disrespect to the Members of the Government in particular [*Desk thumping*] and the Members of the House. And since we are not here in our own interest, since we are here to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the disrespect really was not to us, it was to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on whose behalf we serve. [*Desk thumping*]

I could imagine what the Member for Chaguanas was going to do, not having heard what we have to say here, he would have come with the prepared arguments that they always have and that whenever their backs are against the walls, it boils down to race. That is how they do it. That is what they do. I have seen it for thirty something years, I do not need to see anymore of it. The text was already written and the Member for St. Augustine had no interest.

But what was pathetic was in the absence of any leadership from the Member for Siparia, then nobody else on that side could take a decision. They saw what was happening; nobody else on that side could take a decision. Nobody else on the Back Benches of the Opposition could take a decision. In the absence of the Member for St. Augustine there was nobody there who had the authority to take a decision; that could never happen on this side. [*Desk thumping*] It could never happen here. That could never happen on this side. They talk about maximum leadership; if there is democratic leadership in this House, it is to be seen on this side. The maximum leadership and what happens when you have that, was clearly evident on Monday last when this House had to prematurely terminate its debate on the budget for fiscal year 2007.

Mr. Speaker, nobody could take a decision, and then the Member for Caroni East goes on the television to blame the PNM, goes on the television to blame the PNM. It is our fault because we were not here when we should have been here. We did not speak when we should have spoken.

**1.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance presented the budget; the Member for Arouca South spoke next; the Member for St. Ann's East then spoke and then the Member for La Brea. We did our part; we did what was expected of us. Every Member on this side was prepared to enter the debate at a moment's notice. [*Desk thumping*] The instructions to the Members on this side did not come from the Prime Minister; they came from the Leader of Government Business, the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central. That is how we conduct our business here. [*Desk thumping*]

If, therefore, the country was deprived of any proper debate on the budget for fiscal year 2007, then it cannot be laid at the doorstep of the Government. The Government always had, and now has, the option of expressing our point of view in another place. Under the Constitution, ministers of the government can go to the other place and speak on their portfolio. In other words, the truncation of a debate in this House in no way prejudices the Government's ability to have its

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arguments aired in the Parliament; we just do it in the other place, as we will do when the Senate meets next week to continue the debate.

What the country will not hear is what they think, because none of them sit in the Senate and under the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]—do you sit in the Senate? We will not hear any one of them. How many Senators are elected? Who did the people of Siparia elect, a Senator? The Member for St. Joseph's voice was heard and I want to congratulate him. [*Crosstalk*] While I am on that, Mr. Speaker, we were in Opposition twice. We considered a response to the budget for any particular year to be a significant opportunity to articulate policy and let the country know that for which we stood.

It was unthinkable for the Leader of the Opposition or the leader of the PNM, in whatever capacity, not to reply or not to lead his team in the response to a budget debate, but to cede that leadership position to someone else. That was what the Member for St. Augustine did. Could you imagine the Leader of the Opposition having spoken—and he has his own party now—and the time comes for us to hear what that party has to say, as articulated by the party's leader; instead of doing that, he chose to cede his leadership position to the Member for St. Joseph and not even to stay in this House. In other words, when the time came to speak, do you know what he did? He “ducked” and he ran. [*Desk thumping*] That is what he did; he ducked and he ran. The Government categorically rejects any liability in this matter.

Mr. Speaker, we have a true political party. If we had done that; if anybody on this side had done that; if that had happened here, as leader of the PNM, I would have had to account to the General Council. And not just me, the Leader of Government Business would have had to also account to the General Council of the PNM. How did you allow that to happen? Our political party is like that. To whom do hon. Members opposite have to account?

When the Member for Nariva sits there, sees what is happening and does nothing, it is because they know. They are experienced politicians now; they are not new. Therefore, they know that it is who catches the eye of the Speaker. If nobody speaks on that side, then the debate would be terminated on this side; they know that. Having done their mischief, having abrogated their responsibilities, they now want to write me and ask me to do magic and political footwork with the Standing Orders of this Parliament, to allow them to speak. When they had a chance to speak, they did not talk. When the time comes for them to listen, they want to talk; that is how it is. [*Laughter*] It is nothing more than that. Mr. Speaker, let this be a lesson to the national community.

It is not the first time that the Member for St. Augustine has operated in that way. That is what you call the new politics; that if you want to hold a meeting in a particular place, you let somebody else apply for the place, so that they do not know what the real purpose is; the politics of deception. That is the new politics. [*Desk thumping*] When the time came for the hon. Member to get up and state his party's position, as we looked around sadly, he was not there. But those of you who were here in 1990 would remember that this reluctance to properly lead, this reluctance to carry the mantle of leadership, even when it is thrust upon you, is not alien to the Member for St. Augustine. Let him tell you what happened in 1990 after he was released from the Parliament to go outside and form a government of national unity.

They believe we do not know. I know, because I was Leader of the Opposition at the time. [*Crosstalk*] It came to me that morning what was about to happen. They did not even have to look. Even before he was released, we put out a press release which said that the PNM would have no part of any government which came to power by means other than the democratic process. [*Desk thumping*] That is how we see it.

The Member went out, unable to put together his government of national unity and then he collapsed, unable to lead; entirely unworthy. They had much to say about the PNM moving from Opposition to government. The first time it happened, they said it was a fluke; the second time they said it was a fluke too, since it was easy to do. According to them, there was no real achievement by doing that. Since it is easy to do, I would like to see hon. Members opposite do it now. I challenge either the Members on the Front Benches of the Opposition or the Members on the Back Bench. [*Interruption*]

I am not giving way to the Member for St. Augustine. When he had his chance to talk, he did not speak. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, you know that I am always gracious. If the hon. Members opposite were participating in the debate—[*Interruption*] Me, I would always give way to the Member for St. Augustine, but not on this occasion. Instead, I would give way to someone who, perhaps, deserves it much more than him. I would give way to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Miss Lucky:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, for giving way. I take this opportunity, hon. Member for San Fernando East, to indicate that I am not going to cast blame, to respond to anything you have said on this particular issue or even to defend any position. Instead, hon. Member for San Fernando East, I want to unconditionally apologize

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to the entire nation, on behalf of the Members of the Back Bench, for what occurred on Monday, October 09, 2006 and for what led to the premature end of the budget debate.

Hon. Prime Minister, we on the Back Bench have addressed the problem. We have looked at our entity and have institutionally fixed the problem. We wish to assure you and all citizens that it will never happen again. New politics is not about not making mistakes. It is recognizing that mistakes will be made. It is about being big and brave and humble enough to admit when one is wrong; to fix it; to address it; to apologize for it; to move on and to learn from one's mistakes. That is what I am doing here this afternoon. That is my understanding of what new politics is.

Hon. Member for San Fernando East, I again thank you for giving way. I know that many of us have lost the opportunity that we had to address many of the issues that were raised, but I give the assurance, as you have done in the past, hon. Prime Minister, that especially with all the major issues, including crime and justice, which I wanted to address, to offer at no cost and at your convenience, if you see it fit and I hope you would, to have meaningful discussion as to how we can work together as parliamentarians to deal with fighting crime, because it remains a great problem for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I repeat: I unconditionally apologize for what occurred. It was not prompted by what you said. I have written about it today. I said it earlier on programmes. I am saying it today, because the disrespect and the mistake occurred in the Parliament, therefore, it is an apology to you, to the Speaker and to the nation as a whole.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that today I have a new hope for Trinidad and Tobago; that a Member of Parliament on the other side could get up and in the circumstances of what has happened, make the statement just made by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*] On behalf of my colleagues, we accept the apology without reservations. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Wind up the debate and stop playing preacher.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, "nuf said".

Mr. Speaker, we have the Member for Siparia and "doh" care how we say it; no matter how we say it, the Member insists on coming to this Parliament and



giving an impression that is entirely incorrect, because they know that at the heart of the economic expansion taking place today, at the heart of an accelerated government development programme, at the heart of our move towards Vision 2020 is the reserves of oil and gas with which God, in his wisdom, has endowed us. Therefore, in order to treat adversely with us, what they seek to do is to come to the Parliament and give impressions about oil and gas that are entirely incorrect.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I would just take a few more minutes to deal with this question of the reserves. The Member for Siparia argued that the oil and gas reserves were running out, that based on the reserves to production ratio of oil and natural gas, our reserves would end in a certain number of years. That is how they interpret it. The reserves to production ratio is the amount of reserves you have for oil in barrels, divided by the rate at which you are producing the oil, calculates the number of years the oil would then last. We have made the point before and we wish to make it again: To put that interpretation on it is to misinterpret the realities. Let me just look at the figures for oil. They are very well demonstrated with the oil production. *[Interruption]* Give me a minute, Mr. Speaker; I thought I had the figure for oil, when, in fact, I have the figure for natural gas. *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Moonilal:** You should apologize for the incompetence. "Yuh" get four days and you are still not prepared?

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry; the table that I thought I had, in fact, is the wrong one. I have the one for natural gas, but it is the table for oil which demonstrates the point more adequately.

### **2.00 p.m.**

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, the reserves to production ratio gives you an indication of how long it will last, all things being equal, things are never equal, and the way it is used is to tell you the level of exploration activity in which the country ought to engage. So that over time, the reserves to production ratio fluctuates and in fact, over the last 10—15 years, that reserves to production ratio has fluctuated from about 9.2 to as high as 15, 16, 17 and it goes back down depending on what discoveries are made in relation to the amount of oil that is produced.

In other words, to say that the oil has a finite time based on our analysis of the reserves to production ratio is to misrepresent the facts to the national community. We have said it before, and we say it again that we discovered oil in this country

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in 1866 and have been producing oil since then. We have been exporting oil since 1908 and to this time 2007, 100 years, Trinidad and Tobago is still an oil-exporting country.

Therefore, when the Member for Siparia sought to use the argument of reserves to production ratio to cause panic in the population and give the impression that the oil or natural gas were about to run out, it behooves those of us on this side to make the records pellucidly clear, and to let it be known that no such eventuality, no such adversity is about to evolve upon us. [*Desk thumping*] And I hope we do not have to spend time in this Parliament again putting that to bed.

Mr. Speaker, forgive me if I appear to dwell on the Member for Siparia because she is the only one who said anything to which I could respond. I wish I could have responded to the Member for St. Augustine, but regrettably, that is not to be. I wish I could have responded to the hon. Member for Oropouche, but that was not to be, he did not give me a chance. [*Crosstalk*] Had he had something to say, I still feel that we may not have had much to respond to. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Hinds:** He is spending too much time in St. Lucia.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Siparia in speaking about the old age pension gained headline by saying that it is \$3 per day for old age pensioners, but Ministers have given themselves a very large increase in salary. That is basically what she said.

Mr. Speaker, one would get the impression that the report of the Salaries Review Commission was not laid in this Parliament and was not the subject of some discourse between hon. Members on both sides, or you would get the impression that the Member for Siparia and hon. Members opposite chose not to accept any salary increase. Not only did they accept the salary increase, Mr. Speaker, but argued that they did not get enough and like *Oliver Twist*, put their hands out and I quote: "Please sir, could I have some more?" That is what they said.

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is hypocrisy on the part of hon. Members opposite. I do not know what they do and in fact, the way they behave in this Parliament, the members of the population must be wondering why they pay us any money at all. The way they carry on, they are not even here. Why do they pay us at all?

For Members on this side, I would like to let this honourable House and members of the national community know that the PNM takes its responsibilities

to the population very seriously. In the 36, now 41 constituencies in the country to the extent that we do not have an elected parliamentary representative, the party designates a Senator to oversee the work of that constituency, or to the extent that we do not have enough Senators to do it, we identify a senior party official to look after the particular constituency. So for the PNM, we have somebody in every constituency who looks after what happens there. They have responsibilities. Each Member of Parliament is mandated to go to his/her constituency on a weekly basis.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not exempt. Every Thursday afternoon while I am in the country, the Prime Minister goes to his constituency office in San Fernando and sees the public himself, and every week on which I go the numbers range between 70 and 105 persons whom I see. In my own constituency, I am not the only one in that office who sees people. Sometime the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs comes to San Fernando and sees the public also and we have an array of persons who provide services.

Some look after representation; some look after self-help; we even have a health programme; we give free legal advice from that constituency office; there are people to assist young persons who want to access any of the training programmes; we have people who assist in labour if persons are unemployed; there are people who come for housing and there are people who look after that and so forth. Right across the gamut of responsibilities of a Government, we have people in our office on a Thursday evening to provide services to the electorate. [*Desk thumping*].

I would like to invite the Member for Siparia to come to the San Fernando Office to see how it is done. Come, you will learn something from it. More than that, every member of the PNM who has a responsibility for a constituency is mandated to meet with his or her constituents on a regular basis to let them know what the Government is doing. Speaking for myself—and I do not want to involve all my colleagues in this matter—for this year I have held 22 of those meetings. That is what we do.

On a weekend—and all Members of Parliament are mandated to do it—I go out in my constituency. Again, since I have assumed the office of Prime Minister, I do it less now than I used to then. It is still done. I drive around my constituency, I look to see the physical conditions under which my constituents live, I talk to people as I see them, wherever I meet them I talk with them. We do that. So that we have a programme in which PNM Members of Parliament engage and everybody does it.

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Mr. Speaker, we attend our constituency group meetings, constituency executive meetings, meetings of the General Council and meetings of the central executive. In other words, we discharge a party responsibility also. I can tell you I do not go to cocktail parties because I do not have the time to do it. I sleep no more than four and a half hours every night.

**Hon. Member:** “That is why yuh fall asleep here.”

**Hon. P. Manning:** They are quite right. And if I come to the Parliament and from time to time I doze, it is because of that. [*Desk thumping*] That is correct. That is the reason.

Mr. Speaker, I would be the first to apologize; I would apologize for dozing.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Apology accepted.

**Mr. P. Manning:** It is accepted? You see, Mr. Speaker, I sleep four and a half hours a night. It is work, work, and more work in the interest of the people. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is. And now that the Minister of Education is my wife, the lights hardly go out in our house. I know what you want me to say, Mr. Speaker. I know what is going through your head. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Partap:** What are the hours you sleep?

**Hon. P. Manning:** “I could tell yuh what the Member for Couva North said once yuh know, but I won’t do that.”

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the PNM categorically rejects the assertion that we are not working for the salary we get. We reject that, we work very hard and all my colleagues do it, all the Ministers. Look at them. They have ministerial committee meetings to attend and their portfolios to see about. They all do it. So we work very hard and if the Parliament agreed to a salary for Ministers that is significantly above what it used to be because they might have been underpaid in the past, then why must the Member for Siparia seek to give an impression to the national community that is entirely incorrect?

We work very hard. If they do not work then they must say so, but every one of them who talks about salary gets two. The Member for Caroni Central has his private practice. Right or wrong?

**Dr. Rafeeq:** Wrong. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central has his pharmacy in his wife’s name. Right or wrong?

**Dr. Rafeeq:** Wrong, wrong. The pharmacy has always been my wife’s, it was always registered in my wife’s name and it is hers.

**Hon. P. Manning:** That is what I just said. Mr. Speaker, the wife of the Member for Caroni Central has a pharmacy, the revenues from which she keeps entirely for herself and the Member for Caroni Central knows the family benefits from it anyway. What is that? Right or wrong?

**Dr. Rafeeq:** Mr. Prime Minister, it is just that I do not have the wherewithal to give my wife a job like you have. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Shot boy!

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, one of the best persons I have ever employed in terms of giving them a job is Hazel Manning, as the Minister of Education of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Partap:** You cannot say otherwise.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Siparia has the option to have two jobs. Right or wrong?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I have one job. I serve the Parliament fully.

**Hon. P. Manning:** If she has one it is by choice, Mr. Speaker.

Member for Fyzabad, how many jobs do you have, one or more than one?

**Hon. Member:** “He unemployed.”

**Hon. P. Manning:** Silence. The Member from Nariva, how many jobs do you have?

**Mr. Partap:** One.

**Hon. P. Manning:** I know you have one, do you know why? Because nobody will employ you. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

They started it, Mr. Speaker. Do not come to the Parliament and give the impression that we are being paid under false pretences, we are not.

Mr. Speaker, in 1996 I got at least one article per day for 10 months, none of them complimentary. I had to endure that. I am not complaining, I am merely telling the national community the other side to this story because those who talk about it like to give only one side. I am not complaining, but that is what we have to face.

It is when a country is in economic difficulties, Mr. Speaker—when a business is in difficulty do you know what it does? It fires the management and puts into that business the best management it can find. We have done that at

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British West Indian Airways (BWIA). The management at BWIA today is extremely highly paid, but it is necessary because expertise does not come at a low price and we are seeing where it has led to and it is going to lead to a new Caribbean Airline.

In the same way when a country is in trouble, the citizens normally try to put in place the best government they could find and the fact that they have consistently chosen the PNM Government is a credit to the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I take it one step further. If this country is today enjoying a period of economic prosperity it is as a result of the cumulative efforts of successive PNM administrations, notwithstanding what intervening governments would have done. [*Desk thumping*] And I am going to demonstrate the point: one of the most significant decisions ever taken in this country was in 1956. When the PNM came, Eric Williams took one decision in the face of scarce financial resources, the decision was that the priority would be placed on education and Trinidad and Tobago stands out today in education and an educated electorate because of a seminal decision that was taken by Eric Eustace Williams and the government of 1956. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.15 p.m.**

Many of them on that side—not many; every last one of them on that side—to the extent that they have any education at all, got it from the PNM—benefited from the PNM. I defy any one of them to get up and say no. It was George Michael Chambers, in 1985, as Minister of Finance, who, in the face of declining oil prices—because the oil market had collapsed in 1983 and, therefore, declining revenues—decided still to give a tax break to the manufacturing sector to allow them to retool. It is that decision that caused the head of CIAC, speaking to me last year, to come here and say that the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago is the most competitive in the Caribbean and, in fact, now has surplus capacity that it has to look outside the Caribbean region if it is to continue to expand and, therefore, a lot of our companies are now going global. But we could trace it back to one decision of a government headed by George Michael Chambers who, at the time, was the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

If this country went into a period of economic contraction and from 1994 the economy began to expand, and today we are experiencing the 12<sup>th</sup> straight year of economic expansion, it was because of a series of decisions taken between 1991 and 1993. Let me tell you what they are. Let them dispute what we are saying.

The first thing we did was liberalize the economy and when we were doing it we were the subject of a campaign from the business community. It was on television and radio and it culminated in the statement: "Write your MP". Do you remember it? There were bumper stickers. One gentleman who parades on the radio today as a defender of the poor was outside of the Prime Minister's office with pot and pan all over his head; all in the yard. You see, we took a beating for doing it. We liberalized the economy. We opened up the economy to competition, because as we said at the time, as you do that, inefficient businesses would go but more new and efficient businesses will spring up that are competitive on an international basis and, therefore, they will set the stage for a more stable economy that can compete in the new world economic order that is emerging around us and, therefore, set the stage for a more stable, viable and sustainable Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Hon. Member for San Fernando East and Minister of Finance has expired.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I seek your leave to move Standing Order 90(1) to waive the—

**Mr. Singh:** You want to waive the Standing Orders?

**Mr. Valley:** Yes, to allow the Minister of Finance an opportunity to respond and so inform the public of what he needs to. I so move that the Minister of Finance be given unlimited time in his winding up of this debate.

**Mr. Singh:** Unlimited time? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Hon. Members, the question is that Standing Order 41(2) be suspended to give the Prime Minister time to complete his entire address.

*Question put.*

The House divided:   Ayes       18       Noes       13

AYES

Valley, Hon. K.

Manning, Hon. P.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*

*Friday, October 13, 2006*

Narine, Hon. J.  
Boynes, Hon. R.  
Beckles, Hon. P.  
Rahael, Hon. J.  
Roberts, Hon. A.  
Bereaux, H.  
James, Hon. E.  
Hart, Hon. E.  
Callender, Hon. S.  
Seukeran, Hon. D.  
Job-Davis, Hon. E.  
Hinds, Hon. F.  
Khan, F.  
NOES  
Rafeeq, Dr.H.  
Persad-Bissessar, Mrs. K.  
Sharma, C.  
Partap, H.  
Nanan, Dr. A.  
Baksh, N.  
Moonilal, Dr. R.  
Singh, G.  
Dookeran, W.  
Yetming, G.  
Ramsaran, M.  
Khan, Dr. F.  
Lucky, Miss G.



*Question agreed to. [Desk thumping]*

**Hon. P. Manning:** I thank hon. Members for their kind indulgence. You understand what I am saying, that hon. Members opposite, when they had their chance to talk they did not want to talk; when it is our time to talk they do not want us to talk. In other words, they are against the institution of Parliament! *[Desk thumping]* That is what they are against, because that is what Parliament is about. *[Crosstalk]* You had your chance. What did you do with it when you had it? Let me know, please. I am prepared to give way for you to tell me what you did with your time when you had it!

**Dr. Khan:** You are afraid.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Afraid? All I would say in response to the Member for Barataria/San Juan, I have never ducked and I do not run. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Valley:** In 35 years. *[Crosstalk]*

**Mr. Speaker:** No, please. Hon. Members, do not get too excited and carried away. Please, listen to the Prime Minister.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your protection. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, we faced the slings and arrows of those who felt they were threatened by the policy decision. To be true, it was an unpopular policy. We did that. We were urged not to liberalize the exchange rate; do not float the currency. We floated it and whereas in the month in which we floated it—I think it was the month of April 1993—our net international reserves at that time was minus \$10 million. At the end of September 2006, our net international reserves stands at US \$6.5 billion, a successful policy, if ever there was one. *[Desk thumping]* The PNM was at the heart of all these things.

The third critical decision that we took was to reverse a policy that was carried out by governments, prior to us, of not allowing natural gas to be exported as LNG. In 1992 we made a C-change in our policy position on that. We reviewed it and we came to the conclusion that we must export LNG. We were opposed by them and others, inside and outside the Parliament. We maintained it, and if today we have significant revenue from natural gas, it is because of LNG.

Last week I was in Boston and I had the opportunity of addressing Caribbean students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. The morning was chilly and I told them that I was feeling a little cold and I was not accustomed to cold, but I would not complain about cold in Boston because Boston represents

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the best market for Trinidad and Tobago LNG, and that on a cold day in Boston, 70 per cent of the gas that they use comes from Trinidad and Tobago; I am pleased to be here in cold Boston. It means revenues, and much of what we can do today is as a consequence of our gas revenues. We are insignificant in respect of oil.

This morning the Cabinet looked at the figures for the month of August. Our oil production was 151,000 barrels per day in that month. Our gas production was the equivalent of 753,000 barrels per day of oil equivalent, for a total oil equivalent of 885,000 barrels per day oil equivalent for Trinidad and Tobago. All this is as a result of decisions taken by the PNM between 1991 and 1995. And we took another decision to review the tax regime, to put incentives in place to stimulate exploration activity. So the argument of the Member for Siparia cannot be true when she spoke about reserves to production ratio. It cannot be true!

We have discovered the reserves and our production today, of natural gas, is 4.2 billion cubic feet per day in the month of August. For a small country it is an achievement. Our policies were so unpopular, economically, that we lost an election in 1995. But we always knew that even if we lose an election it is only a matter of time before we come back in. The difference between them and us—because they like to talk about election budget, election this and that—politicians think about the next election; statesmen think about the next generation. [*Desk thumping*] So while they talk about election budget, we are thinking about 2020 vision; we are thinking about Trinidad and Tobago of the future. [*Desk thumping*] What are we putting in place? What kind of country is going to emerge here? What kind of society are we building for our children? That is what the PNM is about!

So that every successive PNM government, whatever Trinidad and Tobago has emerged to be today, it is PNM governments that have done it. In the case of Eric Williams, I cite only one decision. He has done many, many more, but I cite one. In the case of the administration under George Michael Chambers, a critical decision in terms of the manufacturing sector, and in the circumstance of this PNM administration, the number of decisions that we took in the 1990s that landed us in trouble, but which today people are hailing as some of the more significant decisions ever taken in respect of the economic and social developments of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Nanan:** Thank you very much for giving way. Does the Prime Minister agree that the manufacturing sector is on the verge of collapse? I will tell you why. Because the labour contracts have not been negotiated recently and the price

of labour will go up and we will see what is going to happen. The manufacturing sector will not be able to export into the Caricom market and there will be a drop.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Tabaquite talks about the manufacturing sector being on the verge of collapse, let me read the figures as published in the Review of the Economy. In the year 2002, the manufacturing sector grew by 3.8 per cent; in 2003, the manufacturing sector grew by 12.2 per cent; 2004, the manufacturing sector grew by 8.6 per cent; 2005, the manufacturing sector grew by 11.6 per cent; 2006—projected figure—the manufacturing sector would have grown by 11.8 per cent. That is the sector that the Member for Tabaquite is now arguing is on the verge of collapse. They will collapse by themselves; leave the manufacturing sector out of that. If they want to collapse, let them collapse. The manufacturing sector is thriving, and thriving well and, in fact, making its contribution to national development, employing people, creating jobs and making revenues available for expenditure in health, education, social services, and so on.

The Member for Siparia says that old age pensioners are being given \$3 a day. If you divide \$1,150 by 30—when I used to go to school it used to be more than three—it is about \$38 a day. How much is it? Let me see if anyone could divide.

**Dr. Moonilal:** They cannot understand what people are saying.

**2.30 p.m.**

**Hon. P. Manning:** When you had your chance to talk you did not want to talk, you know. Leave me to speak, please. You had your chance; you did not speak. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I crave your protection from the Member for Nariva. I am merely trying to make my contribution which he chose not to make when he had a chance to make it.

When this matter of the increase in old age pension went to the Cabinet, the meeting before the budget was presented, Members of the Cabinet had a full discussion on the matter and were of the view that the increase should be a little greater than what he had targeted. Because of the circumstances we said all right, we would proceed with the budget as written but we will examine the matter to see the implications and whether we are in a position to do anything more. I am now pleased to advise this honourable House that when Cabinet met this morning

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it agreed to increase the figure by a further \$100 per month. In other words, the figure has gone to \$200 increase and it would cost the people of Trinidad and Tobago \$78 million.

We know it is money well spent. Let them not believe that that is money being wasted or we did it because of anything they said. [*Interruption*] It had nothing to do with you. The Cabinet had already flagged that when it met before. The budget statement was pre-empted. I did not have to say it then. I am saying to you now that it has been done as a consequence of which our senior citizens will be in a better position today to cushion the effects of increased prices than would have been the case prior to the presentation of the budget for fiscal year 2007.

I noticed that neither the Member for Siparia nor the Member for St. Joseph nor the Member for Naparima had much to say about the increase in rum prices. Sorry, alcohol prices. While I could see the annoyance on some of their faces when I talk about rum, that is understandable. They had little to say about casinos. Let me tell you why. The hon. Member for St. Joseph presented a budget in September 2001, in this honourable House. Remember he presented a budget which was passed in the House at the time, but which was never enacted into law because the Finance Act was never passed?

By that time the government had changed. Listen to what the Member for St. Joseph had to say. I am quoting from the budget speech, September 2001.

“Mr. Speaker, as part of the worldwide trend towards limiting and discouraging smoking,...”

Eloquently put by him. I did not know that he could talk so.

“I propose to increase the excise duty on tobacco products, the import duty on tobacco products of common market origin, and the tobacco tax and extra-regional tobacco products, by 15 per cent (respectively).

I also propose to increase the excise duty on locally manufactured rum...”

What he has against rum I do not know. He singled out rum as opposed to other things.

“rum, beer and other alcoholic products by 15 per cent, while the import duty on rum, beer and other alcoholic products of common market origin will be increased by 15 per cent. Import duties on rum, beer and other alcoholic products from extra-regional sources will be increased by 30 per cent.”

**Dr. Rowley:** Identical measures.

**Mr. Imbert:** Identical figures.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Identical. I am not complaining. Of the few of them who spoke none of them got up here and said that they supported the Government's measure. They support it but they remained silent. When they support a measure that they feel is unpopular they remain silent. That is the new politics. *[Interruption]* You are right. That is their new politics. They do not want anybody to know that they support it because they are not strong enough to stand by the courage of their convictions, if they have any convictions at all. I do not refer to the Member for Couva North. When it comes to conviction they do not have it. If you support it say you support it. To support the Government, they are not about to do that because they have this view about Opposition and Government where they must oppose everything we do. That is the new politics of the Member for St. Augustine.

I have with me a document, *The Report of The Caribbean Commission On Health And Development*. It was commissioned by the Heads of Government Meeting in Nassau. I think it was in 2003. Last year or this year at the Caricom Heads of Government Meeting in St. Kitts, the Chairman of this commission who is the Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Sir George Alleyne, presented this report and drew a startling set of facts to Heads of Government assembled in St. Kitts. Let me read selectively from the document for the benefit of hon. Members. Chapter 1. *[Interruption]* As long as you did not talk I will talk. An hour from everybody; how much is that? Five hours at least from your side. *[Laughter]*

“Trends in Mortality

A mortality analysis for the years 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000 showed a consistent trend in which non-communicable diseases were the commonest cause of death overall over the period, with heart disease, cancers, cerebrovascular diseases and diabetes mellitus, constituting the four leading causes of death.

The four leading causes of death in the Caribbean in 2000 were all NCDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes. These four conditions accounted for 47 per cent of deaths in 1980 and 51 per cent in 2000, the most recent year for which relative mortality date is available. The major non-communicable diseases in the Caribbean share common underlying risk factors namely, unhealthy eating habits, physical inactivity, obesity, tobacco and alcohol use...”

I repeat.

“tobacco and alcohol use and inadequate utilization of preventative health services.”

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That is what these wise men headed by Sir George Alleyne had to say. They had much to say. It goes on elsewhere. I will come to the point just now. Wherever you go through the whole document, it tells a story of high mortality rates of non-communicable diseases and a high cost in treating with non-communicable diseases.

“Tobacco consumption has traditionally been identified as one of the most important contributors to ill health in modern societies. It also identified a position for Trinidad and Tobago that is worse than the rest of the Caribbean.

Stroke predominates in the Caribbean. Coronary heart disease is higher than what would be expected especially in Trinidad and Tobago and this may reflect the increased risk in the population of East Indian origin.

The death rates for diabetes appear to be 10 times higher in Trinidad and Tobago than in the USA.”

This is what the report says.

Many of the non-communicable diseases of which they speak are adversely affected by tobacco smoking and alcohol. Therefore, when the Government of Trinidad and Tobago comes to Parliament and says, “We want to increase the excise duty on tobacco; we want to increase the excise duty on alcoholic products”; we are seeking to discourage the use of tobacco and alcohol, so that we do not have to spend much money in the future to cure diseases which have been contracted and already become chronic and could have been avoided by a different lifestyle. It is preventative in nature.

**Dr. Rafeeq:** You are making a very interesting point. Is there any evidence from the past that when the prices of cigarettes and alcohol have been raised that consumption actually went down?

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, recently, we had a consultation in Trinidad on this matter. After the Heads of Government considered this report, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was so alarmed by what it saw that it decided to host the first symposium on it which was held on September 15. Arising out of that one of the recommendations they made to me was to do something about the price of tobacco and alcohol. In other words, the experts have recommended that. It is not the figment of the imagination of Prime Minister or hon. Members on this side. It was the considered opinion of experts sitting at a meeting that the countries involved should take that course of action. We accepted the advice of the experts and we have done what we have done in this budget. If that does not work we would do something else.

The hon. Member for Caroni East can be assured that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will not sit idly by in the face of these statistics and reality and do nothing. We will not be guilty of the inaction of which hon. Members were guilty when the House broke up prematurely in the debate one week ago. We will do something about it.

I will be the first to admit that what we have done may not have the desired effect. If it does not have the desired effect then we will examine it again and do something else. Let it not be said that we did not do anything. We have taken the first steps to discouraging the use of alcohol and tobacco. The Minister of Health, as Ministers of Health in so many parts of the world, is now examining this question of cigarette smoking and tobacco use in public places and will advise the Government appropriately. The Government would make announcements in due course as to what else it must do in this regard.

You cannot smoke now on a BWIA plane. It is a smoke free environment. In a number of public buildings in the United States and developed countries you cannot smoke anymore. We are seeking to bring Trinidad and Tobago into the mainstream of contemporary thinking on these issues, suffering as we do to a greater extent than many of the developed countries from the ill effects of alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking, as we seek to bring our country forward to developed country status. It also means proper standards of health care to which the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will subscribe.

There is one other point I want to make. The excise duties that have been put is an increase in the excise duties that exist now on alcohol and tobacco. It is not an equivalent increase in the price of a bottle of alcohol. There are those who are saying that we have raised the price of rum by 15 per cent. That is not true. If we had raised the price of rum by 15 per cent I would have expected to have a howl on the other side. That is where the Government of Trinidad and Tobago stands.

The Member for Siparia also chose to remain silent on this question of private members' clubs, casinos. You had a part on it or there is a part you skipped out? What did you say?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I indicated that my concern was with the workers in the industry and the Government needed to ensure that these workers—just as Caroni workers were sidestepped and traumatized—would have options for other jobs. My concern is for the workers who will be dislocated from the industry.

**Hon. P. Manning:** In other words, if appropriate arrangements can be made for the workers, you agree with the policy?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Check the *Hansard*. [Laughter] I repeat my point. My concern is for the workers. As you said hon. Prime Minister, just one second more if you are giving way, the matters I did not raise was because we had no difficulty with them, or else I would have raised them.

**2.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, in arrears, and under pressure, I had to get it out from her like dentist pulling teeth with pliers. [Laughter] Mr. Speaker, they do not subscribe to truth and to being upfront. If you support it, you support it; nobody could do you anything for that! If that is your view; if you support it, then you support it! If the Government has put a proper measure in place and you agree with it; then you agree with it! Say it! Nobody could kill you for that! That is what you believe! They would not even say that! One man would not even be present so you could not ask him whether he agrees or does not agree! He would not even be here! He is just masquerading as a leader of a political party.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** You getting to be a little unkind.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Unkind? Mr. Speaker, the Member for Siparia says I getting a little unkind. I was a leader of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, and I remember one evening I attacked the Prime Minister on a particular matter and the Government put eight speakers at me. When they were finished with me, Mr. Speaker—the last one was the Member for Couva South, who is not here today, and who is never here—when he was finished beating me for about 45 minutes, he said: “I will grind you into the dust.” Mr. Speaker, we are not on any of that but we are making the point that the Member for St. Augustine, the leader of a political party, from his actions in this budget debate, has demonstrated that he is unworthy of the position of trust in which he has been placed. He is unworthy of it! He is unworthy!

[Mr. Dookeran attempted to rise]

**Hon. Members:** No, no, no.

**Hon. P. Manning:** You had your chance to speak. You had your chance.

**Dr. Rowley:** No. When time to listen you want to talk.

**Hon. P. Manning:** You will talk in another debate. If the Member for St. Joseph asks to speak, I will give him way because he spoke in the debate. You cannot run and want to talk now! [Interruption] Which one he did first?

**Mr. Imbert:** Ducked and ran.



**Hon. P. Manning:** Ducked and ran. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, with respect to private members' clubs, I think that everybody understands that casinos are illegal in Trinidad and Tobago, because that is the law. Our disagreement with what has been taking place—put in place, incidentally, by a minister of government of which they were a part; it was their government; Mr. Kuei Tung who did it and the technocrats in the ministry begged him not to do it—has led to a situation where there is a proliferation of casinos in the country, but by law casinos are illegal.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has signified for some time our disagreement with this. We understood all that was involved in it, and we were trying to discourage the development of the casinos. I have all the facts here of exactly how we did it. In the 2003 budget, we put on a gaming tax:

“For every regular Poker Table	\$8,000 per annum
For every Caribbean Stud Poker Table	\$60,000 per annum
For every Black Jack Table	\$40,000 per annum
For every Baccarat Table	\$32,000 per annum
For every Dice Table	\$20,000 per annum
For every Roulette Table	\$40,000 per annum
For every Rum 32 Table	\$60,000 per annum”

I did not say VAT 19 table; a “Rum 32 Table”. I continue:

“For every Sip San Table	\$60,000 per annum”
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And so on. We signified clearly and significantly that we did not agree with this thing. Mr. Speaker, it has not worked! They sidestepped it!

In the budget for fiscal year 2004 we went back at it again. This is how it was put in that budget:

“The Government proposes to increase the fee on slot machines from \$2,000 to \$10,000 per annum, the fee for regular Poker Tables from \$8,000 per annum to \$20,000 per annum, and with the exception of pool tables which will fetch a fee of \$2,000, the unspecified tables and devices will now attract a fee of \$10,000 per annum.”

We hit it again in budget 2004. It did not work!

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In budget 2005, we decided to signal our attention to put a licensing regime in place and that did not work! You could go all over the country today and see signs marked “Casino” with cards with Queen of Harts and all sorts of things on it. People are being openly enticed to go and play in casinos where it is against the law. Therefore, the actions we have taken in this budget have been taken because our other actions have not worked. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is not just the casinos. With respect to the online games we took the same position. This morning, the President of the United States signed into law a provision that bans online gaming in the United States of America. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we are seeking to do here. [*Interruption*] Internet gaming. We are saying that the suasion, all the discussion has not worked, and we had indicated in the budget what we proposed to do.

Subsequent to that we met with the Association of Members’ Clubs. I have to congratulate them because they understood why we did what we did. They did not think that the Government would have acted as strongly as it did. They have said that they have one concern with what we have done. They were afraid about the immediacy of what we said we were going to do, and they feared that if we did that a number of people who now make their livelihoods out of that industry would be on the streets with the consequent dislocation of families.

Mr. Speaker, it is an argument that we find persuasive. Our decision to outlaw casinos, in other words, to enforce the law on casinos that makes casinos unlawful, we intend to uphold that law. But what we will now do; we will now meet with the Association of Members’ Clubs and we will have discussions on the phase down of it, rather than the immediate action we intended to take. Coupled with that, Mr. Speaker, the Government proposes to institute—in collaboration with the Association of Members’ Clubs—a retraining programme that will allow the workers in the members’ clubs to be retrained in other areas of production in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

With respect to online gaming, there has been a lot of misconceptions in the public domain as to what has happened. The contract with Gtech expired on September 05, 2006 and, therefore, to avoid the automatic renewal of the contract under the existing contractual arrangements—because that is what is there, it is automatically renewed for five years—the Government entered into discussions with Gtech to do two things: one, to remove the automaticity; it has been extended for five years, and two, to put in a clause in the contract that allows the Government to terminate online gaming whenever the Government wishes, so that we now have the flexibility to do it. We will work out a schedule of reduction, just as we

said we would do, of these games until online games are eliminated from the landscape in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Miss Lucky:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. When the issue was being dealt with in the presentation of the budget, with respect to casino gambling I, in fact, pounded the desk because I do share the concern that it does lead, amongst other things, to the destruction of family life. But a suggestion had been made by me last year when I thought the clear indication was being given about the Government's concern about casino gambling.

You are right, hon. Member for San Fernando East; they did not seem to deter any persons from establishing their various businesses throughout the country. In fact, sometimes before 8 o'clock in the morning you can see these establishments operating and persons going there and leaving, looking exceedingly sad, no doubt, by the amount of money they have lost.

The suggestion I had made last year was that we do like other countries which have gambling. There is the issue of the law and, I agree, it is illegal and that which is illegal should not be supported. But I did, in fact, ask the Government to consider establishing a regulatory commission because many times there could be—I am not saying there is—the fixing of dice, the loading of dice, as we say—machines that are operated in such a way that there is no fairness when it comes to the operation of the various games and so on. That is done in other countries because there is the clear recognition, when you are playing on a slot machine, for example, you are hoping that you have a fair chance, but there could be a situation where the machine is so configured and fixed that you do not get it.

I am suggesting, coupled with what you have said, hon. Prime Minister, in terms of the phasing down process, bearing in mind that there would be some establishments now recognizing that their timeline is short for making profits—I am saying it quite openly—that consideration still be given to this establishment of the body, which allows them to go, without any breach of any constitutional rights, to enter premises, check machines on a random basis, just to make sure that until we can get it the way it is supposed to be, that is in conformity with the law, that players are still given a fair chance, which I think now really does not exist. In other words, they need to be lucky; no pun intended. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, the Government can, indeed, give some consideration to the proposal made by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. We will exam it to see whether we ought to institute it.

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Mr. Speaker, I hope I have clarified those two issues. I should tell the persons employed in the private members' clubs that we are taking this step at a time when the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is expanding. Our unemployment level now on average for the year to date, is 6.9 per cent, it is below 7 per cent and already we are seeing indications that we may have reached full employment, at least, in certain parts of the country. The time, therefore, to transfer labour from one sector of the economy to the next is now. We are reasonably certain that as we take this step to bring private members' clubs within the pale of the law, it is unlikely to result in any dislocation of persons by way of employment, since as the economy is expanding there is the opportunity for us to replace them in other productive sectors; one of which, lending itself immediately for consideration, is the tourism industry, where there is a shortage at this time. Particularly, in Tobago in the tourism industry there is a need for more people to see themselves as part of it, to take part in the tourism industry, so that we can maximize the benefits that industry provide to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The economic strategy being pursued by the Government is not understood by all. I think it is worth our while to spend a few minutes looking at it. Remember we liberalized the economy in 1992, 1993, 1994, coming right down; we liberalized the exchange rate; we took the decision to export natural gas by way of LNG and together with the decision taken by George Chambers' government, to stimulate activity in the manufacturing sector which had the effect, and also in the context of an educated workforce, a decision taken by an original PNM government, in 1956, the stage was set for economic expansion.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, in the quarter in which we left government in 1995, the unemployment rate was 16.4 per cent. The unemployment rate when we came in 1991 was 20.3 per cent. In other words, the unemployment fell by about 4 percentage points in our period of governance. But so secure, so stable, so successful was the strategy that even under the government that succeeded us, without doing much—because there is not much to which they can point that they have done in that six-year period—the unemployment continued to fall. When we came back into government, it was at the level of 11.7 per cent. The quarter in which we took over—the fourth quarter of 2001—the unemployment was at 11.7 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, you will forgive me but I cannot resist reminding hon. Members that when we targeted full employment in 1995, we were accused of all kinds of things. Today, with an employment rate of 6.9 per cent average for the year, full employment has been reached in certain parts of the country and we are very

proud of that. We have achieved the objective. In the period in which we have been in governance therefore, it has fallen from 11.7 per cent to 6.9 per cent, that is 4.8 percentage points; a very significant development.

**3.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, our strategy, having put the environment in place, having put the framework in place for economic activity, is to stimulate and to lead that economic activity by way of a government development programme, and our priorities for development have been education first, health second, housing third, social services fourth, all within the context of a safe and secure environment—the question of national security. That is the way this Government has established its priorities, and it is working.

We target, for example, job creation by way of the construction sector and while hon. Members opposite and a lot of uninformed people in the national community had a lot to say about the level of Government spending, the Government knows exactly what it is about. That it increases its expenditure bringing down the unemployment levels and when the unemployment levels reach where they are at this time, where we would be approaching full employment, then the next step would be to maintain public sector spending at that level. That is the strategy. You maintain the public sector spending at that level and you now move to deal with all factors that are perceived to be causing inflation in the country because inflation is an important indicator for us.

We targeted an inflation rate of 7 per cent and the inflation rate right now is 9 per cent. It has gone above what was anticipated. Contrary to what has been projected by the Member for Siparia that it would be a runaway year, double digit inflation next year; that is not so at all. Because the Government had put in place a ministerial committee and the ministerial committee is looking at the construction sector which is chaired by the distinguished Member for Diego Martin East, and they are looking at the factors in the construction industry which lead to inflation, one is the supply of aggregates and we have moved to put out additional acreages for that. Secondly, the price of cement and its availability. We have taken steps to liberalize that. The Caricom Secretariat has just given us a three-year derogation on the Common External Tariff and it is going to be removed so we could import cement and keep the market satisfied on the basis of imports at a lower price and to keep the market in balance, to keep the prices down to ensure that we do not have any undue and improper increase in prices in the area of cement. We are looking at steel to do the same, because we have a monopoly in supplying steel in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Take concrete blocks. There is also a very conservative private sector because it was signalled that all this construction was coming, yet there is a shortage of clay blocks, shortage of concrete blocks and if the private sector on its own is not prepared to make the investments designed to change the shortages, to increase the supplies, then the Government is going to have to partner with appropriate business entities, domestic or foreign, to ensure that it develops a capacity in the country that can sustain its long term development at levels that are consistent with its national aspirations.

At the same time, another contributor is food, and, therefore, we depend and we are relying more heavily now on the two acres to Caroni (1975) Limited workers, and many leases have already been given out and we have announced and are about to invite a request for proposals for the establishment—we started off as five, it is now eight large farms in Trinidad and Tobago and there are two more that we will put in place using lands in Chaguaramas on the basis of arrangements between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Cuba, Cuba being a country that has established and developed an expertise in this area and from which the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago can benefit. So all the factors which are causing inflation are factors that we are now examining and looking closely into, and trying to keep under control by increasing the supply.

Over and above that, it is important that I say that there is no developing country in the world, in circumstance similar to ours, that has sought to embark on as an ambitious a development programme as we have, without having to rely on some foreign labour. Turnkey arrangements—and there are a number of the bigger projects that we are now doing which are being designed outside of Trinidad and Tobago, because the local design sector is at capacity; they are being designed outside of Trinidad and Tobago and the construction arrangements will be on the basis of imported labour into the country. As you do that, including the supply of materials from abroad, you can expand your rate of development without impacting too significantly on the inflation figure. And, therefore, some of that would form part of our strategy, at all times ensuring that the domestic construction sector is as fully satisfied as is prudent to have them to ensure that there is no disadvantage to the locals as opposed to those from outside on the basis of the strategy that we are now pursuing. It is going to work. They did it in Dubai, they did it in Malaysia; they do it all over the world. It is not rocket science. There is no mystery to it. The Government knows the model and the Government has thought this thing out and is proceeding with that model. That is

how we are doing it, and by those arrangements, not only are we going to maintain an acceptable rate of development, but we are going to contain the inflation and keep that also within acceptable levels.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is particularly pleased over its social sector policy and the policies it has pursued particularly to assist the elderly and young people. We take young people. Recently I toured housing projects in the country and I met a group of—*[Interruption]* when you had your chance to speak you did not speak. Do not try to talk on my time now. You know I am very gracious. I will always give way to you, but not in this debate because you did not use your time when you had a time to use it. If the Member for St. Joseph would like me to give way, I would be very pleased to do so, or the Member for Siparia, but the Member for St. Joseph has made no such request of me. And do not try to prompt him now. He is not taking any instructions from you. Leadership has been ceded to him so he is the leader I recognize in this debate, not you.

I toured housing projects in South Trinidad and I met young people from the MuST programme and I was amazed at what they had to say to me. In fact, I recently attended a graduation exercise of several cycles of the MuST programme where 1,684 students graduated, plenty young people and many of them said—because when the programme was conceived I know what it was targeted to do. Many of them said that they thought they had no chance in Trinidad and Tobago until the MuST programme came along. The MuST programme is for people who do not have a full certificate, who may not even have completed secondary school properly, and many of whom felt that there was no hope for them in this society. Even though you can apply to the MuST programme by way of sending in an application programme, the MuST programme started off by recruiting people on the highways and byways and it arose out of a series of visits I made to various constituencies two years ago, and that is the result of it.

The MuST programme is training many people especially women in construction skills; the HYPE programme is doing the same thing except at a higher level. We started off the HYPE and MuST programmes at level one and we are now moving to level two of the Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualification (TTNVQ), a higher level of skill so that you end up with the skilled workers that the country and industry need. That is what we are now doing. It is the MuST programme, it is the HYPE programme.

In agriculture it is the YAPA programme. We are training two cycles of 500 per year, it is 1000 per year, exposing people to established farmers so that they

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get first hand on-the-job knowledge of how to do the farming so that they can come out of that and be part of a productive farming and agriculture sector and in some instances themselves become the farmers towards to which they aspire. That is in the YAPA programme, all this for young people.

On-the-Job Training (OJT). When hon. Members opposite came into Government in 1996, one of the first things which they did was to stop the OJT programme which, at the time, employed 5,000 young people. I do not know what passed through their heads, what they were thinking about, that caused them to do something like that. We started it back and it is running in excess of 5,000 at this time. Young people who are able to access this programme to be attached to established categories of skilled people, to learn from them by association and after a period of time, six months for most professions, you are able to apply for a job and when employers say I want experience, you are able to say to the employer, I have six months experience On-the-Job Training programme and, therefore, I am able to do the job that you have advertised, I apply. Giving them hope and opportunity and a way. It gets rid of much of the hopelessness that afflicted our young people and it sets them on the path to proper family life and a sustainable future. That is what it does.

These programmes are so many that it is difficult to remember, but the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is particularly pleased about it, as indeed, we are pleased about the programmes and the progress that we have exposed our disadvantaged people to where we have increased the level of government subventions to them to ensure that even if they suffer disabilities, they are able to make a much better life on the basis of the activities, of actions of a caring and benevolent Government. That is how we see it.

Mr. Speaker, it is necessary and, perhaps, it is worth our while to spend a minute on the Government's housing programme. The Minister of Housing, my good friend, I was his guest recently when we toured housing projects in South Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, Tarouba, 419 houses; Orchid Gardens, Pleasantville, 580 houses; Corinth Hills, under construction, 778 houses; Retrench, under construction, 328 houses, Golconda, just over the hill, 340 houses; Debe, 488 houses; and Taradale Gardens, which we are going to be using for squatter relocation, 334. Do you hear the numbers? Because it is part of an overall programme to provide 8,000 housing starts on an annual basis in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] There are housing problems. When we started the programme in Savannah Villas, and we did not have a chance to allocate the houses by the time



we left office and when they came into government they allocated four and five houses to their friends so men make plenty money out of it while the people of Trinidad and Tobago who needed the intervention of the State for proper housing could not benefit from it. Now they are complaining.

Mr. Speaker, in Carlsen Field, one of the largest housing projects in Trinidad and Tobago is now under way. Lots of houses. In other words, it is a programme of housing activity that recognizes that there is a significant shortage of housing in the country, and to make any impact on it you have to build houses on a mass scale. We anticipated a deficit of 100,000 which we can wipe off in 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, it is now clear that as houses are built, people apply and we are beginning to see the true demand for housing. It is way in excess of 100,000 and, therefore, this housing programme, which was initially conceived to go on for 10 years would have to go on much longer than that. The PNM makes the commitment that it would carry on its housing programme for as long as it takes us to satisfy every housing requirement in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**3.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, we are not like them. We understand that the cost of housing construction has gone up. We understand that it would not be possible for many of our people to buy houses unless there is a subsidy. The Cabinet recently took the decision to take up the infrastructural cost of land development and charge for the land cost, a price to be determined by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. So that the Caroni workers, the 7,257 beneficiaries of the Caroni programme, are now having their cost reassessed in the light of the clear enunciation of this programme and they will find that the service lots made available to them will now be made available at prices considerably lower than they anticipated when the agreement was signed a couple years ago. Say something! It is announced. We have announced it now. This is the new policy.

Mr. Speaker, 1,000 of the lots are now available. Oh, we have taken another decision and we must make it clear. Initially we talked about lots only for Caroni workers. The literature and the experts tell us that we should never put one category of persons in a housing estate. We have decided to increase the number of lots in central Trinidad from 7,257 to 20,000. We are going to build 20,000 lots. We are going to ensure that the Caroni workers get the lots to which we have committed, but other lots will now be available for other members of the national community who wish to participate in that programme and in that way bring

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about the mix in the housing development that the experts tell us is very desirably required as you develop housing in the public sector. That is how we are going to do it. It is a very good policy.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of construction and the cost of mortgages are also high. A number of people came to me and said they were the beneficiary of a house, but now that they have gone to TTMF, they do not qualify; their salary is not enough. We have announced in this budget, an approach to that issue.

1. We will take up the cost of infrastructure;
2. We will sell the land at a cost that the Government determines; and
3. We will give them mortgages, instead of at 6 per cent, at 2 per cent interest and for salaries up to \$8,000 a month, with a cap of \$450,000.

Under the previous arrangement, if someone's income was \$1,440, which is the minimum wage, that person with a 6 per cent mortgage would have been entitled to a mortgage of \$75,000. Under the new arrangement, that figure goes to \$113,246. If someone's salary is \$2,500 per month, in the past under the old arrangements, that person would have been entitled to a mortgage of \$129,290. Under the new arrangement, that person is entitled to a mortgage of \$196,530. If the salary was \$3,000 per month, under the old arrangement a mortgage of \$155,050; under the new arrangement they are entitled to a mortgage of \$235,690; for \$3,500, the mortgage goes from \$180,970—that is what they would have been entitled to under a 6 per cent mortgage arrangement—to \$275,095 at the 2 per cent arrangement. For a salary of \$4,500—one or two people—previously mortgage would have been \$232,500; the new mortgage to which they will be entitled is \$353,423. If the salary is \$5,000 per month, old mortgage, \$258,219; new mortgage, \$392,824. If the salary is \$8,000 per month, we have capped this figure, it would have been \$345,160 mortgage under the old arrangement, under the new arrangement, the figure goes to \$450,000. We cap the figure at that. We do not believe that such a concessionary arrangement should be applicable to houses that cost more than \$450,000.

By these arrangements, many people who could not have qualified in the past would now qualify for housing. Further, Mr. Speaker, it is retroactive to September 2002, when the Finding Your Way Home Programme was initiated.

**Dr. Rafeeq:** Thank you very much for giving way, Mr. Prime Minister. These rates that you are mentioning, are applicable for the purchase of Government houses or private homes?

**Hon. P. Manning:** Public sector housing only. To be able to do it in the private sector would have cost an amount of money that we did not think we could afford. We understand the concern in the matter and really we would have liked to do it in the private sector too, but we do not see that we can do it because it cost us \$450 million. Because of the cost of the programme we do not see that we can do it in the private sector at this time.

We take it a step further. We are not unaware that when people get a new house they need appliances. Some may have appliances before; some may not and one of the problems that they face is that they have to buy appliances, but they take them on hire purchase from Standards and Courts and whoever else. At the end of the month they therefore will have two debtors to face. The Government has decided that in addition to the mortgage we will give you a loan of \$15,000 that you will include in the mortgage over a 25-year period, so that you can buy appliances and at the end of the month you have one debtor to face, which is a state agency.

So we feel that this intervention is a significant one. But we have taken it one step further. We are now saying we have now instituted the transferability of mortgages. Many people under normal circumstances, age 50, 51, 52, still are in need of houses, but cannot get a mortgage by virtue of their age. The working life goes up to age 60. The Government has now said that with the transferability of mortgage arrangements, any time during your working life, you can get a mortgage and if you die then the mortgage is transferred to the beneficiary of your estate, who is in a position to continue the mortgage payment and the house moves from generation to generation. That is a proper way of doing things and I am very proud of it.

At the same time, we institut4ed now the Rent-to-Own Programme which is to say that if you feel that your emoluments will not allow you to access the mortgage programme but that you feel in the future you will be able to access, you can now go into the Rent-to-Own Programme for a period of five years, where two-thirds of the rent at the end of a five-year period is applicable to mortgage and one-third stays as rent, that becomes a mortgage down payment and you can convert to the mortgage programme.

If after five years you cannot do it, then you get an extension of three more years by which time it is hoped that you qualify for the mortgage programme.

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It is a very forward-looking policy that we feel will have a significant impact on the lives of a number of people who hitherto have not been able to access housing but now will be able to do it as a result of this programme that we have put in place.

Therefore, if we discuss these matters with a certain amount of pride, it is because we know that we are impacting on the lives of our people and we are taking them from a state of dependence and underdevelopment ever increasing into a stage of development in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Augustine was not here. If he were here, he would have heard the Member for St. Ann's East speaking and he would have heard him say.

**Hon. Member:** He was here at that time.

**Hon. P. Manning:** He was here? Let him get up and say that.

**Hon. Member:** You are not giving him the opportunity to get up.

**Hon. P. Manning:** You are quite right. Absolutely!

He would have heard the Member for St. Ann's East, the Minister of Social Development, say that the poverty rate, the preliminary figure, is now 17.1 per cent. It is important that I say it because they live by a 1990 figure of 35 per cent. We have come a long way from 1990 to now and it is a pity we do not have intermediate figures because we would see that they made little impact on that; that it is largely as a result of what this Government has done that the rate has now fallen to 17.1 per cent, 19 per cent in Tobago and just over 16 per cent in Trinidad. That is what it is from the 35 per cent of 1990 that they spoke about. *[Interruption]* I am saying that the figure is down and we are not surprised because a PNM government has put policies in place designed to bring it down. *[Desk thumping]* It is not happenstance; it is not accidental. It is so because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago designed it to be so. It means that our policies are working and we have no doubt that over time—even 17 per cent is unacceptable to us—as our policies continue to bite, they will see that poverty coming down until it reaches levels that are consistent with poverty levels that exist in the developed countries. *[Desk thumping]* Developed country status is where we are *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence just to spend a few minutes on governance arrangements in this country. It is important that we talk about governance arrangements. It is clear that as the country progresses; as the country moves forward economically;

as the country moves forward socially, so it is necessary to take the country forward in terms of the arrangements for proper governance. We have heard time and again from Members opposite about discrimination and racial bias and everything that is wrong about racism, as if to say that the PNM is responsible for some of these things. Some of these things are invented by some of them, but we are not here to engage in that kind of discussion today.

We are saying that if they have been able to convince their supporters—and they have in some instances—that something is wrong with the Government's arrangements, then the Government of Trinidad and Tobago thinks it necessary to re-examine them and under our local government situation, we have come up with the approach where there is a power-sharing arrangement between central and local government.

We are saying that central government policy/local central government execution of policy, except in certain areas and except through the established state agencies that have been set up for certain purposes. It means that whoever wins an election at the national level, looking essentially at two major races in the country, at the local level, because of the way those local government elections have panned out over the years, nobody is excluded from the process of governance, and it begins to address this question of winner takes all. Winner does not take all. Even if you lose an election, the mere fact that the execution of policy is to be carried out at the local level, now brings all groups in the mainstream of the process of the country's governance. That is the proposal.

As we talk about the reform of local governance, we are looking at the powers of local government. We are looking at new management arrangements. You will now have an executive council similar to what we have in Tobago. You now have to have full time politicians to carry out the work of an executive council and it opens up a whole new vista. One of the things we are going to have to do is to see whether the existing arrangements of 40 local government bodies are optimum. I think it is too much and it looks to me more like somewhere between 10 and 14. Perhaps 12 might be the appropriate figure. We do not know. We will examine it and arrive at a figure. Once we arrive at it we are coming to the Parliament. Nothing happens without appropriate parliamentary scrutiny and since it has to be enacted into law, it is the Parliament that is the law-making body. That is it.

There is a very interesting proposal in our local government document which talks about all chairmen of local government bodies sitting in the Senate with a voice and not a vote. That is one proposal. I have seen a second proposal, Mr. Speaker, that is not in our document at all. It did not form part of PNM policy, but

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has come out of the Ellis Clarke version of the Constitution. He is saying instead that the local government bodies should select two senators to sit in the Senate. Mr. speaker, I have to tell you that approach is one I believe not to be without merit. We have not discussed it as yet in the Parliament. I am just for the time being giving a point of view. As the discussions continue on constitution reform, these are some of the things we will have to consider. What is clear is that there is a solution to the problem. More than that, the Ellis Clarke version puts a particular proposal on the table that is worthy of some scrutiny in the Senate, part of which is identified on the basis of proportional representation following a general election.

**3.30 p.m.**

The PNM is resolutely opposed to proportional representation and, therefore, we are going to examine that proposal very closely before we could say yea or nay, to see where it is applicable in a modified form.

The search for a new governance arrangement is on; that can meet the requirements of as many of our citizens as possible. One is the question of winner takes all, which will be dealt with; secondly, people being left out of the mainstream of governmental activity, and, of course, the third is the decentralization of authority, not devolution, to the local government bodies, so that at the local level, people have a much greater say in the way their affairs are conducted.

We are in an interesting time. The roundtable discussions in Whitehall have already started and we hope that by December 31, 2006 the Government can put out a green paper. I hasten to point out for the benefit of the national community that a green paper is a discussion document. When the Government puts out a green paper, it means that we are asking you to consider this; now the consultations begin. Meanwhile, while the roundtable discussions are taking place in Whitehall, two of the members, Dr. John La Guerre and Dr. Selwyn Ryan, will be going around the country listening to what people have to say, explaining what the two drafts contain: the principles of fairness draft and that one, to hear the views of people, so that those can be made available to the round table, as the Government seeks to formulate its own position on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, it is a very interesting time that a lot of changes are taking place in Trinidad and Tobago. The stage is being set for the Trinidad and Tobago of the future. One of things that are going to revolutionize this country is the mass transit system. The request for proposals has already been issued. I think the proposals are in since August 28, 2006 and by the end of the year we expect to

identify a preferred bidder with whom negotiations will take place, to decide how this thing is going to be done to put a new transit system in the country, which we expect will be fully operational by 2011. So it is in transportation, health, electricity and so many other things.

It is a pity that all of this could not find its way into the parliamentary record at this time. It would have found its way, had hon. Members opposite kept faith with the population and sat in the Parliament and engaged in the debate which they are elected to do. Since they did not debate and since they took the opportunity to bring the debate to a premature end, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have been deprived of much of the information that the Government would have wished to make available to them by this mechanism.

Mercifully for us, the Government has another mechanism available, that is the mechanism of Ministers speaking in the Senate and when the debate resumes in the Senate next week, a number of Ministers from the Lower House will find their place in the Senate and place on the parliamentary record, the position of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Meanwhile, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House now resolve itself into Committee to consider the Estimates.

**Mr. Speaker:** The House will now go into Committee. I now ask all strangers to vacate the House. Before we go into Finance Committee, may I suggest that we take a little recess and we will return at 3.50 p.m.

*Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.*

**3.35 p.m.:** *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

**5.15 p.m.:** *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

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

*House resumed.*

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

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, October 20, 2006. I wish to inform my colleagues that on

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that day the Government plans to debate, to finality, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order 2006. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** That is Divali weekend.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 5.17 p.m.*