

*Leave of Absence**Monday, May 21, 2007***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, May 21, 2007*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for St. Joseph, Mr. Gerald Yetming, asking for leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2001. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. The Quarry Policy White Paper for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, the Government is able to answer questions Nos. 33 and 74 on the Order Paper today. I am asking for a deferral of two weeks for the other questions.

Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East): Mr. Speaker, I note with some concern the fact that question No. 5, which has been on the Order Paper the longest and which has been deferred for 11 occasions of two weeks and one occasion of one week, that the substantive answer to that question was given in a post Cabinet press conference and the answer was not laid on the floor of this House. Therefore, I regard this as contempt of this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I agree with the hon. Member for Caroni East. If you look at the Order Paper you will see it has been there for quite some time. I do distinctly remember on the last occasion when the Minister was here he had promised to answer this question on the next occasion. When that occasion did arise the Minister was not prepared to answer the question.

On the matter raised by the hon. Member for Caroni East, I did recall hearing or seeing a post Cabinet conference, when the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs alluded to this question and he gave, not perhaps an entire answer, but he did make references in that post Cabinet conference, which would have answered some part of this question.

I am making a formal ruling today that questions on the Order Paper ought not—it is disorderly and completely out of order to answer questions on the Order Paper other than in the House. [*Desk thumping*] Questions must first be answered in the House, then you can refer to it elsewhere subsequently. It is a discourtesy to this House for any Minister not to answer a question in the House. So I am ruling that all questions must first be answered in the House.

The hon. Member for Naparima.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Brian Lara Stadium

5. (a) With regard to the Brian Lara Stadium, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise:
- (i) the status of work being conducted;
 - (ii) the expected completion date; and
 - (iii) the cost overruns to date?
- (b) Could the Minister state what would the stadium be used for in relation to Cricket World Cup 2007? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT)

36. Could the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education list:
- (a) all the contracts entered into by the University of Trinidad of Tobago (UTT);
 - (b) all consultants whose services are engaged by UTT and the fees paid to them;
 - (c) all legal fees paid to attorneys-at-law for and on behalf of UTT; and
 - (d) all foreign personnel of UTT and their respective salaries? [*Mr. G. Singh*]

**Community Development Fund
(Status of)**

44. With respect to the Community Development Fund (CDF), could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs inform this House:
- (a) what is the present status of the fund; and
 - (b) the number of recipients and quantum of money disbursed and the purpose of the allocations for fiscal 2005/2006? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Community Development Bursary Programme
(Details of)**

45. With respect to the Community Development Bursary Programme, could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs indicate to this House:
- (a) the number of recipients of bursaries under the programme; and
 - (b) the quantum of moneys disbursed for fiscal 2005/2006 and for what given purpose? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**SWMCOL/CEPEP Investment Club
(Money Market Account)**

58. Could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment state:
- (a) the purpose of the fund established in the form of a money market account in the name of “SWMCOL/CEPEP Investment Club”;
 - (b) the signatories to that account;
 - (c) the current balance of that account;
 - (d) the average monthly balance of that account since its establishment; and
 - (e) the total amounts contributed annually by SWMCOL to the “SWMCOL/CEPEP Investment Club”? [*Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

**SWMCOL
(Contracts from 2006 to date)**

60. Could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment provide:
- (a) the names of any consultancy firms employed by SWMCOL during the period 2006 to date; and

- (b) the duration of the contracts and the contract amounts? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Allocation of Funds
(Details of)**

70. Could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs state the allocations made to TUCO, Soca Monarch and Calypso Tents for the period 2005–2007? [*Mr. G. Singh*]

**Chief Justice Legal Proceedings
(Cost of)**

72. Could the hon. Attorney General provide the total cost to date in respect of all legal proceedings involving the Chief Justice? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

E-Teck, InterFix LLC and InterFix Ventures LLC

75. Could the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry list the principal terms and conditions of the Shareholders Agreement between E-Teck and InterFix LLC and InterFix Ventures, LLC? [*Mr. G. Singh*]

**Blood Sugar Monitoring Devices
(Supply of)**

76. Could the Minister of Health advise:
- (a) whether the Government intends to supply diabetics with blood sugar monitoring devices including glucometers and testing strips free of charge;
 - (b) If the answer to (a) is in the negative, why not; and
 - (c) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister indicate when the programme will be initiated? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**National Chutney Foundation
(Subventions by the Government)**

33. **Mr. Nizam Baksh** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs:

Would the Minister indicate whether any subventions have been given by the Government to the National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago for the propagation and development of this art forum?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Hon. Eulalie James): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two established organizations in Trinidad and Tobago responsible for the showcasing of Chutney music, namely the National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago and the Chutney Soca Organization of Trinidad and Tobago. Massive Gosein Roving Tent is also involved in the promulgation of the chutney art form.

The National Chutney Foundation is not in receipt of a fixed annual subvention from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Instead the Government, through the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs allocates funding to the National Chutney Foundation, the Chutney Soca Organization, as well as Massive Gosein Roving Tent to stage their respective chutney programmes. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs have disbursed a total of \$855,000 to the Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago for the three-year period 2005 to 2007, as detailed hereunder:

2005	\$282,000
2006	\$363,000
2007	\$210,000

The Ministry has also disbursed a total sum of \$844,785 to the chutney Soca Organization of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*]—for the staging of the Chutney Soca Monarch competition for 2006 and 2007, as detailed hereunder:

2006	\$324,785
2007	\$520,000

With respect to the Massive Gosein Roving Tent, a sum of \$322,300 was disbursed to this tent between 2005 and 2007 to further the development of the Chutney art form. For the years 2005 to 2007 a gross total of \$2,022,085 has been expended for the propagation and development of the chutney art form.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Baksh: Supplemental. Could the Minister indicate how much subventions the two organizations received? She mentioned two organizations in receipt of subventions.

Hon. E. James: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the answer to that question, but I could get it for you.

Mr. Baksh: Supplemental. Could the Minister indicate to us whether any consideration is being given to the National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago for a subvention as promised by the Prime Minister to them?

Hon. E. James: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of that at the moment.

Details of Valeo

74. Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East) asked the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry:

- (a) whether the company Valeo has developed and sold any health industry related hardware and software;
- (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister indicate the price and purchaser?

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Valeo is a software development company that does not design or develop health industry related hardware. The company is developing health industry related software through Medical Data Caribbean Limited (MDCL). The software training programme trains young nationals of Trinidad and Tobago to become software developers.

The locally developed MTS would be marketed by InterFix Ventures through its Atlanta Georgia, USA based operations. Valeo Software Limited has for 15 months engaged in a software development effort to create a contemporary medical transcription platform for the medical transcription and health care industry. The benchmark addition is currently alpha testing at MDCL. Alpha testing is expected to be completed by April 16, identifying faults and difficulties with the software and rectifies them.

Following this, the data test lasting approximately four weeks would increase volume to ascertain any lingering balance. Once the data test is completed the software is ready for limited commercial release.

Mr. Speaker, the second part of the question. As previously indicated, Valeo does not sell health industry hardware. MDCL is currently using benchmark in the alpha test mode, an interim solution based on old technologies, named TransFix, was indeed put into production 15 months ago at MDCL and was enhanced with modules that have been directly transferable to benchmark. MDCL is entitled to use the software as it passes through data and production cycles at no cost.

Additionally MDCL saved over US \$2 million by utilizing the interim solution transcripts since its inception; also at no cost. As the project development moves from alpha to data test and finally into production release, sales will be made immediately following release.

The answer to (b): As previously indicated in 74(a) Valeo is in the development and final testing phase and has not sold any health industry software to date.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

Gladys Gafoor Report

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing the following matter of urgent public importance. Namely, the failure of the Government to place in the public domain the Gladys Gafoor Report on the Health Sector, which was submitted to his Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on Friday, April 13, 2007.

The matter is definite since it relates to a specific commission of enquiry whose terms of reference were and I quote:

"To enquire into the adequacy of existing public health care services to meet the needs of the public, including the special needs of the elderly, visually impaired and handicapped. The adequacy and quality of the public health services provided by professional and non-professional staff of public health care facilities and the adequacy of medical equipment and availability of drugs and pharmaceuticals to meet the health care needs of the public."

The matter is urgent because the report diagnoses and puts forward recommendations that seek to address the problems in the national health sector.

The matter is of public importance because there is an immediate and compelling need to address the state of Trinidad and Tobago health care system.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this Motion by the hon. Member for Caroni East does not qualify under this Standing Order and can be properly brought under Standing Order 11.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have given leave to the hon. Member for Arouca South to make a personal statement. However, I will ask your indulgence on her behalf; she will make this statement later on in the proceedings.

**INCORPORATED TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BILL**

Question put and agreed to, That a bill to repeal and replace the Presbyterian Church Incorporation Ordinance, 1893 and provide for the incorporation of certain persons as Trustees of The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago, be now read the first time.

Bill accordingly read the first time.

POLICE SERVICE REGULATIONS

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [May 16, 2007]:

Be it resolved that the Police Service Regulations, 2007 be approved.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Sharma: What is the arrangement? We were told that we were doing the Equal Opportunity Bill and we will come back to that later.

Mr. Speaker: No, my understanding of it was, we were going to complete this and then do Equal Opportunity Bill. On the last occasion the hon. Leader of the Opposition was on her feet; unfortunately the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not with us at this time. So if there is any other Member wishing to contribute—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, when we adjourned the House there was an undertaking that the Minister of National Security and his people would meet with some Members of the Opposition to come to an agreement. I understand that they have come to some agreement with respect to the Regulations. If that is so, to me it is a matter of winding up and accepting the regulations and moving on; if that is the situation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, if that is indeed the case—because as a matter of fact we did make a contribution to the Regulations—we may be interjecting as the Minister delivers because there are certain things which we ourselves have not looked at and we are looking at now.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I think there is only one issue really; the issue which I raised in your absence; medical injuries to persons whilst they are within the service, but whether they are covered, whether they are currently entitled. I hope you would address that.

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, also the NIS, where officers in the Second Division—

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps when the Minister is winding up you can intervene. The hon. Minister.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members. Mr. Speaker, coming out of the debate in the House of Representatives on the Police Service Regulations, 2007 on Wednesday, May 16, a decision was made to adjourn the House to treat with further proposals to the regulations to be advanced from Members of the Opposition. A meeting was convened comprising representatives from the United National Congress, Congress of the People, Ministry of National Security and the Office of the Attorney General.

Mr. Speaker, let me now address the concerns raised. In regulation 3, to reconsider the height requirement as a criteria for appointment as a trainee. One of the concerns as advanced, was the need to lower the requirement in the Regulations, that males be at least 167 centimetres in height, and females are at least 150 centimetres in height. It was argued that this criterion has a high probability of eliminating a lot of competent applicants.

The recommendation was made that an analysis be done to determine the average height of Trinidadian males and females. Such an appreciation may serve a more useful purpose in arriving at a suitable height. At this time the recommendation cannot be effectively treated with, due to the present time constraints. It has however been duly noted and consideration will be given in the future.

Regulation 4(7): Recruitment Procedure for Trainee. The proposal advanced to define the members of the panel with responsibility for interviewing a candidate for appointment as a trainee was accepted. The members of the panel are: the recruiting officer, who shall be chairman; a police social worker; the director of human resource of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; a representative from the recognized Police Service Association and a person appointed by the Commissioner of the Police Academy; so that has been accepted.

Regulation 9(4): Appointment to the First Division. The proposal submitted was that a police officer in the Second Division, who also obtains a Bachelor's Degree, should be given the same opportunity for appointment to the First Division as persons who are appointed into the First Division from outside the police service. An officer in the Second Division will be appointed based on

experience and merit. So that an officer who has a Bachelor's Degree and not much experience may not be considered for appointment into the service.

To cure the deficiencies in the regulation, the following have been introduced: In regulation 9(2), to provide that an officer in the Second Division who is suitable for appointment on the grounds of experience and merit or having obtained the Bachelor's Degree or produced proof of having reached an equivalent or higher standard of education.

The Commissioner is given the power to exempt only an officer from training who is appointed into the First Division from the Second Division. A person appointed from outside the service must undergo a course of training. The regulation as originally drafted was silent as to whether the Second Division officer must also undergo a course of training.

A candidate under regulation 9(1)(b), that is, a person coming from outside the service was required only to satisfy the requirements in regulation 3(1)(g); this was an error. He is required to satisfy all of regulation 3(1) other than 3(1)(g) and (j).

A person who already has a degree will be exempted from regulation 3(1)(g), which deals with passes in O' levels and A' levels and 3(1)(j), which deals with passing a written examination. So that has been corrected as recommended.

Regulation 12: Principles Applicable to a Constable on Probation. The proposal was that some mechanism should be put in place to ensure supervision is sympathetic. This is not a legislative but an administrative matter. However, as part of the overall revisions to the recruit training curriculum, a field training programme has been implemented.

This phase of the training regime provides the trainee with a continuation of his or her education and allows for an evaluation of the trainee. In essence, it is a form of on-the-job training that is geared towards the duties and responsibilities inherent in police work.

After completion of academic and physical fitness training at the Police Academy, each new constable will be assigned a Field Training Officer (FTO) at a specified division within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. For 12 weeks the new officer works closely with the FTO, who is required to show the officer the finer points of fieldwork and good policing.

The FTO is required to provide periodic reports on the progress of the new officer in acquiring the skills of a police constable, and there we expect that the whole question about sympathetic supervision will be addressed.

Regulations 14(3): Dismissal of a Constable on Probation. The proposal to delete in line two the word "may" and insert "shall" was rejected. The Commissioner who decides to dismiss a constable on probation, before so doing must give him or her written notice of his intention together with the reasons and any relevant facts. The constable is requested to respond in writing. The Commissioner, who must consider the response, is given the discretion to conduct a hearing. That is the reason why we have to stay with "may" rather than "shall".

Regulation 19: Principles of Selection for Promotion to and within the First Division. The proposal to delete and insert a new regulation 19(13) was accepted. The intent of the new regulation is to promote equality of treatment to officers in the First and Second Divisions.

An officer in the First Division who is on the order of merit list and who is not promoted during the validity of the order of merit list is to receive an allowance. The provision will be similar to regulation 65(1) and is intended only to reward competence and boost morale; a point made by the hon. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Sharma: How is it done now?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Sharma: How is it done now? None?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: None, so all we are doing now is to make sure that no one is disadvantaged from the first and/or the Second Division. In regulation 19(4), the proposal to define the panels responsible for conducting the Promotional Assessment Process was addressed. The members of each panel shall possess appropriate skills, expertise and qualifications in policing, particularly in the area applicable to the rank under consideration.

Regulation 20(2) and (5): Principles of Selection for Promotion to and within the First Division. The proposal to re-examine the scores allocated in this area was accepted. The original provision entitled an officer to be interviewed by the Promotion Advisory Board only if he has been allocated 50 or more points based on his performance appraisal report and examination mark. Now, as in regulation 20(2), 50 points was changed to 40 points, so that an officer will only be interviewed by the board after scoring 40 or more points.

In regulation 20(5), deals with criteria for promotion in the Second Division. After careful consideration, it was decided that the performance appraisal report be moved from 50 points to 40 points and the examination mark be moved from

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25 points to 35 points. The proposal by the other side was performance appraisal report, 40 points and examination mark, 35 points. The argument was that too much weight was given to a system, that is the performance appraisal report, which has been accused of much subjectivity.

Regulation 32(4): Termination of Appointment on Grounds of Inefficiency. The proposal to delete the word "may" and insert "shall" was rejected. The Commissioner is given a discretion to terminate an officer's appointment, notwithstanding a recommendation to this effect by a senior officer, thus the need for the word "may".

Regulation 64: Attorney Allowance. The proposal to pay a similar allowance to an officer who is performing the role as a prosecutor did not require inclusion as this is already treated with. Officers acting as prosecutors are paid an allowance in this regard.

Mr. Panday: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My argument was that if you have a police officer, say a constable, in the police service, who is qualified as an attorney and he is still a constable, that the allowance should be the difference between the wage of a police officer and a State Counsel I.

Assuming this officer stays in the police service and he becomes a corporal, that that figure, which was differential should be kept as his allowance. But as it stands at this time, my information is that he is given only \$1,000 allowance as an attorney; for example that does not reach that of a State Attorney I. If we want to keep the officers there we must make it lucrative. If we have officers in the police service who are attorneys-at-law we should try to keep them there. And a way to keep them there is to make their remuneration lucrative, hence the reason I had made that proposal about allowances for prosecutors. Because, as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre indicated, a prosecutor will be there and he will have to go to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP); keep back a case from going on and we want to speed up the system of justice and if you have a policeman who is an attorney-at-law, indeed we could cause the system to move forward faster.

2.00 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Hon. Member, I take the point on board and we will look at it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: We will look at it, you would not do anything.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: But we looked at everything that was proposed and we did something about it.

Hon. Member: Behave yourself.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I mean, come on, that was not the experience, look at how many things we have accepted. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, regulation 66(7)(b), work week and working hours, the proposal to insert after the words “time off” the words, “at the option of the officer was not accepted”. The provision as drafted already gives an officer where he “works in excess of forty hours” three options, namely: Overtime pay, compensatory time off or overtime paid.

Mr. Panday: Hon. Minister, experience in the police service is that option is not the option of the officers but the authorities. The officers say that if they work overtime, they are sometimes forced to take compensatory time and that they cannot take compensatory time to the grocery to buy food.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Again, hon. Member for Princess Town we will have to look at it.

Mr. Panday: No, no, hon. Minister, could we put in regulation “at the option of the officer”, and we will deal with it?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I do not think it is as easy as that, because, of course, you have realized that we did not just take these suggestions. We had to discuss it with the police organization, so that, let us look at it, I will give you the undertaking in the shortest possible time. The first point that you made is easy for us to come with some amendments to the regulations, but we need to have these regulations, and I give you the assurance that we will consider it, if it is worthy of an adjustment we will make the adjustment. Okay?

Regulation 190(c) “pension to dependant of officer killed on duty...” The proposal to change widow to spouse was accepted, this will cater for cohabitational relationships in keeping with the Cohabitation Act.

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, before the hon. Minister sits, kindly ask him if they have addressed the situation when in the First Division it is compulsory that a First Division officer goes on retirement at 60 and in the Second Division police officers are forced to go at 55—so are forced home—and when a Second Division officer goes home he has to sit at home and wait for five years to qualify for national insurance payments. That is an issue that we would probably like you to look at, because what they want him to do? Go and work Amalgamated or go and hustle? The other issue which I had raised and I would like some clarification, compensation for injury—

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I am not finished yet.

Mr. Panday: Oh, you are not finished, I apologize to you.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Thank you very much. *[Interruption]* In regulation 190(f), to increase the gratuity paid to the widow or children, or to any of the dependants of an officer who has died while in the service to three years instead of one year as proposed in the regulation.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, the Protective Services (Compensation) Act No. 22 of 1996 which is applicable to police officers also makes provision for compensation for death arising out of, and in the course of employment in the sum of an amount equal to three years gross salary at the date of death. In other words, taken together, both the Police Service Regulations and Act No. 22 of 1996, the law already provides for benefits up to four years.

Mr. Panday: So you are saying the officer is worth more dead than alive. *[Interruption]* You are saying that this is money to the survivors. What about an officer who is injured and is alive? *[Interruption]* That is the point I wanted to raise, not only a case where he is dead and you are paying compensation to the spouse or the widow, but what will you give an officer who has been injured and is still alive?

Hon. Member: He gets paid.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: There is a formula now that exists.

Mr. Panday: That formula is crazy. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: We will look at that, we will look also—

Mr. Panday: You will look at that also.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: So, that is the third item for which it is that we will look at and come back to you on.

Mr. Sharma: On the same point, where you are identifying spouse and children, does it include dependants of the officer, stepchildren, adopted children for which is legally required?

Mr. Valley: Children is a defined term. *[Crosstalk]*

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Children is a defined term. *[Interruption]*

Regulation 88, “Scholarship and study leave”, the proposal that an officer who embarks on a course of study approved by the Commissioner is eligible for study leave was addressed. The regulation will now provide that:

“An officer who undertakes a course of study approved by the Commissioner is eligible for study leave and for such allowances and benefits as may from time to time be provided for other public officers.”

It is important that the course is one that has been approved by the Commissioner before such benefits are afforded to the officer.

Mr. Speaker, there was some other miscellaneous, there a number of proposals dealing with as it were, drafting issues, these were not accepted by the drafters.

Mr. Singh: I want to thank the hon. Minister. Mr. Speaker, I participated in the meeting and I want to thank the Minister for taking on board the suggestions of my colleague in the debate. A matter was raised with me only this morning at regulation 98(1), dealing with the officer who is injured—

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I am coming to that.

Mr. Singh: You are coming to that; oh, good.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: The proposal to consider and grant Voluntary Separation Employment Packages to police officers was noted. This proposal requires further consultation from other relevant stakeholders and cannot be addressed at this time. The proposal that deductions be made from an officer's salary upon his request to facilitate the officer in obtaining items on credit was not accepted.

The proposal that a policy should be put in place to allow officers to be transferred to any part of the country is already in place. Regulation 68—

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, sorry Minister, the reason why I had argued that, is that from my own experience the criminals in this country have a network in place. For example if a criminal from point A goes to jail and a criminal from point B say at the southern part of the island goes to jail, they set up a network. The thinking behind it was that we must not only transfer officers within the division, but the police must also network and must put officers, say from the southern division and the northern division, so you will be able to get into the network of the system of the others.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, all I am saying is that the proposal that a policy should be put in place to allow officers to be transferred to any part

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of the country is already in place. Regulation 68, which speaks to “Transfer”, allows the Commissioner in determining where to transfer an officer to take into account any hardship that such a transfer may occasion to the officer, so that it is already in place.

Finally, regulation 98, what exists today is that officers are afforded free medical, dental and other benefits whether or not injured in the course of his or her duties. This was removed from the draft regulations. The position as previously existed should remain, and as a result all we will do is, 91 we will remove who is injured in the course of duty and it will read:

- “(1) An officer is entitled to receive free medical, dental, optical and hospital treatment and medicines as may be necessary and as may be provided by a Government Medical Officer or at a Government medical institution; and
- (2) Where such treatment is not available locally then he or she is entitled to it.”

It was an error and that has been corrected.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank Members on both sides, especially those who took time to participate—

Dr. Rowley: Both Back and Front.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:—both Back and Front I am reminded. [*Interruption*] Three matters have been raised—

Mr. Panday: I want to raise a fourth.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Oh Jesus!

Mr. Panday: And the fourth matter is, is it possible that the State devise a method to probably take out group insurance for police officers?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: That was also raised, [*Interruption*] so that we now have four matters for us to report back on in the shortest time possible.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Members on both sides, [*Desk thumping*] your contributions were taken on board. [*Interruption*] It provided improved legislation and improved regulations, and in keeping with that, I beg to move that the Motion be amended by adding the words:

“subject to the following amendments to the “Regulations” after the word “approved” .

So it should now read:

“Be it resolved that the Police Service Regulations, 2007 be approved subject to the following amendments to the Regulations.”

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question, on amendment, put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Police Service Regulations, 2007 be approved subject to the following amendments to the Regulations.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. Speaker: Before we get to “Bills Second Reading”, I did intimate to you earlier on, hon. Members, that the hon. Member for Arouca South would like to make a personal statement and I now ask her to make her statement.

Visa Gold Credit Card (Details of)

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. “The big swipe!”, “Robinson-Regis maxes it up!”, “Camille's fertility bill!” These, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, members of the national community, these are just some of the headlines which have referenced the big story of which I have been a part over the past week.

Mr. Speaker, I ask your indulgence, therefore, for me to address these recent developments, initially referred to by the Member for Caroni East. Further, I beg your indulgence to read from prepared notes since in this seemingly complex matter I wish to be absolutely clinical, pristine and as communicative as possible to leave nothing to the imagination in this matter which has itself arisen from a fanciful imagination.

In the first instance, I would like to request your latitude to provide some history to the events which are before this House. Notwithstanding the fact that I am about to disclose some issues that are of a very personal nature, much of which I would have preferred not to be made public. I am going to do so in an effort to bring clarity to the misinformation which was first presented in this honourable House last Wednesday and which has been discussed at length in the public domain.

Visa Gold Credit Card (Details Of)
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

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Mr. Speaker, for many years I have visited medical doctors in Trinidad and Tobago with regard to a recurring gynaecological issue. This ongoing concern has affected me in a physical manner, so much so, that I have undergone three myomectomies locally with a recurrence of the problem. A myomectomy is the removal of fibroids without removing the womb. As early as age 37 it was recommended that I have a radical hysterectomy recommended by the doctors in Trinidad and Tobago, and as you know, Mr. Speaker, a radical hysterectomy is the removal of the womb, the tubes and the ovaries. This course of action was even advised by a prominent gynecologist who sits in the other place.

Let it be known, Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] and those on the other side are laughing, they probably thought it was an attempt on his part to do something.

Mr. Panday: No, no.

Dr. Rowley: Ignore them.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Let it be known, Mr. Speaker, that this course of action was not an option for me, as it would have meant the premature onset of menopause, the symptoms of which are extremely severe for members of my family who have a history of late onset menopause. Mr. Speaker, a history where menopause in my family occurs at the age around 60 and over, and it occurs with severe consequences, it was not an option for me to have a radical hysterectomy.

Mr. Speaker, having made the decision to explore other options, I visited several gynaecologists locally, all of whom made similar recommendations of a radical hysterectomy. Mr. Speaker, I am certain that the hon. Member for Caroni East would have received in his mailbox a list of the said gynaecologists and would be delighted to reveal their names to the national community. I will not do so here. However, my gynaecologist here now in Trinidad and Tobago who is American trained, my current gynaecologist advised that there was a specialist operating out of the Coloumbia Presbyterian Medical Centre who has experienced great success in treating similar conditions. My medical files were sent to the said doctor and it was based on his assurance that there would be a successful resolution of my condition that I approached the hon. Prime Minister and the Cabinet for medical attention overseas.

Mr. Speaker, the treatment involved a battery of tests prior to surgery and follow up tests thereafter and treatment as necessary to prevent the recurrence of the problem. At my follow up visit in June 2006 it was discovered, not only that the surgery was successful, but that I was pregnant. The issue then, became a matter of preserving the pregnancy. Mr. Speaker, please understand that the intent

for visiting this specialist was not for any fertility treatments, but solely for the purpose of issues related to my complicated gynaecological history and my complicated gynaecological concerns. As with many specialists whose offices are located in specialty clinics, the office of my specialists was located at the American Fertility Service in New York, a fact which did not even come to my knowledge until I had to return for follow up treatment, because all the other visits were made at the Coloumbia Presbyterian Hospital. Again, I would like to state emphatically, that all my visits to my doctor in the United States were with regard to my complicated gynaecological issues and not to any infertility treatments. As you know, Mr. Speaker, a myomectomy does not cure infertility.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to categorically state that I did not deceive the Prime Minister, nor did I deceive the Cabinet with regard to my medical condition. Now that I have laid bare my medical history, let me now clarify statements made with reference to the use of the Visa Gold Credit Card that was issued to me by the Ministry of Finance. Let it be made clear that there are no encumbrances on the card in question. All debts related to this card have been cleared up to the present time, and were fully cleared even before this matter had been brought into the public domain. In addition, Mr. Speaker, it must be emphasized that the card utilized by me is a facility provided by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for expenses accrued while abroad and for local entertainment. It is stated in section 14 of the Ministry of Finance Circular No. 7 dated October 04, 2005, that:

“The Government will not be liable for *any charges* arising under the card. The Government will only pay the initial card fee and the annual renewal card fee.”

Therefore, on receiving approval and a cheque for expenses related to my medical condition I applied the money to the card to facilitate its transport and use abroad.

With regard to the item of my other personal expenses which were paid for by use of the card [*Interruption*] because I viewed the card, perhaps naively, as an individual travel card facility for which I was personally accountable. I took the opportunity while abroad to attend to some personal matters and applied personal funds to the card. Although the use of the card may have been inappropriate, there was no inappropriate use of public funds. Mr. Speaker, I wish to emphasize— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—that there was no malicious intent or subversion intended by me in utilizing the card. However, I realize that I misinterpreted the nature of the use of the card and for that I apologize most profoundly. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I hope that my explanation on this matter will clear up any concerns or questions raised. I reiterate that this is a credit card and there is no money owed on the card. Additionally, any money expended using the card as a facility was either approved by the Cabinet or were my own personal funds. To the extent that private items or bits and pieces of services were paid for by me using that card as a facility, it was with my money and this cannot be refuted by any authority.

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

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY BILL

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the question [March 21, 2007]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Before we listen to the contribution of the hon. Member for Couva South, on the last occasion the hon. Member for Diego Martin East was on his feet and he has sent his apology to the House. He is on official Government business today, and in these circumstances I call on the hon. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): It is a great pity that I am called in the circumstances, but I am sure that I speak in my own right here today.

Mr. Partap: And you are not acting for Imbert. [*Laughter*] Rowley, I want to hear your statement now.

Dr. Rowley: I am not your friend.

Mr. Partap: I want to hear your statement.

Dr. Rowley: I am not your friend, do not talk to me.

Mr. Partap: Give me your statement now.

Dr. Rowley: Do not speak to me; I am not your friend.

Mr. Partap: Let us hear you now.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am thinking about returning my own card. *[Laughter]* You see where I work, Mr. Speaker, we get a circular saying; it is not to be used for personal business. But I sympathize with the—

Hon. Member: And you could get fired for it in the private sector.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You could get fired for it, but I do not want to get involved in the domestic business. You see when you do not want a Member to run for election again, all kinds of internal things take—*[Inaudible]* *[Laughter]*

Mr. Manning: You have long experience in that. *[Laughter]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have experience. *[Laughter]* And I have learnt over the years that you do not take things personally in politics. You get a chance to serve, you do a good job of it and you say thank you for the opportunity to serve the people.

Dr. Rowley: And you go your way after.

Mr. K. Ramnath: And walk away. *[Interruption]* This time if I have to walk away I will say nothing except I am going to another place to have a good time.

Mr. Manning: When you say another place what do you mean?

Hon. Member: No plaque card this time. *[Crosstalk]* *[Laughter]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not ask for your protection because I do have my say on this side when they are speaking, but certainly no plaque cards this time. No animosity.

Mr. Speaker, I want to get to the Bill—

Mr. Manning: That is a message.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am very disappointed that debate on this Bill was not concluded much earlier, and I hope I am not wrong by concluding that the Government has very little interest in the matters relating to this piece of legislation.

One would recall that there was an agreement, and we have heard a lot about it between the Prime Minister, the Opposition Leader and Members of the Opposition to have this legislation reenacted, and to ensure that certain pieces of urgent legislation are debated in the House, some of which have been debated in recent times. But on almost every occasion that debate was supposed to be

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resumed on this matter, another piece of legislation came to the Parliament. I am hoping, therefore, that we can bring an end to this and have it enacted for the benefit of all the citizens of this country, particularly the less fortunate citizens so that they can have matters resolved one way or the other. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to remind hon. Members and the national community that the issue of discrimination is a continuing one. There were periods when the world experienced great trauma as a result of what was happening in South Africa, what was happening in the United States, particularly in relation to Afro-Americans and what was happening right here in our region in Guyana, where you had a government that was oppressive and one which utilized all kinds of oppressive tactics to deal with people who were in opposition to that government.

That was a very difficult period, and I know that we in Trinidad and Tobago supported the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. We supported the struggle of Martin Luther King in the United States, we supported Burnham in Guyana as he oppressed a major section of the population, and even today we are supporting any attempt to ensure that discrimination does not rear its ugly head and so deprive decent people of the right to live a decent life.

In Trinidad and Tobago we have a tendency to dismiss claims of discrimination and to attack those who bring some of these matters to light. [*Interruption*] We have to accept the fact that we have a unique situation in this country. It is a well-known fact, Mr. Speaker, that the Government obtains its support, mainly from Afro-Trinidadians and the Opposition from Indo-Trinidadians. That is a situation that is dealt with in *The Suffrage of Elvira*, for those who are reading Naipaul's satirical but very serious work. Maybe we should revisit. Of course, people like Ferdie Ferreira, whose capacity for literature is so diminished will see Naipaul in a totally different role rather than an international writer.

2.30 p.m.

It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that this situation has persisted and it has done so even with your intervention as a former Member for San Fernando West and as a former PNM Member, and it has been so even though people from the Opposition side, Members of the Opposition of African descent have sought to get involved in winning support from Afro-Trinidadians, but the reality is that we have a system of voting that is largely based on ethnicity. I know my friends at the back of me are trying to do something about it or at least so they claim, and they will soon realize that it is not a politician to be blamed for that. Politicians might have

utilized the opportunities to campaign on the basis of ethnicity, but it is the stark reality of our history that the country has that unfortunate divide.

So when the PNM chooses to allocate houses, 99.9 per cent of the houses which have been constructed by the HDC to Afro-Trinidadians, it might very well be that they are practicing the politics, not of race, but of patronage, but it is left to people to decide whether you have a government that openly discriminates on the basis of race or they are simply involved in patronage.

I have indicated to the Prime Minister on many occasions that next to my home in Couva, they excised a large portion of Caroni lands in the late '70s; put down 1,007 housing units and they could not find seven Indians to put in that housing development. Today, the HDC has to be called into question with respect to the allocations of land and housing and I want to challenge the Government to produce a list of all the recipients of government housing and land to the public so as to determine, whether we should not reinstate the Ryan Commission or the Ryan whatever it was called. What is it?

Dr. Rafeeq: Ryan/La Guerre.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Ryan/La Guerre study. Because—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Centre for Ethnic Studies, which was disbanded by you.

Mr. Manning: By who, Sir?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have not seen a report from the Centre of Ethnic Studies in a very long time, so they are probably not functioning.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the Centre for Ethnic Studies under the co-chairmanship of Doctors La Guerre and Ryan was established I think in 1992; we left office in 1995. When we came back into office in 2001, it did not exist. It was existing when we left office in 1995.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, you had the opportunity to reinstate it. [*Laughter*] You have been around for six years and in the winter of your parliamentary life, you may wish to do something before you are retired. But let me say that this is a serious matter, people are afraid to speak of this. I heard one Member of this House saying, well, we do not have racial discrimination in Trinidad, we have political discrimination, clearly not understanding the sociology of the country. I

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am not saying this to interject hatred in the national community, it is very important for us in the UNC when we take Government to deal with people of different races as we did when we were in office. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: You were not there.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, when my colleagues were in office because the road to national development and the road to progress are not as it were described yesterday as Manhattan Skylark and Mozambique routes or Zimbabwe. So you must take into consideration the very serious issue that faces the country, and that is, whether there is perception by a large group of people that Government is not fair. The Member for Diego Martin Central when he was—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: This is not banter now, this is serious business. You know it is a great pity that we cannot even whisper to each other in this House without the Speaker hearing. [*Laughter*] There are a lot of things that are not intended for the Speaker's ear, but we shall discuss that at a CPA meeting. The Member from Diego Martin Centre, when he was in the Opposition, was very vocal with respect to any complaint reaching to him, including making very serious remarks about what was happening in the Coast Guard and things that he could not prove of course. But I think that he has every duty to raise issues which in his opinion impact on the security of the country, as well as, on the peace and stability of the society.

So I want to ask you, Prime Minister, in all seriousness, how many Indians are in the army?

Mr. Manning: Pardon me?

Mr. K. Ramnath: In the army?

Mr. Valley: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will come to that. How many Indians are in the police?

Mr. Manning: What is the point you are making?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, I will come to it if you give me a chance. If you look at all of the state enterprises, you may want to give this House when you reply in this motion, if you are going to speak, some idea of how a race impacts or appears to impact on the hiring policy of the Government? Because I can tell you that people feel aggrieved; people feel uncomfortable; people feel that they have no chance. When I hear the Minister saying that we have to study what is the height

of people in Trinidad and Tobago; we have to conduct a study on the height of people of Trinidad and Tobago to determine whether the height criterion in the police service should stay or remain, I wonder whether we are living in the year 2007.

Mr. Sharma: You have to measure the height of politicians.

Mr. K. Ramnath: My friend from Fyzabad says we have no height requirement for politicians; he was in no way attacking the Chief Whip on my side here or myself for being short. But if you all are aware that in a plural society, there are very many complaints about the way in which Government allocates its resources, then you have a duty to ensure that citizens feel comfortable and the Government in no way is attempting to discriminate against anybody.

It is not sufficient to window dress; it is not sufficient to put a Minister here or there of East Indian descent in the case of the PNM of African descent or in the case of the UNC. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Ah.

Mr. K. Ramnath: It is not enough. We are trying to deal with a problem in the society. It is not sufficient, Mr. Speaker, to say that there is only discrimination against Indians in the government service and in the private sector, there is discrimination against Afro-Trinidadians. We have to be very open about this issue and wherever discrimination raises its head, we have to deal with it. And this legislation is a wonderful experience for Trinidad and Tobago and treated in a manner in my view and aptly described by the Member for Diego Martin Central as a negotiated legislation. This was a piece of legislation that was passed in this Parliament, challenged by the Government, the court ruled that it required a special majority, six years later it is brought here with very minor changes.

In fact, the major change is something that will discourage people from bringing forth their claims because if the claim is regarded as frivolous and vexatious, you could be charged up to \$100,000, but I want to come to that in a little while. But I make the point, Mr. Speaker, let us look at how many or let us look at the distribution of HDC homes in Tarouba, and you know the first question is, how many Indians applied? I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, immediately the Prime Minister should institute or cause to be instituted a system that when I apply, I can have a receipt from NHA, so that I can make a claim if my name was not included in a list from which possible homeowners will arise. At this stage

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when you send an application to the HDC, you get no receipt from them at the time you make the application. Why is it you do not have applications online where anybody can go online? There are no applications online.

Mr. Manning: Yes, there is.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, you will get a chance to prove it to me. But, Mr. Speaker, HDC should be required to publish the names of all of those persons who applied, [*Desk thumping*] and therefore, we will be in a position to test the hypothesis for the Member for Diego Martin Central that the reason why Indians are not benefitting from the government housing programme is that they do not apply.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I did not want to intervene in the contribution of the hon. Member for Couva South, but I could not sit here and allow him to get away with the assertion that Indians are not beneficiaries of houses in the public sector housing programme. That is just not so, and in fact, the Government has gone out of its way to ensure that is not so.

And just for the record, recently, I attended the distribution of houses at Olera Heights in San Fernando, in the heart of San Fernando and when I saw the persons who came up as beneficiaries, I asked a question as to what the mix was and I was told it was roughly 60/40 in terms of allocations of houses in Olera Heights, [*Crosstalk*] which is just—please—one project. Again, I am sorry I do not want to take up too much time, but I sit in the office in San Fernando, people come to see me and I know exactly—we try to assist everybody who comes. The assertion of the Member is not correct, and in respect of Debe, he will see it.

Mr. Valley: He will see it in the election.

Mr. Panday: Princes Town.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I cannot guarantee that I would be so gracious in future for the Prime Minister to make several speeches during my speech, but clearly his feet are not on the ground; clearly he is not monitoring his Ministers; clearly he is very busy in matters of State or otherwise than to monitor and audit the work of his Ministry. All I ask him to do is to research and do not use one isolated example as Olera Heights in San Fernando which we all know—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: That is the last one I attended.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—that is the one you attended. I would like you to ask your Minister to produce a list of all the homes distributed—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: You want to know them by names.

Mr. K. Ramnath: By names, yes. Ryan dealt with that issue, that you can with a certain degree of certainty, that an assurance that Diane Seukeran or someone of that name is an East Indian.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Who is Pamela Jones?

Mr. K. Ramnath: So, I do not want to get now into that, but you see, they have a problem in understanding the normal distribution and so forth. But I want to say, I know it does not sound good because we hide this issue. I know you have said very clearly you want to be a Prime Minister for all the people of this country, but you cannot be a Prime Minister for everybody in the country when there is blatant discrimination. [*Desk thumping*] All I am saying, Mr. Speaker, if I am wrong, let them bring the statistics to prove that I am wrong and let us deal with this issue of land distribution. I want to separate the issues because the land that is to be distributed to VSEP avail, sugar workers or is being done based on an agreement reached between the All Trinidad Union and the other unions and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, so that, that is outside of the equation. But if—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Convenience.

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, it is not convenience—but by the same token, Mr. Speaker, the Government will distribute an additional 15,000 lots of Caroni lands to persons who are not VSEP, availed at the same price, and I await, because I would be studying it—would you like? Could you deduct all this time from my—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, and I would vote for the deduction. Mr. Speaker, the VSEP workers were guaranteed preferential treatment in the face of the allocations of lands from Central Trinidad last from [*Inaudible*] Caroni. The price was supposed to be a market price. When the Government finalized its policy for land distribution, it found, that that price was above what the policy price was and we took the decision to reduce price to that. In other words, we ensured that there was no discrimination against the Caroni workers. In the face of that, what is the Member for Couva South saying? The Caroni workers have ended up with several bites of the cherry, and incidentally, and if the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, if the allocation of those lands to Caroni workers were inconsistent to Government policy it would never have agreed to do that with the unions.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East is deliberately missing the point, in order to make an appeal [*Desk thumping*] for

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sympathy. The point I am making is, are VSEP avail sugar workers purchasing or leasing the lot at the same price as the public?

Hon. Member: Yes or no?

Mr. K. Ramnath: And if that is the case, VSEP avail sugar workers who are to benefit from the distribution of lands based on a agreement that their employment will be terminated and that will be one of the benefits of the agreement. [*Crosstalk*] The public did not have employment—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: The public is giving up nothing, so what you should do—

Mr. Valley: If he would not mind. Please, Mr. Speaker, I mean it is simple. In the case of a sugar worker, so circumstance, he was 100 per cent sure he was getting it. In the case of Ken Valley, I could apply and I stand a probability. [*Crosstalk*] I am saying—let me change it, Mr. Speaker, Mr. X. In the case of Mr. X, Mr. X will have a probability and that is easy, Mr. Speaker

Mr. Panday: And you give who you want. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: We are abusing this whole statistical aspect of the debate. Whether Mr. X is chosen by lottery or by the PNM, the fact is, Mr. X did not lose his employment and an agreement was made in order for him to benefit. So the new Mr. X whoever he is—it could be me, I would apply. I think I am qualified and when I get there the person who says, well, I got my piece of land because I lost my job. What did you lose? You are paying for the same thing. And you know I told Mr. Rao and he agreed with me that there will be no natural gas pipeline to the homes of those areas that have been developed for sugar workers. But we will now introduce the natural gas lines which both the Prime Minister and I agree should really take place in all the new developments for Mr. X.

Dr. Rafeeq: And gated communities.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So Mr. Speaker, phase I—the Member for Tobago East would agree with me, she knows what I am saying. No provision exists in the already developed projects for VSEP avail sugar workers for putting natural gas to the homes of these ex-sugar workers.

Mr. Manning: You do not have to [*Inaudible*] It is a new policy.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, I do not want the Prime Minister to speak for the EMBD because he clearly does not know what is happening there. But in the new areas that are going to be made available, they will be putting gas there. All I

am saying is, in answer to the Member for Diego Martin Central, you are having a preferential set of rigs for these people when compared to VSEP avail sugar workers. But I do not want to be distracted, the point I am making, I will be looking at the Mr. Xs to see how they will be chosen because it very important for this country to hold you accountable for spending the nation's money [*Desk thumping*] in a manner that benefits all citizens and provides us with the guarantee the citizens are not being treated fairly. I am keeping you alive, that is a miracle. [*Laughter*] So let us revive the Ryan/La Guerre Centre for Ethnic Studies, let us revive it because when I read what they had said, they made it very clear in their very early report that there was widespread evidence of discrimination.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: Do not be surprised, I am maturing. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Manning: He said I am maturing. [*Laughter*] I have a feeling somehow you are not talking to me.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So, Mr. Speaker, I want look at employment in state enterprises. I want to get a list of people hired, who were hired by WASA; who were hired by all of the state enterprises. You may not be able to provide a list of those who were hired in private enterprise, but certainly, as a Government, you may want to provide a list of all the people hired by the Chinese contractors to see whether citizens of this country are not being discriminated against and other private companies. But you see, I would not—

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker—no, I would not get involved in that.

Mr. Manning: But you would report the Chinese though.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I would tell you because they are in receipt of Government contracts, [*Desk thumping*] many of which were not tendered for, but I would not want to get into that because I have to speak to Mr. Calder Hart in this Parliament here very soon and I would not like to raise matters at this level. But what I am trying to tell you is that when there is widespread complaint about discrimination, you have a duty to investigate it and that is why this Commission is very important to the country. I just want to look at something. Just yesterday in the newspaper, see how serious people operate and I quote from the *Sunday Express*, May 20:

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"Five black current and former employees of Bank of America ... have sued the second-largest US Bank, accusing it of racial discrimination by steering lucrative clients to their white counterparts.

The 29-page complaints, filed ... with the US District Court in Boston, contends that the bank discriminate against African-Americans in pay, promotions, training and support services.

It said the Charlotte, North Carolina based bank regularly teams African-American workers together and assigns them to largely minority neighborhoods and low net-worth clients."

And it went on:

"There is a perception at the bank that predominantly white, wealthy customers in high net-worth neighborhoods are only going to be comfortable with Caucasian financial advisers and bankers."

You think there is anything wrong with people who feel aggrieved, to bring their problems to the fore? In this country and starting even in this Parliament, there are people who immediately go on the defensive once the issue is raised. You should welcome a debate on this issue of discrimination, and if you are not overtly or covertly involved in discrimination, then you will deal with those who either commit acts of discrimination or those who make frivolous complaints. Let us not hide it.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you an example. I am reading from the editorial of the *Sunday Express*, yesterday: "Testing integrity in public life" and I would just quote the—it has to do with Dr. Rowley and his claims that the Integrity Commission did not act fairly and so on. The editorial says in conclusion that:

"The Integrity Commission is a creature of our Constitution ... appointed by the President and comprises persons of integrity and high standing. We assume that the Commissioners are fully aware of their failure to act ... with the principles of natural justice and the requirements of the Act that empowers them, and the expectations that they act in accordance with highest standards of integrity in public life. They must now do what is right and proper, and must be seen to do so."

In a previous editorial, Mr. Reginald Dumas and Prof. Ken Julien (Kenny) and others were quoted in an editorial claiming that the Integrity Commission must resign. And the reason, Mr. Speaker, is based on Justice Rajnauth-Lee's judgment that the Commission failed to inform Dr. Rowley of its findings, but proceeded

beyond that and referred the matter to the DPP. Basdeo Panday was not offered the opportunity by the Integrity Commission when they were investigating and the Government was spending a fortune, millions, all over the world to locate assets which they claim that he and his wife held. I never heard Reginald Dumas or Julian Kenny; I never saw in any of the editorials that today have banner editorial headlines, calling for the resignation of the Integrity Commission as it affects the Member for Diego Martin West. But, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was tried and hanged by this Government and those who occupied those sacred positions in the Integrity Commission.

3.00 p.m.

In fact, as a result of that, he has lost his seat and the country and the constituency of Couva North are denied the representation they deserve. So what happened to Martin Daly? Let us assume that Reginald Dumas and Prof. Julian Kenny are mere functionaries; but Martin Daly certainly is not. He never lifted a finger nor wrote a piece saying that natural justice demands that the Integrity Commission should have called Mr. Panday before it to discuss the charges laid against him.

I am happy for Dr. Rowley that, at least, he had an opportunity to deal with that matter and to add to the body of knowledge with respect to how the commission should proceed. But there may be certain sectors of the community who prefer Dr. Rowley to Mr. Manning [*Interruption*] and they probably have wind of some plan by the Prime Minister to use this whole question of the Integrity Commission investigation to ask him not to run, because the Prime Minister issues a lot of decrees. If you have a case hanging over your head, like my friends on the PNM Backbenches, they have been denied the opportunity to even be screened. [*Crosstalk*] One may very well speculate that this credit card issue was something generated inside the PNM. [*Laughter*] So if my friend from Arouca South believes that we are involved in that, I do not think that Mr. Ganga Singh intended that; he was simply doing his duty as a Member of Parliament (MP). [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I did not know that COP was part of the UNC now.

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, no; we speak the truth; we have differences in ideology. We are a working class group in front; that is all I am prepared to say at this point in time. [*Laughter*]

When the Integrity Commission discriminates, who suffers? The Leader of the Opposition went to prison as a result of the ineptitude, carelessness and in

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some cases the deliberate action of certain members of the commission, but in the wisdom of the judge the police or whoever is responsible for investigating someone should not send to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), unless they have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges or to defend themselves in an investigation.

So people in this country are experiencing a lot of hurt as a result of these commissions which are appointed by the President and who feel that—*[Interruption]* *[Dr. Rowley enters the Chamber]* I was only saying good things about you; do not worry. *[Laughter]* *[Crosstalk]* I got very sad when I thought that I would be here and Dr. Rowley would not be for the next term, but now that he has gotten the court to deal with the detractors within his own party, both of us feel a lot more comfortable. *[Laughter]* This politics is a very serious business; it is amazing what happens to you with your own party. *[Laughter]*

Mrs. Job-Davis: You could write a book now.

Mr. K. Ramnath: This is only my introduction. *[Laughter]* I was making the point that discrimination, wherever it raises its head, is something that must be dealt with in a very serious matter. It will not help the country if the Government continues to believe that it is successful as a result of practising discrimination.

I would like to see all applications for a government house or land published. All the allocations should be published; let the public have an opportunity to see who has applied and who has been selected. Then you would sleep comfortably knowing that this has suffered the scrutiny of the population. I want to see a list of all the persons who have been employed by state enterprises over the last five years and it will be shocking, but, at least—let me not conclude and simply ask that in order to satisfy the population—you never could tell if the list you publish would show that you are not discriminating, then we might have to fight a lot harder to get into government. *[Laughter]*

Do not sit there and assume that you are going back into power. You have committed too many evil acts, atrocious acts, that even the pastor had a problem. *[Laughter]* I do not want to go into that. You have committed too many atrocities and this is the time for you to repent to the population and stop making excuses that persons did not apply.

I want you to check the intake in the fire services to see how many Indians are being selected on an annual basis, and do not tell me that the application for employment in the police service throws out Indians because of their height. In fact, I will not be surprised that a long time ago the height discrimination was

introduced by the colonial powers in order to discriminate against Indians so they could keep them in the fields. *[Interruption]* I am not like some persons in this House; I speak very openly. I work for a state enterprise and I still speak in a manner which I think is best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

You have in this country discrimination on the basis of region. The legacy of the PNM is Tamarind Square. You brought them in from the islands; you used them, abused them and dumped them at the back of the cathedral. When you go there, are you not ashamed to see living human beings in those conditions? I thought that you were men and women of conscience; you pass there. Maybe you do not want visitors to this country because we are getting some money from oil and gas, but that is a disgrace. We have to do something about human beings who are left there in the rain, in the sun, day and night without any medical assistance, some of whom have no food to eat, and we are boasting about the Manhattan skyline. That is discrimination against the poor. A country as rich as ours should not have those people there. You are not only discriminating against Barrackpore, Moruga, Rio Claro and all the areas in the East that do not have water because they are Indians, you are discriminating against everyone. *[Interruption]*

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the House.

The boast of the Government in creating employment for the unskilled worker in the country is CEPEP. The manner in which these people were selected was subject to so many questions and interpretations that even the Government recognized after an audit was done that the situation was disastrous. How many Indian CEPEP contractors are there in this country? *[Crosstalk]* Produce a list and then you will make people comfortable, if they see that the Government is making an effort, in a country in which half the population is Afro Trinidadian and the other half Indo Trinidadian and a sprinkling of other groups in the society.

The Member for Siparia read out a long list of persons who were PNM councillors; I have no problem with anybody who legitimately qualifies for a position, but a list of CEPEP contractors would show that there is an imbalance based on race. It may not be, but it will show. I think the time has come for us to deal with some of these matters in a very serious way.

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I was dealing with the issue of regional discrimination. I am sorry the Member for Diego Martin East is not here. [*Interruption*] I am not as civilized as you; you are from the North.

Mr. Valley: We are both from Couva.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You have forgotten your past; you are discriminating against the people of Couva and McBean. [*Crosstalk*] I am very proud of my heritage. I am very proud of who I am. I do not need any advice from you.

Mr. Speaker, I was on the issue of regional discrimination. The Member for Diego Martin East, who is the Minister of Works and Transport, uses a very interesting barometer in this modern age to determine which roads should be fixed or which bridge repaired. That barometer is public outcry, burning of tyres and blocking of roads. In this modern era, the system in these ministries is so backward, archaic and antediluvian that you have to wait until people block roads and burn tyres, then you have to send the army to deal with the people in Naparima, Barrackpore and Monkey Town and afterwards you pave the roads in a slipshod manner, no drainage, because that is not of any importance to the Government. People are crying out for a supply of water.

When my honourable friend from Oropouche demonstrated the kind of water that people had to use to bathe and drink, he was chastised by one of the Members of the House. Why are you discriminating against rural people? Why are you taking the water and sending it to the Housing Development Corporation estates and preventing people who once had a supply of drinking water in the rural areas from having that supply, particularly at a time when we have a drought in the country? This piece of legislation, if properly monitored and implemented, would ensure that the State does what it is supposed to do in law, to provide the citizens of this country with equal treatment.

There are many other issues relating to discrimination of the various regions. The issue of flooding in St. Helena, most of Caroni East and the Chaguanas constituencies on an annual basis has been raised in this House and if any attention is paid it is just to relieve the problems temporarily, because you do not care about the people who live in those regions, who have to undergo, on a yearly basis, floods which cause irreparable damage to their properties.

It is not simply a case that we must support this legislation; we have supported the legislation in the past; it was in the law books; it is how you are going to implement it. What I expected the Government to do in this debate was for ministers to say, "We are going to take this legislation seriously and we are going to deal with the concerns expressed by the citizens."

So the newspapers will champion the cause of Rowley, which I totally agree they should have in light of the judgment of Justice Rajnauth Lee, but none of them said a word when Panday was deprived of natural justice; not even the Member for Diego Martin West; in fact, he was in glee. I do not blame persons for seeking redress in the courts. I think the Member for Diego Martin West understood very well that there was a campaign within the PNM to get rid of him; that was why he did it.

Hon. Member: Why did Panday not do the same?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I knew that would come up, that the judgment was what caused persons to call for the resignation of the commission; but Martin Daly is no fool. He knew very well that Panday was being ill-treated; but I do not want to get into that. I would speak about that tonight. Let us talk a bit about cultural discrimination.

I heard my friend from Laventille West say that from 2005 to 2007, \$2.022 million was spent by the Government on Indian cultural activities and chutney. I read in the newspaper that the first prize for Panorama was \$1 million. There are over 350,000 Hindus in this country. She said \$2.022 million from 2005 to 2007 on an activity in which the whole country participates. Chutney is no longer an East Indian activity. It is now a national activity. Phagwa—Sat Maharaj has to constantly agitate to get money. In fact, on the eve of Phagwa they line up to collect a little thing. [*Crosstalk*] Many of the grounds on which Phagwa celebrations take place have been abandoned because they cannot guarantee the people who have the centres for Phagwa that they would get any kind of funding from the Government.

Mr. Speaker, a festival like Phagwa, but very large, is Ramleela, known to the Indian community since the Fatel Razack arrived here, is being totally disregarded by the Government. Once again, you make a lot of noise; you have to call on ministers. The Maha Sabha and various other groups in the country have to be agitating. Where is your cultural policy? Where is your multicultural policy? Or are you afraid to develop a multicultural policy in a country with multicultural activities.

Perhaps the whole ideology and philosophy is about melting pot and you hope that one day everybody in this country will give up their great heritage and become like the patrons who rejoiced with this Mr. Akon wherever he was at some place in Port of Spain; then in order to demonstrate that they are doing

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something, they shut down the place on the basis of health. I would have banned that "fella" forever from coming to this country. But that is what the destruction of culture results in.

When you destroy cultural activities of your citizens which they have done for 100 years and you have nothing to replace them with that is of value, then they enjoy Akon bareback on a stage. So Ramleela is another one of those cultural activities receiving little or no support from the Government. Then, of course, there is Divali. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Job-Davis: What is Ramleela?

Mr. K. Ramnath: You understand the question? [*Hindu spoken*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: He is obliged to give an interpretation, which he will do shortly.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, that is the theme of the great Surinamese poet, Ramdeo Chaitoo, when the Indians were fleeing Suriname after independence. He said:

"With my right hand I shall raise the flag."

The people who practise Ramleela raise a lot of flags for Trinidad and Tobago; they are citizens. As a former Minister of Culture, I am disappointed. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: You do not know what Ramleela is.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: Ramleela is a play depicting the life of Lord Rama. The Member for San Fernando West would understand that; she would have been exposed to some aspect, but having joined the PNM she lost it. [*Laughter*]

The way they treat Divali is to give the Divali Nagar a few thousand dollars. Divali Nagar has no monopoly on the celebration of Divali in the country. I am not saying that they should not receive subventions, but this handout system that makes people feel that they are beholden to you—you know that George Singh gets a lot of support from the Government because he is related to a minister. [*Crosstalk*] He promotes a lot of chutney; he is a fete promoter.

Mr. Hinds: Have you ever hosted a Ramleela?

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Member for San Fernando West knows who George Singh is.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to cultural issues, the evidence is very clear that there is open discrimination against persons who practise cultural traditions that are not seen by the Government as part of the national culture. They claim when they travel abroad what a rich cultural heritage we have in this country and what a peaceful coexistence there is among the races that exist in Trinidad and Tobago.

Blind people have to demonstrate in this country on so many occasions in order to get attention. Blind people have been demonstrating outside their place of work in San Fernando, because we have neglected them. We, the more fortunate persons of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government, in particular, have neglected these people.

I recall that a gentleman tied himself to the front of National Flour Mills in a wheelchair demanding that there should be no discrimination against people on the grounds of disability. In this modern age persons who suffer from these disabilities have to demonstrate in such a way to raise the consciousness of the population, and we have a Manhattan skyline and we are getting \$50-odd per barrel for crude oil and we are negotiating agreements for natural gas. A few people are enjoying the wealth of the country, while the poor, and particularly those who suffer from disabilities, have to eke out a living through all kind of means.

One thing that the UNC Government did was to introduce the Maternity Protection Bill. The situation existed where employers would treat pregnant women with disdain. They would be dismissed if they became pregnant on the job; today they are protected as a result of the decision of the UNC government to introduce that piece of legislation. If this Bill was accepted by the Government as early as 2002, we would have dealt with a lot of the issues that still face this nation and which have caused this nation to remain very divided and upset with what is going on.

We have to face the reality that this is a multiethnic society; it is a multicultural society; there must be programmes. You must not only support persons when they are minorities in Britain and the United States. You must look after your very own in the country, who have every right to be here and who have together built this nation. I urge you to support this legislation; do not send it before any select committee. [*Interruption*]

I am not going to support any same sex relationship and so on.

Dr. Rowley: Did you check with the Member for Oropouche on that?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will not get into that discussion. It is not important for this piece of legislation to languish before a joint select committee and die because somebody believes—and I am not going to question anybody's belief—that there is sexual orientation discrimination.

Dr. Rowley: That is okay?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I totally disagree with that; that does not want holding this legislation back. [*Interruption*] I do not want to get involved in your orientation. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Rowley: You do not have a chance; you do not look good or taste good.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not wish to get engaged in a discussion on his orientation. This cannot be a basis for sending this to a select committee. This legislation is too important right now and we have to pass it, otherwise you would also be breaking an agreement that we upheld on this side. We went through pains to keep postponing debate on this while we supported you on all the other pieces of legislation. I think the most decent thing you can do at this stage is to let us sit at committee, deal with the problem and have the legislation passed in the interest of all Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to enter the debate at this precise time, but my colleague from Couva South seemed to advocate quite a number of matters in my interest. I think I owe him some legal fees. I will pay him sometime when we get our back pay; but he seems always to be looking out for me. I do not know what causes that.

I just entered the debate for a brief moment to put on record the facts, because I do not think it is good for the *Hansard* to carry information that is inaccurate, because sometime in the not too distant future or the distant future, the researchers would come and use *Hansard* as the basis of understanding what transpired at this time while we were in office or in Opposition and it is good that whether we agree or do not agree for better or worse, that the record must be accurate. That is why I enter to take issue with just a couple of categorical statements made by my colleague from Couva South which are totally inaccurate.

Mr. Speaker, I know and you know that housing is an emotive matter in any country and the national housing could be interpreted in a variety of ways by persons. Wherever there is a public sector housing programme in any country that I am aware of, there are issues surrounding it. In Trinidad and Tobago, the issue

that we have with our housing programme is that it started with some persons saying that the Government has no role in building houses. That is a policy of the government to which my colleague from Couva South subscribes. In fact, there was a minister of the government of which he was a part who said publicly that there should be no Ministry of Housing and therefore no Minister of Housing. He made that statement while holding the post of Minister of Housing, so that should tell you how they viewed housing as public policy and as government intervention.

When we came into office we had a different perspective, we believe that there is a direct role for government in seeking to bring relief to those persons for whom an absence of affordable housing units is probably their single most important crisis. Therefore, if we treat with that we would automatically be contributing to an improvement in their quality of life. Housing for the PNM has always been and remains and will remain a priority.

I distinctly recall having the pleasure of serving in the Ministry of Planning and Development when funds were a little tighter and we had to look for additional funding from resources available to us outside. In early 2002, I was the Minister of Planning and Development then, we sought to access low interest funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), a bank in which we had membership since the 1960s. We were so concerned about expanding the housing stock that we went to the IADB to borrow some money to kick off a housing programme in this country. That immediately annoyed Members of the Opposition.

One would have thought that in a situation where housing was in such short supply and an expert was telling us that 100,000 units were required in this country to create an environment in which the average person could enter and rent or buy a unit. So here was a government in office saying, "Look, we do not have the resources to make the kind of intervention we would like to make, but we have access to IADB long-term, low cost funding and we are going to borrow some money and start a housing programme."

This was after we met a housing shortage and a government in office for six years that built 461 houses. Here you had a policy of 461 houses in six years, but you were short of 100,000 units. That is not the pace at which you would want to build. So as we moved to the IADB, I interacted with the President of the IADB in Brazil and invited him to Trinidad and Tobago for the precise reason that public servants at the IADB were opposed, like the UNC and NAR governments, to the idea of government being directly involved in a housing construction programme. Public servants in the IADB did not see that as a priority.

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Our position in the PNM is that, "Look, the people of Trinidad and Tobago elected us to treat with their problems and the bureaucratic position of the IADB bureaucrats is not what we were elected to endorse." We were elected to endorse and fix the housing shortage in the country. If we could impact on that by borrowing IADB money and repaying it as we see fit, that was no business of the IADB public servants.

Therefore, I raised the argument with the President of the IADB in Brazil and invited him to Trinidad and Tobago to meet with the Prime Minister so he could understand our commitment to housing and to see whether he could overrule his bureaucratic staff in Washington. President Iglesias agreed to come to Trinidad and Tobago, and he did so, to meet with the Prime Minister.

What was the reaction of the then Opposition? Minister Sadiq Baksh I seem to recall was the one who led the charge and they immediately began to accuse the government of discrimination even before the President came here. Just by signalling an intention to embark upon a housing programme, even before the money was discussed, even before we got an agreement from the IADB, even before we started the housing programme, the Opposition began to accuse the government of discrimination in housing.

When President Iglesias agreed to come to Trinidad and Tobago, the record would show that the Opposition mounted a campaign against him and said that he should be impeached and took steps in Washington to have him impeached for supporting a housing policy in Trinidad and Tobago which they deemed would have been discriminatory against Indians in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] What an amazing position. That is why I got into the debate this afternoon, to put this on record. Here is a debate where we are talking about discrimination and our colleagues on the other side are so versed in discrimination that in a matter of housing, a matter of great need and a matter where people are so desperate to get into housing, when a PNM government IADB funding to start a housing programme in this country, the parliamentary record must show that the UNC attempted to impeach President Iglesias for supporting a loan programme for Trinidad and Tobago for housing.

If there is discrimination, you tell me if that is not discrimination. [*Desk thumping*] You live comfortably in your own home; every one of them lives in comfortable surroundings. The persons who are living in the worse conditions, the Government holds out to them a programme to bring some relief, where their children could have a decent home, some light, some water, probably a flushing toilet for the first time. What was their reaction? Impeach President Iglesias. And

then they did so, not on the grounds of any other item, but on the grounds of discrimination, even before one pound of mortar was mixed, even before one brick was laid, they were accusing us of discrimination in housing.

That is why I am not surprised today that after tens of thousands of houses, the clamour, the rah rah about discrimination is louder. It started on the very day the programme was announced. Till now they are going to the EBC and saying that if people live in an area they must not be allowed to vote there, because their houses are new and they were put there to house pad. What utter absolute rubbish! [*Desk thumping*] The law says that you are entitled to vote where you live. Voter padding, which they are familiar with, is when you vote where you do not live. [*Crosstalk*]

You had one member of their party going to a commission of enquiry and saying, "I am from San Fernando, my mother lives in San Fernando, my sister lives in San Fernando, my husband and I live in Valsayn and I want the law changed to allow ancestral voting so I could vote in San Fernando with my mother and sister." That is on the record; I am not making that up. So you want to have ancestral voting so you can vote with your mother in San Fernando West, but if we build houses anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago and people go to live in those houses, that is an issue.

You have one called Wade Mark, that General Brown-noser, who goes to the Elections and Boundaries Commission and tells the EBC that the housing programme we are working so hard on, that the staff is working on weekends and nights to bring to people, the houses they have not had for many decades for a variety of reasons, not only because of public policy that caused a reduction in the housing programme, but economic circumstances for 10 years—economic decline had caused, even with the best public policy, a reduction in the amount of housing units.

I heard Wade Mark recently saying that the Government had these thousands of houses and we were waiting until election week to put people in them so that they could vote for the PNM. How stupid can you get? If we had houses to put people to vote, we would put them in now: You do not wait until election week, because whether they own them now or election week, the longer they are in there, the better. If you put them in the election week they cannot even vote because they are required to be there for at least two months. In fact, the enumeration process might miss them if they got there too close to the election. It would seem to me that if we had any sinister plan to put people in houses to vote, we would put them as early as possible so they could get in there in time for election.

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But Mr. Mark tried to fool people in this country and said that there was something sinister about the housing programme and that we had this plan where we were holding houses in stock to put in all these lemmings on election week who would run in there and vote. But he would not know, because he lives all about like Miss Howard cat, so he would not know what it is to have a home that you could move into. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, Standing Order 36(4). I am asking the Member with respect to the language he is ascribing to another Member of this Parliament: "Brown-noser" and the other insulting remarks, that they be withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: If you did, in fact, use such an expression then you were certainly using unparliamentary language. You are capable of using better language. I hear you and I would imagine what you are saying is true; I did not hear it, but if you did say that I am asking you to withdraw it and proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, my advice to the Member for Siparia is when I am speaking you keep your seat; it would do you well. I did describe Sen. Mark as a brown-noser; I withdraw the comment. I am sure the next time I refer to him, I would find a more appropriate and parliamentary term that will be acceptable to all of us. By that time it might be "black-noser". It does not matter how the nose is soiled, the colour depends on the meal. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

So here we have a situation where the Opposition by its policy is opposed to public sector housing. We in the PNM are very proud of our record in public sector housing; we stand by it. I would say it as loudly as I am allowed to in the Parliament: The PNM since 1956 believes in the principle that the State has a direct role to play in creating housing units for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is PNM policy and arising out of that policy we have been able to establish communities across this country by direct government involvement and the country is better off for it. [*Desk thumping*] Charlotteville, Buccoo, Milford Court, Laventille, Diego Martin, Chaguanas, Speyside, Sangre Grande, Arima, Maloney, La Horquetta; all over the country you will meet communities built by the PNM public policy. [*Desk thumping*] All we are doing now is continuing that programme of expanding the national housing stock.

Of course, there are some people who have a point of view that is not in their interest. It might not be in their interest, but clearly it is in the interest of the beneficiaries. Wherever we built, my colleagues have never got up one day in the six years we have been in government and said, "Listen, do not do a housing

programme in area X, do it in area Y." Do you know why? Every single location is offensive to them. We built in the East, West, South, Central and in Tobago, every single housing project is offensive to them and they say, "Do not do it." We say, "No, we have been elected to do it."

That is why this afternoon, over and above opposing the policy, insofar as we have gone ahead and done it in spite of the Opposition, do you know what they said? When we came into government and we met the situation and we got the moneys, when they realized that President Iglesias was not going to be deterred and we got IADB money to start the programme, they then said, "You know what, if you build any houses, because you are not going to build any, you are only fooling people; you are only promising people, but perchance you build any houses, we are concerned about the allocation policy." This was before one house was built.

They demanded in a budget debate in this Parliament that the allocation policy must be what they held out to the IADB, because the IADB and similar institutions talked to all the political groups in the country, the private sector, NGOs and so on. When they met with them, they demanded that a condition of the loan was that a random distribution policy should be used, because that was the only way they could prevent the Government from giving the houses to PNM supporter. That was how they interpreted and described the housing policy, that it was meant for PNM supporters.

Therefore there must be a random policy where the Government should have no say and the Government should put all the names in a computer and as and when they come up, that would be how the houses would be distributed. We are the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, we agree that a certain element of randomness is involved, but picture all of us in here buying a lottery ticket and imagine you won and I did not; how unfair would that be? You with all your money, Mr. Speaker, and you win and I do not. [*Laughter*]

Clearly there must be a situation where there would be circumstances where a family is more in need than another. Can you imagine an 18-year-old or 19-year-old applies for a house, because he wants a "bachy" to leave his father's house and at the same time a family with young children in desperate need also applies for a house and by randomness the bachelor gets the house. He and his friends are having a ranking good time, but the family with children, struggling and suffering, are the victims of randomness.

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So with our distribution programme 60 per cent is random, but because we have been elected to run the country and we are doing our job we make interventions, and I make no apology for that. The Government's policy is that the protective services should be distributed as evenly and as widely as possible within the housing programme; so part of the policy of distribution is that 10 per cent of the houses we built we try, as far as possible, to allocate them to members of the protective services. That is PNM housing policy and we stand by that policy. [*Desk thumping*] All this is done as good public policy.

My friend from Couva South got up here this afternoon and said, "When you apply to the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) you are not given a receipt," and he demanded that this system of the giving of a receipt by HDC must be instituted so that you could track who applied and prevent this arbitrariness to which they ascribe to us. So he was cautioning us today, advocating that we issue a receipt.

Mr. Speaker, I know that my friend from Couva South knows that what he said was not true. Do you know why? Because he sends me a number of letters on behalf of his constituents and he makes reference to the receipts they got when they applied. [*Laughter*] He is just being mischievous as usual, but you cannot be mischievous and put it on the *Hansard*. Ever so often I would get a letter from the Member for Couva South, which is quite proper. If he represents people, as all of us in here do, and somebody comes to him and says, "Look, you are my MP, I have this situation and I need your intervention with the Minister of Health or the Minister of Housing", he represents people. When I get that letter from him, I look at it personally because it is my job.

My friend from Oropouche sends me a file; every letter he writes to the HDC he sends me a copy; he represents people. [*Crosstalk*] Very frequently he sends letters to the Ministry of Housing. So when the Member for Couva South or anywhere else comes in this House and stands in the Opposition Benches or anywhere and puts on *Hansard* that when you apply to the HDC you get no receipt or anything, I as Minister stand and say, "You lie." [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: No, you can say telling an untruth. I think that was what you meant to say, so please, withdraw it.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am in your hands. The coaching I get from you would serve me in good stead in the next term. I withdraw that word. [*Desk thumping*] I reiterate to all those who heard my friend from Couva South, especially those who have not applied to the HDC; what Couva South said is not true and he knows it. It is as simple as that.

When you apply to the HDC now, in fact, they give you a card to go away with. On the card you have your name, reference number and application date. In fact, some people walk around with it as an identification card and they meet me in the grocery, a funeral, wherever and the first thing they say is, "Hello Minister, look meh card." I would tell them that is the process; it is a procedure; all that means is that you have applied. So when they hear him say that, they would say, "What manner of man from Couva South would make a statement like that knowing that there are 70,000 persons out there with cards from the HDC." I do not know who they are trying to fool. Of course, it is still a free country.

Then, to make it worse, as if that was not bad enough to make it look as if we were discriminating and doing something bad, he said, "There are no forms on the Internet." We have applications online; how could it possibly have no forms on the Internet? The Internet does not need pages. Once you get online it is there for you; it is a virtual form. So what was he saying, that we ran out of forms on the Internet? How stupid can one get? *[Laughter]* He knows. My friend from Couva South is a senior manager at Petrotrin, so he knows that you cannot run out of forms on the Internet. *[Laughter]* So when he came here and said that, he knows he was making mischief and he was trying to fool people, but the only person he could fool in here is his friend from Nariva. *[Laughter]*

He wants us to publish a list of all the names of persons who applied and all those who got houses. Do you know why? He wants to count Indian heads versus non-Indian heads, because that is his theme; that is what he is all about. I want to ask him, when he gets the list of names of citizens and he sees a "fella" called Martin, what hair would he ascribe to him? What ethnic background would he ascribe to him? When he sees a "fella" called Joseph—*[Crosstalk]*

Hon. Member: Or Gillian Lucky?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: My colleague from San Fernando East is telling me that he has a friend called "Rajbansee" who is African; San Fernando East, of course. *[Laughter]* I can tell you that in this melting pot of Trinidad and Tobago, there are large numbers of persons whose names do not reflect their phenotypes. Their phenotypical expression is not expressed in fact by virtue of the name they carry, because we have been mixing in this country for a long time, but he wants to count Indian heads, so he told me to publish all the names.

The HDC operates as a bank giving mortgages and on that basis we say, "Listen, we are not going to put a person's private business on the street so that you could count Indian heads." Even before we built one house, you accused us of

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discrimination; what can we possibly do to change that? They have made it quite clear, "There is nothing you can do; whatever you do we will accuse you of discrimination, because we believe that will serve us politically, so we operate in the environment."

I know what goes down in the Cabinet; I see the extent to which the Cabinet goes out of its way to prevent that perception from being fact, but there are some persons you cannot please, you will not please, you will never please. In this housing programme that is one of them. So we go forward and we build the units and we make them available to citizens. I will be very pleased until the day they are able to say that I carried home one of those units. [*Laughter*] As long as they cannot say that, I am okay.

The most alarming thing that he said this afternoon—I know my friend from Couva South has a wide imagination; he is a good debater. He is a survivor in the minefield of the UNC. My colleague from Couva North did tell me one time, at a time when my friend from Couva South had a big banner in Caroni one night at a meeting reading "Indians for sale, check out Panday." So I met my friend from Couva North at a function soon after and I said, "What are you getting on with; have you seen Couva South?" And he said to me, in his inimitable style, "The political cemetery is littered with the bones of those who cross me." [*Laughter*] So you must excuse my friend from Couva South who moved from bones, to rising like the Phoenix, to today coming here and accusing the PNM of corruption.

I have been in public life now for 25 years or thereabouts. I first appeared on a PNM platform in 1980 at 27 years. I have been in the Parliament for almost 20 years. I have served in ministerial capacity and I have served two terms in the Opposition. My colleague from Caroni East came into the Parliament and told the people of this country, "I tiefing sand and gravel in Tobago." If he thinks that will get him into political office then more power to him, but I could tell you one thing. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have never used this Parliament floor or the PNM political platform to defend myself from the folly from Caroni East. I let them talk their stupidity for as long as they want, until they cross the line and I argue my case in the courthouse. [*Desk thumping*]

I went to the court because I am a citizen of this country, and that is how I handle my business. The fact that Basdeo Panday chose not to go to court, is his business; it has nothing to do with me and my action. Strangely enough, the editorial that the Member referred to today in the *Express* newspaper when he said that it was discriminating because it was defending me and discriminating against Panday, I read it differently. I wrote a response to this *Express* article today, but on the advice of my lawyers I withdrew it, because I am speaking in the court.

4.00 p.m.

When the *Daily Express* advises me that I must show restraint in dealing with the Integrity Commission, they can put that where the monkey put the nuts. [Laughter] Because I was here for two and a half years watching my friend, the Member for Caroni East, and listening to him and all his colleagues; Robin Montano, Basdeo Panday, and Wade Mark had much to say, casting aspersions on my integrity and I went to a court of law where fact and truth are supposed to prevail over malice and rumour and I get an editorial from the *Daily Express* cautioning restraint on my part? Could you imagine that? And then to add insult to injury, a colleague comes to the Parliament and says that editorial shows discrimination in my favour because they did not say anything for Panday. Where he came from?

I seem to recall Mr. Panday had five different stories, every time they talked to him, he said something else and the press reported it. First, there was no money; then it was not his own; then it was for medical expenses; then that changed and lastly, “is a man geh mih wife”. [Laughter] Now, come on. Then you have the gall to come to the Parliament and put on the *Hansard* that the *Daily Express* discriminated in my favour and they hound Mr. Panday? I do not want to get in Mr. Panday’s business, but if you come in my business, you cross the line and my business is being dealt with in the court. And, of course, my friend the Member for Caroni East is smart you know, after he had much to say under parliamentary privilege, when he got his commission of enquiry and it wrote to him twice asking him, he said he has nothing to say. He is smarter than that. “Stay right dey and pelt blows.” You see, he had nothing to say.

Mr. Hinds: Little mouse.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am stronger than that. “I told you all before whenever a policeman comes by me, he come to lime, or he come to ask for all yuh.” [Desk thumping] [Laughter]

You see, Mr. Speaker, we cannot take it when parliamentarians come to the Parliament, take positions that are so easily dismissed and refuted especially when the positions are steeped in malice because they are meant to hurt people. In fact, when Barrington Thomas—the UNC candidate in Tobago who started that rumour that was embellished and presented by the Member for Caroni East—left Tobago he was holding court at Crown Point Airport you know, and he was telling them that he was coming to Trinidad to bring down a Minister.

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Do you know what provokes me today? To hear the Member for Couva South talk about discrimination in this editorial in my favour. I sat here all this time soaking up all the nonsense and old talk from the Member for Nariva. I have never heard nor read in the editorial a condemnation of their irresponsibility.

They had much to say, they had a commission of enquiry, the report has been languishing in the Parliament for how long? When the commission of enquiry put a report, why did any of them not debate it? Because I was quite ready, willing and able to debate the report with them, but after they got what they wanted in slandering me, the report is lying in the library, they have no interest. In fact, one of them told my colleague, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, that all they wanted was the headline, and they got it.

They are not interested in fact and truth. That is their style, you understand and you want to use that as discrimination? It is the same thing with the editorial today. I am the victim of this foolishness and instead of you dealing with those who did their nonsense; you are coming here to caution me the victim, that I must show restraint. I have shown more restraint than I knew I had, and then he says, that is an example of discrimination. You do not know the meaning of the word.

They talk a lot hoping that there are people in this country who would endure a life of horror every day they wake up, they are being discriminated against. My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central in his normal style recently made an—what he admitted—inappropriate comment for which he apologized. I have gone to court on this matter and my going to court sends a loud statement for me unlike them who say publicly that the UNC cannot expect justice in this country. Indians cannot expect justice from the Judiciary; that is their position. What is my position? I am not selling my country short and until they tell me otherwise, or I experience otherwise, if I am wrong the only place I go to defend my name is not on a PNM platform, or in the Parliament Chamber, I go to the court and all those who have something to say, the door is wide open.

Mr. Speaker, listen to this obscenity: “Natural justice now demands that the commission be heard.” That is the editorial that the Member is saying discriminates in my favour. As though my action is somehow preventing the commission from being heard. The commission came to court and asked for one month to respond to my affidavit, after two months they could not respond, do you know why? They had nothing to support their rumours so they told the court they are offering no defence because there is none. That happens in a court of law, in the lawmaking body of the country and an editorial says: “Natural justice now demands that the commission be heard.” So somebody is now defending

somebody against me. I say no more on that for now, but all in good time. In Tobago we have a saying: “Moon ah run till day ketch him.” As you would know, Mr. Speaker, because you are from San Fernando and were around during the war. “So run yuh run.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask you and my colleagues to dismiss the contribution of my friend, the Member for Couva South. It is full of mischief, full of malice and a liberal sprinkling of untruth. Even as we are dealing with a current situation, there is this thing about discrimination and hypocrisy moving hand in hand. Today, I know it was very painful for my colleague, the Member for Arouca South to come here and undress herself in the way she did, if only to bring reason to a situation and for the public to understand what kind of person she is and what she did not do. It was painful, but she had to do it. [*Desk thumping*] It appears as though at the same time you could find a connection between an editorial and my action in the court and you are jumping up and down.

What about when you are involved? Are these standards only applicable to the PNM? What about when you were involved? Principle cannot be convenient you know, it has to stand the test of time, night or day, Sunday to Friday but Mr. Speaker, my friend, the Member for Caroni East, he was in the Cabinet with my friend, the Member for Siparia and many of them who were there and something has happened and those of you who are observing will notice that the Member for Caroni East is very perky recently. There was a time when he had a “hang dog look”.

Mr. Valley: He had a what?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: “A hang dog look”, because he was expecting a certain action which he thinks is now beyond him. So all of a sudden, he is very perky. He either got back something he lost, or somebody promised him he would not lose something, so he comes here now “bussing mark”.

Mr. Speaker, one of the leaders of the UNC, the former Prime Minister had, without having the facts—as a matter of fact, he does not need facts, he just says anything he wants. Hearing about what transpired with my friend, the Member for Arouca South, described her actions as scandalous and said that could never happen in the UNC, because it would never issue credit cards. That is the only true thing he ever said.

Mr. Speaker, when I was a little boy I had many friends who were around my age and we used to walk down the hill to go and buy bread every day, and some of the older people would ask us to buy bread and bring back for them. There

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were a couple of “fellas” who were not entirely above board, so every now and then they would report that the 25 cents lost, and, of course, the person’s whose bread would have been bought with that was to catch, and I always associate that with juvenile delinquency, pranksterism and whatever. But Mr. Speaker, when I was directed to a particular Cabinet Note which is familiar to my friend, the Member for Caroni East, which I want to share with you and I do so only in the context that you would see their righteous indignation as they heap coals on the head of my colleague, the Member for Arouca South. I want you to take them for what they are and not for what they say.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read for you Cabinet Minute, No. 2355 of October 29, 1999 and it is entitled “Reimbursement of money stolen from the former Minister of Legal Affairs during an official visit to Paris/France, September 1999”. The note says:

“Cabinet agreed that the Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, former Minister of Legal Affairs, be reimbursed the sum of \$35,250 which was stolen from her during an official visit to Paris, France in September 1999.”

“I know my partner and dem used to lose 25 cents”, but this is \$35,000 and the Cabinet was told—let me read what the Cabinet Note says how this happened.

By Cabinet Minute No. 1877, August 11, 1999 Cabinet agreed *inter alia*, that a delegation which included the Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Minister of Legal Affairs, represent Trinidad and Tobago at a ... (conference).

Cabinet also agreed that the Minister attend something in Monaco. The Minister accepted the invitation.

And Item No. 4 says:

4. The Honourable Minister had converted most of her per diem allowances to cash in order to meet the cost of hotel expenses and meals and ground transportation.”

Take note of that.

- “5. Outside of her hotel in Paris, the Honourable Minister was approached by two persons who were mistaken for but were actually impersonating Police Officers. The two persons proceeded to rob the Minister of cash in the sum of USD \$3,500.00. (the equivalent of 3,000 Swiss francs, the equivalent of TT \$35,250).

So Mr. Speaker, consequently—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Read the police report.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It continues.

“6. Consequently, the Honourable Minister was forced to access personal funds in order to meet expenses...”

Mr. Speaker, these are people who would tell you everything that happened in the country, and they know everybody who is discriminating, but this Minister goes to Paris and was robbed by two persons and we were never told.

Mr. Speaker, were you aware that a Minister of Government of Trinidad and Tobago was robbed in Paris?

Mr. Hinds: “She lost de bread money.”

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, do you not think—

Mr. Speaker: I think there is something you are saying that may not be right, because you indicated US \$3,500 and that cannot amount to—

Mr. Valley: No, Swiss francs.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, okay.

Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am asking if you find it acceptable that a Member of Trinidad and Tobago’s Cabinet can go abroad and be robbed and nobody in Trinidad and Tobago was ever told that? Nobody? So it falls to me today to let the public know that our Ministers are exposed to crime abroad, in the city of lights in Paris our Minister was robbed. The Note says:

She was reimbursed the sum of \$35,000 because she was supposed to have converted her per diem to cash.

Mr. Speaker, you would have travelled on Government business, what quantum of the expenses is really per diem? And you convert and got \$35,000 in cash for your per diem?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The Note says allowances. It is not \$170,000.

Dr. Moonilal: “So what yuh saying, she tief de money?”

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: All I am saying is that I find it passing strange that such an experience could have been had by a Minister of Government and this country was never told a word about it

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I will find the media report for you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And when they say they are not issuing credit cards, they do not have to issue credit cards, all you have to say is two strange men came up to you and take away the money. That is all you have to say and the Cabinet will reimburse you.

Do you know what my friends in Paris told me? Any money that was lost was lost in a bar.

Mr. Hinds: In a bar?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, it was lost in a bar where the owner of the cash may not have been in full control of the cash and—

Mr. Speaker: No, be careful. [*Crosstalk*] Order please!

Mr. Panday: I responding just now to the jewellery.

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order! Please continue.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am just telling you what my investigation revealed, and I am saying in a situation where a Member of the Cabinet accessed public funds, went abroad, returned and said somebody took it from her in a street in Paris and that is a secret to the country, I am calling for a proper investigation into this matter. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Correct.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Read the police report.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I would like a proper investigation into how a Minister of Government lost and was reimbursed \$35,000 in this schoolboy ruse.

She is shouting read the police report. Anybody can go to a police station and make any report. Ask my friend, the Member for Fyzabad, he went to the Central Police Station (CPS) in the company of my friend, the Member for Siparia who knows all about false police reports. The Member for Siparia was in the company of the Member for Fyzabad when he went to the Central Police Station and told

the police that he was beaten by me. So she knows the value of a false police report, and the fact that there is one in the back of this document saying that, they could only say what she said. They were not there.

I am asking for an investigation into this suspicious transaction. [*Desk thumping*] Today, the Member for Arouca South baring her soul in front of their fangs as they held this defence of public moneys, this defence of the principle of public accountability that they love so much and behave as though we are doing something so wrong, and they are the ones who are defending the public's interests and you tell me you converted most of your per diem.

On this trip \$35,000 was not all the per diem you know, that was only a part of it which she converted in cash. So this Minister was walking around with a bulging bag of money and somebody knew she had it. Two French men just looked at her and said: You have cash, and impersonated police officers, two persons outside her hotel in Paris. The Minister was approached by two persons who were mistaken for, but were actually impersonating police officers.

So they came up to you and say "Bon soir e, Madame, we are police officers, give me your money." So they impersonated police officers: We are French police, we are from the *gendarme*, give me your money, and she puts her hands in her pocket and hands over all the cash she has.

Anybody doing that has to be in a drunken state, they have to be crazy. They impersonated police officers. How does an impersonating police officer connect with you handing over cash?

Mr. Speaker, before they cast aspersions on anybody on this side they must clean up their act because they are in no position; not the leader, the sub-leader or any of them to cast any aspersions on anybody on this side. [*Desk thumping*] So when I hear them playing themselves on my name, I can deal with that, but when I approach the court with law just keep out of it. I do not need your help, and I do not care what you think, because you are unfit to speak about anybody on this side. And when your leader gets up outside and says it is scandalous, and it cannot happen in the UNC, he knows what he is talking about. Because even as we are receiving letters of apology from persons who raped the Treasury, they are trying to hold up the airport as something good because they think somebody would believe their nonsense, and until we get an apology from the UNC, do not mention Piarco airport as any public project of which you should be proud.

We have Americans writing the country contrite letters saying they are sorry for the role they played in ripping off the country, but those who were in office

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and facilitated it are here taking the high, moral ground. I was put out of this Parliament indefinitely for bringing documentary proof about what was going on at the airport. So if you find me annoyed, it is because I experienced it personally as an Opposition Member. But one thing the record would show is that I have never come to this Parliament and made an allegation or accusation against the UNC and they were ever able to say what I said is not correct, this is what is correct. On every occasion and every instance I came to the Parliament, everything I have said has stood the test of time, and that is the difference between the PNM and the UNC. [*Desk thumping*]

If they believe that by accusing us of corruption will improve their political fortunes because their government fell on corruption, in this PNM Government we have no Ramesh, we have no Ralph, we have no Sudama and there is no cause for any person like that to collapse the Government. We do not have that. Three of their Cabinet colleagues walked out of their government. We are not opportunists you know, Mr. Speaker, and I will give you an example.

When they were about to implode, I was in Tobago and got a call from a high-ranking UNC official who told me that Ramesh wants to talk to me because he wants to bring the government down. I said: "Talk to me? I will not speak to Ramesh." If he wants to talk to the PNM, it has a leader, it has a party headquarters and he can go there because I will not speak to him. So today when he talks about he is best friend of who and who, they know who they will tell that to. The next thing I knew, I saw him in certain situations and clearly I knew he spoke to people, not to me because I do not trust him as far as I can throw him.

Mr. Speaker, it is reasonable that if you want to accuse people especially if they are taking the highest ground on the indication that you are here to defend the public's purse and the public's right, then your slate has to be clean. It sounds like the ring is hollow coming from the UNC. My friend, the Member for Caroni East who had a lot to say was standing right here when he was confronted with how come, he as Minister of Public Utilities can instruct T&TEC by ministerial edict directed by the Cabinet to award the InnCogen contract to the Prime Minister's friend. When that heat was getting to him, he sought to cool it by saying that he discovered that two former PNM Ministers were on oil company payroll and he has passed that matter to the American Attorney General and they are looking into the matter.

When the press asked the American Embassy who are these Ministers who had been discovered to be receiving bribes under the PNM Government, the American Embassy issued a statement saying they are unaware of it, it is the first

time they are hearing of it and what the Member said is untrue. Up to this day we have never heard anything else about that allegation which made the front page in the *Trinidad Guardian*—PNM Ministers taking \$2 million bribe from oil companies. So we are accustomed to that and we will not spend anymore time listening to the foolishness. We have to get on with the people's business, we have our policies to execute; we have the people's interest to see about and that is what this Government will do until the people decide otherwise. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that the hon. Prime Minister took note, because that speech was not meant for us but for the Member for San Fernando East. He is campaigning and he is trying to terrorize you.

Mr. Speaker, it is one of the most disgraceful contributions I have heard. He speaks about the Member for Caroni East making allegations against the Member for Arouca South, spurious allegations, dropping bomb in the Parliament according to him, but I ask him today when the Member for Caroni East spoke, was it a bomb he was dropping, or did he quote from the Comptroller of Accounts documents? It was not *mauvais langue*, he quoted from an official document and today when one looks at the papers and sees \$6,000 in jewellery, and you come here to talk about fertility. We do not want to find out your business whether you are fertile, barren or not. We do not want to find out that. We are not concerned with that.

Dr. Moonilal: Or what hairdo, no.

Mr. S. Panday: We did not come here to deal with that!

Mr. Speaker: Order please! Order! Be careful with your language, please.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, you understand what I am saying.

Mr. Manning: I object to that.

Mrs. Job-Davis: That is not nice.

Mr. S. Panday: Why is it not nice? What about the jewellery, when was it bought? The hairdresser? She never told us about the jewellery, she never answered the questions and the queries raised by the Member for Caroni East. We thought we would have heard that. We did not want to come here today for you to put your private business in public. No, of course not, we do not want to hear that. We thought you would have come today and told us who you bought jewellery for.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Why?

Mr. S. Panday: Why? That is the answer, why?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is my money.

Mr. S. Panday: “All yuh feeding from the trough.” “Your money what! And the Comptroller of Accounts said it would garnish yuh salary because yuh doh want to pay it?”

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps it is a good time to have some tea. The House is suspended for tea and will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Members, before I call on the hon. Member for Princes Town to continue with his contribution, I want to issue a warning to all Members.

When the Speaker is still in the Chamber and advises whether it is for tea or dinner as the case may be, try and keep the crosstalk and the quarrelling to a minimum level. After I leave the Chamber, you can do what you want, but certainly, while I am exiting the Chamber, please have some respect for the Chair.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, it was never my intention to bring the hon. Member for Arouca South into this debate, but the Member for Diego Martin West, brought it into the debate and it is he who said when they thief we must call it naive. They are naive when they thief. He was using that as a weapon to attack Members on this side. Therefore, it is a duty on our side to respond. [*Desk thumping*] He went out of his way to attack the Member for Caroni East. He has said on many occasions he came with false rumours and made false statements, trying to degrade the Member for Caroni East and to nullify the effect of what he has to say when it is good information coming before this honourable House. He wants to give the impression that the Member for Caroni East has become perky, attacking him as though he lost something and he has now found it or something somebody had and he now got it, trying to cast aspersions on the character of the Member for Caroni East. All the Member for Caroni East was doing was his work, and he went off on him.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM has a habit of covering up their thievery and their corruption, their attack on this side so that their situation will go on the back burner. It is our duty not to keep it there.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Arouca South is here, I want to tell her I mean no personal attack on her. It was the Member for Diego Martin West who brought her into this debate.

Mr. Speaker, he said she poured her heart before the House. That wicked statement from the Member for Diego Martin West, that she changed her per diem allowances and that she was robbed. He was trying to insinuate. [*Interruption*] That is exactly what. They believe how they thief, that is how everybody else thief—and she was robbed. And, he was trying to create an impression in this House that she was not robbed and she made a false claim. Investigate it! We welcome an inquiry into that. Seven years now he has that waiting as though they were expecting to do the wickedness, corruption and the thievery that they were doing, that he holds this in his back pocket like an election date to use. Why did you not raise it before? Why did he have to look for it today so that when the Member for Arouca South was exposed nakedly before the country he came out with that? That may attack the Member for Siparia, but it does not put clothing on the Member for Arouca South.

Mr. Speaker, he says he is not afraid of the court and the Member for Caroni East lied. What the Member for Caroni East said is that he had information that materials were moved from the Scarborough Hospital—state material was used. What did the report came out and said? Five million dollars in materials were removed, but he wants to cut the throat of the Member for Caroni East for saying that. He wants to devour him.

The Member spoke today about how he was so sorry that Member had to put her private life in public. It is he who put it, and he was trying to justify the wrong because the Member came today and said that it was for gynaecological and infertility treatment.

One would have thought that would have been the extent of the spending and Cabinet would have approved it. That is not what the Member for Caroni East said last week. The Member, as a gentleman as he is, said he did not want to reveal the contents of the documents which he had in his hand. When the Member for Diego Martin West said that the Member for Caroni East is dropping bombshell, the Member had an opportunity in the absence of the Member for Arouca South to burst the nest on that occasion, but he said no. I am giving the Member for Arouca South an opportunity for her to come before this House and tell the House how the money was spent. The Member for Diego Martin West must know how he is speaking.

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He knows what he is speaking but he is making confusion. If he has a war with the Prime Minister, let them fight it there. And when one watched his body language today, one would have seen it was the Prime Minister he was warning. It was not us because he cannot touch the Member for Caroni East. He cannot touch any of us here. The man nearest to him is this Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that he would have asked the Member for Arouca South—hear what he said last week? Go and find the *Hansard*, read the *Hansard* and answer the *Hansard*. We ask the question: When they came here today and made their explanation the Member for Diego Martin West, did he in any way try to justify the purchase of jewellery at Christie's Sotheby's, New York for US \$6,420 on June 01, 2006? On a Government credit card. What happened? You could not get your own credit card. You could not have a private credit card? Why did you take your money and put it on the Government's credit card?

Purchase of clothing at Max, Better Dresses, New York for US \$259. on June 09, 2006, using a state credit card. [*Interruption*] Do not come with that.

Mr. Valley: My money.

Mr. S. Panday: Do not come with that. If that was her money then she had no need to come before the House today to explain anything. If you think that is propriety—and you were right in what you were doing, you had no explanation to give anybody. But the question is: Why did you come to the House today and only gave half of the story? Why did you come to the House today and try to talk about the fertility and the gynaecological thing? Is it to create sympathy or is it a red herring? Why did you not talk about the luxury items that were spent with the Government credit cards? Why was the luxury items omitted from the credit cards? These are questions.

Purchase of items at Blitzes Pieces, End Pieces, New York at US \$6,781 on June 09. Like this spending spree was from June 01. Purchase of items at Light House Lighting Corporation for US \$3,118.99 on June 13, a whole two-week period of spending. It was feeding from the trough. As politics would have it you are feeding from the trough over the area. Why did you not come today and tell this honourable House and this country what happened? You are the Minister of Planning and Development, you are a senior Member of Government—and she said oh, I was naïve. Not good enough.

We want to let the Member for Diego Martin West and Members of the PNM know that is not good enough for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Last week when the hon. Member for Caroni East was speaking the Member for Diego Martin Central said it was not her fault to exceed the limits on the credit card. The bank—

Mr. Valley: What the *Hansard* would show is that I said there must be some reason. No one can exceed a credit card by \$174,000. There had to be some explanation. That is what I said.

Dr. Moonilal: What is the explanation?

Mr. Valley: The explanation is clear that the Member put the card in credit.

Mr. S. Panday: You gave it to her? That is a PNM scandal.

Mr. Speaker: One minute hon. Member. I think the *Hansard* reporter could only really listen to the Member who is on his feet and not any other Member. The Standing Orders do provide that when the Member is speaking everybody else should keep quiet.

Mr. S. Panday. If the Member for Diego Martin West did not speak, I did not have to speak. Last week the Member said the bank was at fault.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, the Member is misquoting me. I am asking him if he wants to quote me, he should quote me correctly.

Mr. S. Panday: I will quote the newspaper.

Mr. Valley: Quote the *Hansard*, not the newspaper.

Mr. S. Panday: You could run but you cannot hide. You said it and you could bully me how much you want. Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing in this Parliament today is the under-belly of the PNM; the thuggery which they use at election time. This is election year and the thuggery is now beginning to manifest itself. That is what we are seeing her, and you could play a thug as you want, you are not going to stop me.

Mr. Speaker, and I quote from the newspaper of Saturday, May 19, 2007, “All that glitters”—is not gold editorial.

“The PNM regime has frequently been accused of being a spendthrift administration. That criticism has been rooted mainly in the several construction projects the Government is spending billions on, even as it ignores more basic infrastructural needs in the country. And that is when we

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talk about the Equal Opportunity Bill that they are prejudicing against the country people in terms of water. Look how they are spending the money here! This is what we are talking about also.”

“But the recent revelations about credit card use by Government ministers suggest that PNM profligacy is rooted in the attitude of its leaders. “

We want the population to know that this Government has to go, and I want all Members on this side to know it is now or never. We have got to get rid of you all. For you all to use credit card again!

“In the Senate last Wednesday, Caroni East MP Ganga Singh named eight Government ministers who, he said, had used their Government credit cards over the limit and for private use.”

What was the purpose of the cards? The purpose of the cards was for Government and official business. It was not to buy wig. I know the Member for Diego Martin West might not want. You must not use the credit card, which is an official document, giving you permission to spend money for official purposes.

Mr. Speaker: I appealed to Members once before, and I am not going to appeal to you all again. The Member is speaking; the Hansard reporter has to record everything he is saying. I have to hear what he is saying. If everybody decides to talk along with the Member for Princes Town, I am not going to tolerate it. The Member has the absolute privilege of speaking. All of us need to hear him.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker,

“The worst offender, according to Singh, was Planning Minister Camille Robinson-Regis, who spent over three times the card’s of TT \$63,000 limit”.

You had TT \$63,000 to spend and she went over that to TT \$174,000. The members of the public must know this. It says:

“...Robinson-Regis has denied Singh’s allegations,”

And she said the sums were spent for medical expenses. The hon. Member came today and said that and she failed and refused—and I will not go so far to say that she misled the House in not giving the House the information about the private luxury items which she bought. The PNM could jump high, they could jump low; those are the facts.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central should hang his head in a bucket with a certain liquid. As a junior Minister of Finance, a person who

controls and deals with finance in this country, do you hear the kind of explanation he gave? He says, and I want him to answer.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said it was her money. The same way he could say gravel was his too in Scarborough. Hear the problem.

“The route of putting a ‘cash advance’ to ‘put the card in credit’ is odd given that a withdrawal on the credit card incurs a 20 per cent cost.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis, in fact, incurred over \$6,000 in bank charges— for cash advances, late payment, and debit interest.

Another key point made by Mr. Singh was that the credit cards were not to be used for private purchases. Mr. Singh said that some of the items listed on the credit cards included jewelry and lighting fixtures.”

This is not the purpose of a credit card. You are an official of the Government. When you go on Government business you incur certain expenses and the expenses must be ... [*Crosstalk*] Is that Minister saying he does the same thing? Is the Minister saying the profligacy is rooted in the attitude of the leaders of the PNM? Do you agree with that? The question is: Is it right? Answer.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Princes Town knows not of what he speaks. He has never been anywhere on Government business. He does not know anything about what he is talking about.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I would not like to know what he knows from what he does. Singh said that some of the items listed in the credit card included jewellery. Did you ever buy jewellery on your credit card? Answer. I want you on *Hansard*. He would not answer. Lighting fixtures. You would not do that. Were these items indeed, purchased by the Government Minister? We have not heard any denial on this specific allegation and that is what we thought today would have happened, that the Minister had an opportunity today to say the Member for Caroni East is a liar and the Member for Diego Martin West can come and say he is trying to “buss mark” and he does not know what he is saying. You had an opportunity today and you denied the House the information that was necessary to clear your name.

Finally, and this, I come to you Member for Diego Martin Central. There is a role of the First Citizens Bank in this matter.

“When Singh raised the issue, Trade Minister Ken Valley said the blame should be put on the bank since credit cards are supposed to have a limit.”

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Did you not say that? Were you trying to cover up for PNM corruption? This is the question we are asking you. It is not boy, it is man here. Here is where the lack of respect and regard people have for the Member for Diego Martin Central.

This is quite disingenuous coming from a senior minister under whose administration the then-named National Commercial Bank (NCB) had to be closed and restructured precisely because, as a State-owned bank, its procedures had been abused by politicians and party hacks.”

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I am sure everybody knows that the NCB failed under the NAR administration.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker that may be so, but after the PNM sucked out everything from the bank like a sucouyant, and they left it bloodless, anaemic, maybe, something happened. But it was under the Minister’s charge and this kind of PNM profligacy that is rooted in the attitude of the leaders. That is the point. I will read this again.

“This is quite indigenous coming from a senior minister under whose administration the then-named National Commercial Bank (NCB) had to be closed and restructured precisely because, as a State-owned bank, its procedures had been abused by politicians.” and that is you all and “party hacks.” That is your party hacks, but Mr. Valley’s comments also gives the insight into the political culture he represents.

The political culture is a way, and there is institutionalized corruption, that you say it is naïve, it is procedure.

Mr. Valley: You check your brother for that.

Mr. S. Panday: The Government Ministers should not be blamed for overspending but the bank should be held accountable for not ensuring that they do not. That bank is now under the PNM. The PNM is in power now and that bank is existing now. When you said it was the NAR that closed down the bank, and I told you the PNM Ministers and party hacks have sucked out the bank and made it anaemic. I am asking you today: Is that not the same FCB which existed under a PNM Government and it is the same thing that happened then that is happening now?

It says the lack of responsibility and self restraint in our view, explained much about the ills in our society—and these are leaders in our society.

When one takes a credit card, do not tell me that a government minister or a Minister of Planning and Development would not know what are the purposes of

a credit card. The Cabinet Note was read by the Member for Caroni East? It says that when you go on Government business it must be as a result of Government business, it must be as a result of expenditure which you incurred consequent on a government business. That, buying a wig, is that on Government business? Buying dresses, is that Government business? Buying lighting fixtures, is that Government business? Do not come and tell me I put the money. When was it put?

The Member for Caroni East said the Comptroller of Accounts had written a number of letters asking for the payments. So, those who are saying it was her money. It was her money yes, after the Comptroller of accounts asked for the money. Was it paid then?

I did not raise this. I did not want to speak about this. But that Member for Diego Martin West tried to pour scorn on us.

Mr. Speaker: You know before today, I never thought that the hon. Member for Princes Town and the hon. Member for Arouca South had something in common. But they do have something in common, so perhaps, you can take off your mike and we will all hear you. I am asking you to tone down a bit.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, they have spent their lifetime attacking us here and when they do it, they try to justify it by making excuses and that is what we are annoyed about. The Member for Caroni East was performing his functions.

An official credit card issued pursuant to a Cabinet Note saying that it was for spending as a result of Government business. Here are some data taken from the list of card holders with contraventions as contained by the Comptroller of Accounts. How could you justify this? Where are you all running? It says: Camille Robinson-Regis cash advance April 06, 2004, private use \$10,971; Cash advance \$64,050; May 06, private use \$26,352.56. Feeding from the trough. Private use again, June 06, \$176,453.59; debit interest, 13.05.7. It goes on and as we go along, up to April 2007, it says, August 06 after it was crossed, an email from FCB dated November 11, 2006, re: non-payments toward accounts. Up to that time, was it your money? Money that you have taken since 06 April, it says, debit interest, memo to, CA/Comptroller of Accounts dated December 13, 2006 for June 2006 and August 2006; September, breaches. This is what they are speaking about. On October 06, draft letter to Permanent Secretary, finance, submitted for approval of garnishee proceedings. Do you know what garnishee is? It is not something you eat. It is not carrots and so forth. Mr. Speaker, up to November 06, garnishee proceedings, draft letter to the Permanent Secretary,

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finance, submitted for approval. I want to ask the Minister of Finance who is sitting there, did he know about it? Member for Diego Martin Central, did you know about it? As a Minister, did you know about it and you pretended you did not know about it?

On hold; pending settlement request by 31/12/06. On January 30, 2007, minutes to the Minister of the Finance dated 2007.01.30. The question is: It is a memo either to the Minister of Finance. Is it the Prime Minister? Is it junior Minister Conrad Enill? I do not know who is doing it. And, the last thing we have is, awaiting response.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I did not want to do this but that Member for Diego Martin West and this is where they have been accusing people—the Member for Diego Martin Central—that could not happen to the PNM. But Ambassador Jerry Narace, Ambassador Plenipotentiary, said the PNM does take care of its own. This whole corrupt worse case here, is it a case of the PNM taking care of its own and hiding it from the public? These are questions that we are asking here today.

As I said, I have no grudge against the Member for Arouca South, but to say that when they attack people, that they must note what they are doing. That Member for Diego Martin West ran because he could not stay this evening. He plays ‘bad john’ and runs. Something he spoke about in 1999 when the Member for Siparia and he called for an enquiry. We say we welcome it. [*Desk thumping*] We are not asking for one set of rules for us and one set of rules for them. We are asking the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance to launch an enquiry into the moneys which the hon. Member for Siparia had claimed via some Cabinet Note, and at the same time, we are asking what will the PNM do with their own?

5.30 p.m.

We want the same treatment meted out to the Member for Siparia to be applied to all Members of the PNM, so we call for a full enquiry into it.

Mr. Speaker, they have a habit of saying, “Dey thief; dey thief”. I want to find out if what I just read there, about the payments and the various letters, is not “thieving”. If that is not corruption, tell me what corruption is. It seems to me that when the money was taken, there was no intention at the time to pay it back. If there was intention to pay back that money, there would not have been letters from the Comptroller of Accounts begging for the money. There would not have been letters saying they would garnish the salary.

Do you know what garnish is, Mr. Speaker? Garnish is to take it away from your salary. That is what garnishee proceedings mean. We ask them here today—we call, just like they have been calling on us—for equal treatment; equal opportunity, [*Desk thumping*] equal accountability and equal transparency.

Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I am sorry that the Prime Minister is not here. That was the most disgraceful piece of conmanship perpetrated upon this Parliament—the introduction of this Bill. I will show you why. Do not get up yet, Mr. Speaker, I see you want to rise. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: I thought you were referring to the Member. Had you been referring to him—that was a good afterthought. Carry on!

Mr. S. Panday: You are like the rising sun, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation is similar to the Act of 2000. I say that this piece of legislation is the greatest fraud perpetrated on the Parliament. I will tell you why. The Minister came here on the last day, March 23, 2007 and spoke about the legislation in very glowing terms. I quote from the *Hansard*:

”The Equal Opportunity Bill, 2007 seeks to provide the mechanisms for such persons to access justice. In other words, the Bill seeks to enhance access to justice in respect of contraventions by private entities. The Bill will provide the legal framework to allow a right of redress to persons who feel they have been discriminated against by others in the private arena...Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to prohibit certain kinds of discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different sex, colour, race, and origin including geographical origin...”

He said that the only reason the PNM did not support the Bill on the last occasion, in 2000, it was his gut feeling, that the way the Bill was presented was creating more problems than it solved. He is a person, it appears to me, who does not deal with substance. He said:

“...nothing was inherently innocuous about it, but I rather suspect it is the manner in which it was presented...”

I am convinced now, as I was convinced then, that the greatest problem facing mankind today is its failure to manage diversity.”

He went on:

“Mr. Speaker, legislation of this nature should indeed seek to foster cohesion rather than conflict in the society...”

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And he went on to produce arguments.

Mr. Speaker, he gave the aims and objectives of the legislation, but he failed to inform this honourable House that this piece of legislation was declared unconstitutional by the courts, not only because of the fact that they did not have a majority, but also because it offended section 13 of the Constitution. If I may help him to go on to section 13 of the Constitution, it says:

“(1) An act to which this section applies may expressly declare that it shall have effect even though inconsistent with sections 4 and 5 and, if any such Act does so declare, it shall have effect accordingly unless the Act is shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a society that has a proper respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual.”

It seems to me his argument was that he does not understand the law or he did not read the Bill. He quoted the Bill, so I hope he knew what he was reading. If that is so, it is a fraud he has perpetrated on this Government and the Prime Minister—I am sorry he is not here—should know that is the worst presentation we have ever heard in this Parliament.

If one looks at the Bill before us, one will see that it is almost identical to the 2000 Act. There is only a slight change to section 7 and another section—minor changes—and section 7 is not one of the most offensive sections in the Bill and that is the one they pull out because they want to perpetuate a kind of antagonism in society.

Mr. Hinds: You are very bitter.

Mr. S. Panday: I am bitter when I see a credit card being abused the way it has been abused. I am bitter. Mr. Speaker, do you know why I am bitter? Because they profess to be angels, but in truth and in fact they are “soucouyants”.

The courts had said that this Bill is not only unconstitutional, but it is unworkable. The Bill is unworkable and I ask the question today: If we pass this Bill with a constitutional majority, what has the Government put in place to make it workable? What have you put in place to make it workable? And the answer is: Nothing!

So, Mr. Speaker, they said that was negotiated legislation. That was when Members of the Opposition met with the Government. The Opposition then had indicated that the Equal Opportunity Bill must be a part of the package. While all members of the Opposition went with clean hands and hearts and negotiated with the PNM, the PNM tried to outsmart them. They never acted in good faith. Bringing

a Bill like this, at this stage, the PNM has not acted in good faith and they were "mamaguying" the Opposition, asking them to support them in all the legislation and they would bring the Equal Opportunity Bill. Do you know what that says: You want it, take it.

I hold no brief for the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the Member for Caroni East, but when they met the PNM, the PNM never told them that the Bill has no value. As a matter of fact, they went with the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and put deadlines. They said that by April 19, the Bill would be debated and within a certain number of days it would be implemented, knowing full well that what they have brought to the Parliament is a Bill that cannot stand, whether they have the special majority or not. The Bill is going nowhere.

Sending this Bill to a select committee means nothing because this Government never had the intention to have this Bill passed and implemented. It is "ol' talk" because discrimination is in the DNA of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Remember what the Prime Minister said, Mr. Speaker? Equity does not mean equality. Do you remember that?

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my learned friends. I promise if they do not provoke me, I will not take the whole 30 minutes.

It is in the DNA of the PNM to discriminate. They have been in power so long they have institutionalized, not only corruption, but also discrimination. They have brutalized the population to such an extent that the population is now numb.

People speak about racial discrimination, but I speak of another kind of discrimination where the PNM comes for anybody who is opposed to them. I make the statement about Marlene Coudray. They wanted to interfere with her lands in Cocoyea. She stood up to the Prime Minister. He tried to move her. He said: "Yuh playing bad? Go dong dong dey where you have somebody. Go down to Point." I know Marlene. She was my schoolmate. She is a woman of class; a woman of strength and she stood up. The Member for San Fernando West knows that. Great lady! She stood up and she took them to court; took the Prime Minister to court

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and that is why today when the Member for Diego Martin West was speaking: “I go to the courthouse to get my thing”, he was really talking to the Prime Minister. That Prime Minister has been to court more than anybody else for discrimination.

Marlene Coudray decided to fight and she won. Do you know what was the message to the councillors of the San Fernando City Council? “Give she pressure till she run.” She was such a good CEO that even the councillors could not take the instructions. Do you know what the result was? The Mayor of the City went too. He got blows. He was too friendly. He went into a room and cried. He said that Marlene Coudray was a great CEO.

So when we talk about discrimination, I do not want to dwell on racial discrimination, but I want to talk about the discrimination of the Government against people. All the people opposed to the PNM are discriminated against and that is why we must stand up and that is why I say it is in their DNA and they do not want this legislation. If this legislation comes to fruition, they will be dealt with. The Member for Chaguanas indicated, as he sees it, that when the PNM is in power there is political discrimination and when the UNC is in power, there is political discrimination.

The Member for Couva South said probably we inherited it from colonial days. There was a vision of a man—I quote from the *Hansard* of the debate on the Equal Opportunity Bill, dated September 28, 2000, Dr. Anna Mahase.

“...it is a very great honour to stand here this evening in what is supposed to be my maiden speech, to support this most progressive and long overdue Equal Opportunity Bill.

Mr. Vice-President, the Equal Opportunity Bill creates the Equal Opportunity Commission, which is the dream of the Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday, who has been calling for an Equal Opportunity Commission since his days in Opposition.”

She goes on to say:

“On April 25, the President of the Law Association, Glenda Morean argued, and I quote:

‘If it is necessary to eliminate or avoid or minimize or contain discrimination in its wildest practices, then we must go outside the Constitution and set up the appropriate machinery.’”

If the discrimination was there, as the hon. Member for Chaguanas said, I humbly submit that it was the vision of the government of the time to ensure that

discrimination was eliminated. That is why when the Member for Caroni East was the Minister of Public Utilities, he said there would be water for all. That was the concept.

When they had the Common Entrance, where 10,000 students stayed back every year, we instituted universal secondary education; inclusion of all; no child must be left behind. That was the thinking, so even if there was discrimination, there was at least an attempt to deal with it. That is why we wonder if, indeed, that was the reason they did not want to have this legislation, because they know they would never be the beneficiaries of discrimination. They would never be the discriminated, but they would be the discriminators.

Mr. Speaker, they behaved so badly in the Parliament when that Bill was introduced. I remember the Member for Diego Martin East:

“And that is why we in the PNM are not going to vote with you as on this oppressive piece of legislation.”

They see equal opportunity as being oppressive. Oppressive against whom?

“We will not allow you to mash up this country.”

Giving people equality is “mashing up” the country for the PNM. And he goes on. That Member for Diego Martin Central, who is pretending to be sleeping, his behaviour was so bad. Do you remember what he did? Let me help you.

Mr. Speaker: Objectionable behaviour of the Member for Diego Martin Central!...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to apologize to the House for having kept you waiting for such a long time. Having suspended the sitting of the House, I wish to advise, you know. I ask the Leader of the House and the Opposition Chief Whip to come to my Chambers. I am very unhappy to report that the behaviour of the Member for Diego Martin Central in my Chamber was even more objectionable than it was in the Chamber.” *[Interruption]*

You!

“I wish to advise the Member for Diego Martin Central that he is certainly in the first instance suspended immediately from the sitting of this House for the day and I ask him immediately to withdraw.”

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I was merely joining good company. I remember the time when the Member sat downstairs the Parliament for two weeks in a dhoti. He is the wrong person to be casting aspersions. I was joining good company.

Mr. S. Panday: Mine was not for bad behaviour, but because of the Rent Restriction Act, when I made a certain comment about certain dishonesty in the courts utilizing the Rent Restriction Act, which says that if you want to get out a tenant and cannot get him out, all you have to do is to get a demolition notice and put him in the road.

I knew the details of the case and the engineer said that he knew the building was not working. It was Marajin Roti Shop, Rising Star. She was upstairs and the “Chinee” man was downstairs and they threw them in the road. That is where Radica Trading is now on High Street, San Fernando.

The engineer said, “You all know the place ain’t good. I went and I jumped and the place was vibrating.” And they got that poor lady out of High Street where Radica’s is now. They used their contact in the City Council and the Borough Council to throw poor people on the road. When I talked about it, they said: “Call names.” I said: “Yes, I want to call names.” Then the Member for San Fernando East said not to call names. We want to throw you out the Parliament and they threw me out of the Parliament. That is the reason I was thrown out. So I want to tell the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central he felt he was in good company.

We go on. When this Bill was introduced—when one looks at the history of the Bill—it went to a select committee. The PNM participated in the select committee, but when the time came to sign the report, they toed a party line and did not sign the report. Although they participated, at the committee stage when they came to the floor of the Parliament, they twisted their mouths. That is why the Bill did not obtain the parliamentary majority it needed.

This is what we saw happening and that is why when they bring this Bill before this House, we say we cannot trust them because they would never, never implement the Bill. The Bill, as I said, was published for comment in 1997. Comments were forwarded to a joint select committee; [*Inaudible*] public support, joint select committee, legislative review committee; all that the Bill went through. When we went into the Senate, this is what Sen. Joan Yuille-Williams said. This is in the *Hansard*.

“People have questioned it but we have gone so far with this legislation that I believe by now we feel that we have to come with it again a time. I almost thought that the legislation would have died on its way to the Senate...”

And that Act of 2000 is almost identical to the Bill before us. If the PNM’s position then was that they were hoping that the Bill would die, how are they bringing the Bill and telling us that they are supporting the Bill?

Mr. Valley: Negotiated legislation.

Mr. S. Panday: I say that it was negotiation in bad faith. I ask that Member if he could tell us what were the offending sections in the Act that this Bill has addressed to make it workable? What caused it to be struck down by the court that he has changed to make it workable? Mr. Speaker, it was said that the Bill is unconstitutional in at least six respects. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre had begun in that area.

Mr. Speaker, section 41 speaks about establishing the tribunal as a superior court of record, with powers similar to the Supreme Court, but its Members do not enjoy the same degree of security of tenure. That, Mr. Speaker, is a breach of the doctrine of the separation of powers and it derogates from the powers of the Supreme Court and it erodes the independence of the Judiciary. That is the hallmark of democracy. The hallmark of democracy is the separation of powers and giving the court the power to monitor legislation.

Section 42 gives the Judicial and Legal Service Commission the power to appoint a chairman of the tribunal because it says if you go to the commission and the commission is not satisfied or cannot deal with the problem, then you go on to the tribunal. Section 42 gives the Judicial and Legal Service Commission the power to appoint a chairman of the tribunal. The Judicial and Legal Service Commission is a creature of the Constitution and whenever you are the creature of the Constitution it circumscribes the power. You do not have any common law powers. All you have are statutory powers like a magistrate as against a judge. Any attempt to expand those powers is in effect an amendment of the Constitution and such amendment must be made by a special majority in conformance with section 13.

The question we ask here today is: Has that section been changed? Even if we pass this Bill with a special majority, it offends section 13, and if it offends section 13, it is going nowhere.

Mr. Valley: That is why it has to go to select committee.

Mr. S. Panday: No! Why did you not pass it to your draftsman before you came here? Why did you have to fool the House? Did you bring a bill that is defective and hope to send it to a select committee to have it remedied? It seems to me you have nothing. As Minister of Finance, you attacked the bank and you allow the bank to go down under you.

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So, Mr. Speaker, we are saying that just as in the Police Service (Amdt.) Bill, we stopped and sent it to the draftpersons and it came back within two or three days with amendments which make sense and are workable, let us do that now.

No joint select committee could deal with that because when it goes there—this is coming to the end of the parliamentary term—you will have to appoint legal people and what not and, according to the Member for Oropouche, it will die down there. It will be pronounced dead on arrival—DOA.

That is why we say that they have fooled us. That is what I mean when I say that a fraud has been perpetrated in the Parliament. They never told the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, when they spoke with them to solicit their assistance to pass the Bail Bill, that the Bill they were bringing was the same old garbage. They showed no respect for my colleagues when they acted in good faith and said they would support the Bail Act. They bring this legislation with a timetable. They never told them that when it comes here it was going to a joint select committee and would never come back.

6.00 p.m.

You are treating us like rubbish and that all of us on this side must put it in our pipes and smoke it. You have treated all of us like rubbish. That is what the PNM is about; the arrogance and the pomposity of the PNM. That is what they are. That is why I have said this time, that it is now or never.

Let us go to another section. The problem with section 7 was that it was vague and lacked certainty. It restricts the rights and freedom of thought and expression that are entrenched under section 4. It states that there are situations with which it can deal. It also says that this section is not so objectionable. What do you find the PNM doing? That is the section they have removed. That section has people singing and cursing other people. They have removed that.

The other issue is that of sexual preference and orientation. Maybe we could use the word "gender". That could have been dealt with. It went on to say—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: If you were in the courts, you would be wasting the court's time.

Mr. S. Panday: This is Parliament and I am representing the people. You "buss a bank". You wasted time as a Minister of Finance. Not only were you a waste of time, because I will withdraw that, you have wasted time as a Minister of Finance and allowed a financial institution to grow under your watch. "De only bank for you to 'buss' now is de blood bank."

It states that sections 41(4) and 48 give—[*Interruption*] You are not listening. You have a mindset that you know the legislation is going nowhere. It gives the Tribunal unlimited jurisdiction and creates no offences. That is the problem in the law. It created no offences, but gave power to punish. Your draftsmen will know. It created no offences, but gave power to punish. It is in the legislation. You have left the section which contravenes the Constitution and brought it before us.

The Equal Opportunity Act creates no offences, but it gives the Tribunal the power to impose fines. Anybody who knows any law will know that you must have the law, offences and then penalties. Do you know what is sad about it? He tried to fool the Parliament. He mentioned these things in his contribution when the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre asked certain questions. She said she did not want to embarrass you. I think I cannot give you that luxury today. She felt sorry for you, because it is an act of dishonesty to come to this honourable House and do what you have done. That is a breach of the separation of powers in deciding matters which would impose fines and set limits on those fines. The Tribunal would be exercising a function reserved for the Legislature. The Act gave the Tribunal functions which were reserved for the Legislature. Did you know that when you presented the Bill? If you knew it when you presented the Bill, why did you not make the amendments? Is it true that you read it, understood it and tried to pull wool over the eyes of this House?

Sections 17 and 18 could be cured with the special majority. As we stand here today, we ask the Government not to throw the burden on a joint select committee. The Bill went there already. When you wanted help with the Police Service Bill you asked for it and we gave it. We are willing to assist the Government right away with no select committee. Adjourn and we shall meet and all these things which are in contravention of the Constitution we—as we assisted the Government in the Police Regulations—are willing to assist with redrafting the offensive clauses in the Constitution. If this goes to a joint select committee, we are wasting time.

We must, at this time, I humbly submit, adjourn and let us meet some time during the week. The last time we adjourned to continue with the Police Regulations on Monday. On Friday, we came to the Parliament and we made our contributions. I submitted four pages of amendments and they had been accepted. We are of worth on this side and we are willing to render our services to assist the Government in drafting a Bill right now.

Thank you.

Mr. Valley: I wanted to ask you a question. Does he really think the Government would give him an issue for the election, by allowing this Bill to lapse before the election? Do you think so? Well think so again.

Mr. S. Panday: The way the PNM is arrogant, I believe that they are sending this Bill to be killed. I believe they would not allow it to come off.

Mr. Nizam Baksh (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make an intervention on this Bill, to prohibit certain kinds of discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different status, to establish an Equal Opportunity Commission and an Equal Opportunity Tribunal and for other related matters.

The Bill attempts to legislate equality of opportunity, as far as it relates to discrimination, in respect of employment, the provision of goods and services and the provisions of accommodation. Citizens of this once beautiful country are asking questions and expressing doubts because of their past experiences of discrimination and victimization under the uncaring PNM regime.

Today the Bill is here because of pressure to deliver by the Opposition and public outcry. Since the emergence of the PNM, the seeds of political discrimination and victimization were sown and is now a cancer in our society. Citizens are asking the question: Can this legislation really work? It can work and the Government must be the leader in driving this initiative. It is going to be a commitment of the next UNC government.

I listened to the Government spokespersons on this Bill and I recognize that the contributions made by the Members have demonstrated a lack of enthusiasm and willingness to implement this Bill.

Today the situation is, who you know in Government will make a definite advantage in gaining employment. Likewise, it is who you know in society. We have all heard before the saying “pulling strings to get jobs”. This is a creature of the PNM Government. Can you imagine a Government Minister asking a contractor, favoured with Government contracts, to employ family members or party members and the contractor refusing? Mr. Speaker, you can imagine the experience of knowing the frustrations by that contractor? There would be delay in payments and, of course, no further contracts.

I have listed one or two areas that I feel are of concern, with regard to the discrimination meted out to citizens of this country. As the MP for Siparia, the Leader of the Opposition spoke in her contribution about the distributive justice, I

will look at some of the areas where she spoke about distributive justice, where we can certainly look at, under this section. I will speak about the public service and the teaching service.

A number of constituents came to me and spoke about making application to the Public Service Commission and the Teaching Service Commission. They said these applications were made over a period of five years and, to date, they have not received any formal acknowledgement of their application. Whenever attempts were made to contact them, by way of the telephone, they always got problems. They are unable to reach the clerks assigned to these areas. Sometimes when they get information they are told that their application has been lost and that they have to reapply.

Imagine for a period of four or five years, persons have been waiting with the hope that an opportunity will come to them soon. That will never materialize because they have been told that their applications have been misplaced and that they need to reapply. What does that mean? It means that if you reapply, then your application goes to the top. You would never reach the day when you will get a job in the public service. I feel this is a form of discrimination when these forms are misplaced like that.

I also want to look at the physically challenged. We have been hearing this Government talk about Vision 2020 and that they have plans to implement so many things. Today, we are in the seventh year of Vision 2020 and we have not seen anything materializing under those categories of work. The physically challenged is one of those areas I want to look at. The physically challenged have been complaining about access to public buildings. They can do so on wheelchairs. If you look at the toilet facilities, they are not fully equipped for the physically challenged. This is something we need to look at.

We have a situation in our Parliament. We have the Member for Laventille West. I think we should have provided facilities in this Parliament. We should have an elevator from the ground floor to the upper floor, so that Members can use it to come up the floors. Similarly, the ramp required to get up the stairs is not well equipped for persons with physical challenges to come and sit here. While we want to address the situation with people on the outside, firstly we need to look internally to see what we could do to address the situation of our own Members. We never know what could happen to any of us. We need to provide the facilities.

We are also looking at the educational opportunities for the physically challenged. You have training and people are crying out for jobs. They may have

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some form of training, but yet they are unable to find jobs. That is something we need to look at. Even if it means that we need to find special jobs for them, which will facilitate their employment opportunities, rather than their waiting on the State for handouts. This is a critical area, though we have a small number of people in this category. We need to address it as an urgent matter, because every citizen in this country has equal opportunity. That is what we want to provide.

I also looked at housing. In my constituency there are a few people who came to me who are residing in the south and working in the south and have applied for housing lots. After all the interviews, they were told that the opportunities are available to them in the East-West Corridor. Imagine people living in the south, working in the south and now given opportunities to live in the East-West Corridor. What you are actually telling them is to take it or leave it. You do not have alternative areas for them as well. This is something we need to look at. People must be given opportunities if they need to reside in a particular area, so that they could get the lots they require.

I also want to look at the Caroni (1975) Limited VSEP lots. Mention was made of it earlier. The prices—this was only discovered recently when I posed a question with regard to the lots available to the VSEP workers of Caroni (1975) Limited—that the Caroni workers have to pay the same that members of the public have to pay. I believe that is not fair to them as well.

I have an article from the *Probe* of Sunday May 13:

“Ex-Caroni worker calls on PM to scrap land delivery

Winston Ramdhani, an ex-Caroni (1975) Limited employee has called for scrapping the allocation of the present VSEP housing plots.

'There is corruption in the present distribution system.'

He said that with the ongoing process 'something very sinister has emerged as a result Government's interference, which has corrupted the allocation process'.

Ramdhani explained: 'Developed lots due for handing over as per VSEP are being held back for certain people, while Caroni workers are being pushed into the back areas, where the lots 'given to them are still under bush, not yet developed.

For example, in a completed area known as Exchange Section 1, only 20 per cent of the 600 lots were allocated to the workers.

'The balance is reserved for non-Caroni workers'.

He said that former Caroni workers who were previously assigned to Exchange 1, have been transferred to an undeveloped site 'which is still under cane and bush, called Exchange 3'.

'This is a breach of the VSEP contract, which guarantees 'priority allocation'.

Workers who were hoping to get a plot at Exchange 1 are now in a quandary and very distressed.

'They were assured that they would get a lot of their choice.'

He said the entire process seems manipulated.

'Sugar workers continue to be victims of race politics and corruption.

'In the name of fairness, stop the corrupt process now and start afresh,...'

This is an area of grave concern and we are told that over 6,000 persons will be benefiting from this distribution of lands for the VSEP workers. If this is the kind of treatment we are getting, then surely it is not equal.

I want to look at another area that has been given some prominence, but I want to look at it from another angle, that is CEPEP and URP. Members of the PNM have access to these programmes, whereas others who are not members of the PNM cannot access these programmes. I know of some people who told me, because of their financial and economic situation, that they have gone to the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) offices and became members of the PNM because they were told that unless they had a party card, they cannot get a job in URP. Because of their economic situation, they were forced to accept the PNM card. They are also making a weekly contribution as well so that they can get the CEPEP job.

When you look at this aspect of it as well, the kind of work that these CEPEP and URP workers and the foreign workers—the Chinese workers come to mind—we are making a wholesale importation of Chinese masons, carpenters and steel benders, but we are putting our people to paint stones and cut grass along the roadways. We boast about exposing our people to various skills. How many of those people who we have exposed to those skills, are able to get jobs with the Chinese contractors? What arrangements have been made so that a certain percentage of local labourers and tradesmen must be given jobs alongside with the Chinese workers?

I will read from the *Sunday Guardian*.

“Craftsman sold on MUST heads class

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Madain Ramdass...

He graduated from the six-month programme and was awarded the highest prize amongst his MUST counterparts—the Most Outstanding Trainee Award. He also received six certificates of merit in masonry, carpentry, plumbing, electrical, painting and construction.”

Imagine a person going in there and doing a six-month course in six trades and coming out with six certificates. What quality of training were they able to get under that programme for six months, in six specialized subjects? I know a person would have to do plumbing or electrical installation for one or two years. Where will these people go and get prominent jobs? This is why we have to import all those Chinese workers to fill the jobs that we are putting so much emphasis on.

I read from the *Sunday Express*:

“Letter of the day

What skills, knowledge are locals lacking?

From the Government's point of view what are the specific skills, abilities and/or technological knowledge lacking in T&T's workforce? When will a list of these factors that disqualify our local talent and professionals from billion-dollar contracts, consultancies and the like be disclosed to T&T nationals?

The Government is adamant that it has identified differences in the abilities of its citizens, which bear distinct contrast with that possessed by foreign managers, contractors and labour. In spite of this pertinent knowledge, the specific range of abilities the Government has identified as lacking or missing in its own citizens has not been comprehensively revealed.

Is it logical and/or visionary leadership to direct citizens to a barrage of skills training programmes, without identifying specific target skills and/or knowledge required to fulfil our human resource needs? It is my view that the country's local human resource must be comprehensively informed about identified skill and knowledge variances, followed by appropriate interventions to remedy such variances.

It cannot be good governance to conclude that locals do not possess particular abilities considered important for undertaking billion-dollar projects and/or managerial posts, and simply turn these contracts over to foreign entities. Not only is this demeaning to T&T society; it is clearly unpatriotic.

Certainly the poor and middle class citizens—who represent over 80 per cent of T&T's population—did not sacrifice for nearly two decades to recover T&T's economy from the recession scourge of the 1980s and 1990s, to simply pass on the benefits of their sacrifice, to foreigners. Did 1,040,000 T&T's citizens, the equivalent of 80 per cent of the population, really suffer recessionary fiscal constraints only to allow non-nationals to reap the benefits of their sacrifice, albeit with an endorsed stamp of approval from the Government of the day?

Clearly, if those that govern—be they legitimate representatives of the population or not—placed value on the present and future well-being of T&T's society, the Government's development and expenditure thrust would have been centred on T&T's people. Ironically, the Government has committed tens of billions of dollars toward the enhancement and development of non-nationals and foreign interests, while hundreds of thousands of locals continue to grievously strive under recessionary conditions.

With respect to skill sets the Government's training programmes have managed to produce, continued importation of managerial, technical and unskilled labour is an indictment of the effectiveness of these programmes. They have chiefly managed to fill low-end jobs.

What this is really saying is that with respect to the millions of dollars that we are spending on training people, we are really not getting to the high-end jobs or the jobs that would pay to sustain and take these people out of the poverty level. This is something we need to address. We tend to spend money on everything and not really achieve the goals we have set.

These programmes are killing work ethics and attitude. This is an admission by the Prime Minister that the Chinese are more productive workers, despite the fact that they sleep in containers in rotation. While some work in the day, there are others sleeping in the containers and when the night shift comes, those who worked in the day utilize the containers. It shows that we are not really treating those people properly and the substandard conditions in which they have to survive, while they are working in this country. This is something we must address while we are bringing these people to fill the void we have in these opportunities presented here.

I want to look at agriculture as well. We have heard, witnessed and seen that this Government has killed the sugar industry; a very good industry; one that has accounted for our presence in this country. Today they are boasting about it that they are going to bring sugar from Guyana and also ground provision from St.

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Vincent, Grenada and other small islands. When you look at the discrimination against our own local farmers, there is absolutely no support from this Government for our local farmers to grow crops in this country. We have seen the very fertile agricultural lands now being occupied by houses. This is something we need to address.

When you look at the outdated compensation packages that are given to food crop farmers, due to flooding, this is really unfair and discriminatory.

We also heard the Government has been talking about an exit strategy for the sugar workers. In two or three days, the 2007 crop would have come to an end and to date, we have heard nothing tangible from the Government, with regard to the exit strategy for the sugar cane farmers and those involved in the sugar industry. Is this not unfair to the farmers who have spent their entire years in an industry and are now looking for some assistance from the Government? They have to look for something elsewhere to take them through the rest of their lives. This is a topic on which the Government must say something. They have been allowing this industry to go down and down and hoping that it will die a natural death without the Government having to intervene to assist these farmers who toiled the lands over the years.

I want look at the public service. Mr. Speaker, we have seen in the public service that many persons are coming to work on contract and these people are obtaining higher salaries and perks than the career public servants. At the end of the day, we are seeing that they are performing the same job descriptions with a different job title. This is something to disguise the whole area of providing jobs for people they want to assist. It is something we have to look at, because those people are now clamouring. Recently they got an increase. This is not good enough, when you look at the thousands of people who are now coming into the public service on contract. The salary that they are getting is unfair to those people who have been in the public service as a career. They are now getting something very much lower than those who have come in on contract.

I have an article from the *Probe* of Sunday, May 13 which states:

“\$171 million paid to 1,964 people hired with no contracts”

Jobs for the boys and girls saw a total of 1,946 persons employed on contract by the Manning Administration.

And a mind-blowing \$171 million has been paid to these people brought in to work at the various ministries for the last year.

Most of these people were employed, but so far, almost no contract has been produced to show what they were hired for and what are the terms and conditions of their employment.

Some of these workers were hired outside of this country to serve at the various missions abroad.

A lack of transparency and accountability marks the appointment of these folks.”

I have some other issues to raise. I want to look at the social programmes and make special reference to the conditional cash transfer programme which is referred to as the Smart Card. When I look at the questionnaire which is considered as the application form, it is the first time these cater for people who are unemployed, have lost their job for some reason and are waiting on another job. The questionnaire asks for home number, cell number and also the office number. Persons who are working in offices are now entitled to benefit from this as well. If this is so we must know, so that we can make it equal treatment and send it to other people as well. This is one of my observations. If it is for people under the poverty level and those unemployed, why ask for an office number?

But more curious it is. This is the first time I have seen a questionnaire like this. I would like to leave this as a document in Parliament. At question six they are asking for the ethnic group. What does poverty have to do with ethnicity? They are also asking religion. This is curious. I have other forms such as this one from the Ministry of Housing and there are no questions like these—ethnicity and religion.

In another area it speaks about your health. In another section it speaks about substance abuse. How often does N consume alcohol? Has N ever used drugs? What is the purpose in asking these questions when you are dealing with people who are poor and seeking some form of assistance to help them carry on for the days of their lives? This is something that really bothered me—the kind of questions. There are six pages of questions to get a card at the value of \$200, \$300 or \$400 depending on the size of your family. I want to believe that this card—when this programme first started it was a temporary measure to give people assistance for a period of three months, with the hope that they will move on to something better than what they are receiving. It was extended for six months and today this is more like a permanent card. It now has longevity of two years and, perhaps, the ability to extend later on as well. I feel that this is like a card to come and deliver.

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The delivery has been undertaken by voluntary organizations throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, the Government has knocked out the NGOs and the CBOs throughout the country and they are saying: We are delivering these cards, so when I come and give you a handshake and a card, it means I am looking for your support in return. This is actually buying votes. You have it for a period of two years. This is something that is unfair to those people who cannot access the programme. For those political parties that cannot do the same as well with regard to this programme, this is something we need to look at as well.

We have been talking about a number of issues that concern ourselves and I want to look at the murders. When I look at some of the comments in the newspapers; I wonder if we are addressing the issues and affording equal opportunities to those aggrieved families when they experience these kinds of horrendous activities in their families. I speak of the murders. There are thousands that have occurred under the watch of the PNM over the last five and one-half years. They are thousands of murders when added. Very often the media or police would make a comment that it is gang-related, drug-related or that it is a family relations gone sour. This is the police conclusions. We never hear anything further about those cases. Is it that they just close those cases and we hear nothing again? All these investigations have gone to naught.

I want to make reference to something that struck me as well; my son's death. When I compare it to the importance that is given to Vindra Naipaul-Coolman—I am not saying that it should not be given—I feel that every murder case should be given the same kind of prominence that the Vindra Naipaul-Coolman's case has received; every single murder in this case. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: You raised hell for Vindra more than any other.

Mr. N. Baksh: I am raising my son's murder. It is three years now since he has been murdered and we have not heard a single thing further with regard to any investigation. In fact, I have heard that the Prime Minister received an intelligence report, which linked—I think one of yesterday's newspaper made mention of it, the *Express*, which was the only link—my son's death with the death of the Princes Town—Mala, Uncle Khalid's wife. That is the link that was made. If that was the information that they have, why did they not pursue it and bring it to a close? Today, in this Parliament, I want to put my head on a block and say that the information they have as intelligence in the service, is wrong. I can tell you that. As the father of that son, I could put my head on a block for that. It shows the kind of intelligence gathering in this country by the police. It is very shallow;

just on the surface. Because of the foreign assistance they are getting on the Vindra Naipaul-Coolman issue, it has gone to that extent. Had it been left for the local police, it would have gone just like the others. This is the claim I want to make today. Let every murder case get the prominence that the Vindra Naipaul-Coolman issue received. I speak for everybody else who has experienced that kind of thing.

This Government is relying on statistics to convince nationals that equal opportunity is promoted by this Government. When you look at the figures they gave with regard to unemployment, poverty reduction and crime, all these are just figures to mislead us to feel that something is being done, but very little or nothing is being done. Very often, we hear the remark that the Prime Minister is making decisions on the hoof. Maybe this is the direction and advice they are getting from the prophetess.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot that could be done to improve and provide equal opportunities in this country. This could only be achieved by uniting the national community with common goals and deep commitment to nationalism, not politics first, not PNM till I die.

Our beloved country is at present in a state of utter shock, dismay and confusion. Within the past year, persons in the highest substantive positions of our land have been engaged in the type of power play that borders on victimization. The political directorate, the Executive and the Judiciary are at loggerheads. There are accusations and counter accusations of interference, fabrication and subterfuge. More recently, the Judiciary, that sacred arm of our society, has complained of acts intended to bring it into disrepute. The population of our rainbow country is now polarized between the two significant divisions, with politics and race being the two key dividing factors devised and perpetrated by the PNM. It appears that they are now inextricably linked.

The introduction of this Bill at this time could not be more opportune. We need to develop some sanity and this is a good starting point. The silent majority in our country is convinced that the confrontation between the Judiciary, the Executive and political directorate has its root foundation in politics or race. I feel confident that this Bill will help to loosen the polarization and bring our citizens together.

Basically, the Bill seeks to address very important issues of the lives of our citizens: to prevent or prohibit certain kinds of discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity.

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I would like to venture some explanation of what discrimination does to an individual and groups of individuals. It conveys to the individual or individuals that unfair practices are being used as the criteria to deprive them from the goods or services which they need. Sex, political affiliation, colour, creed, race, et cetera, are applied to prevent persons from gaining access to much needed goods and services. To my mind, this unfair practice affects the very psyche of the people. It demoralizes, discourages and denounces people in the state of apathy and mental aggrandizement. In short, discrimination is one of the main ingredients of demotivation. It destroys and eats into self-esteem and self-confidence.

Discrimination on the grounds of religious wear—I have come across persons who indicated to me that they went to the Nursing Council for an interview and because they were wearing a hijab they were told that they cannot get the job there. I came across instances of this.

When we look at what happens in the United Kingdom, where women wear hijabs and the Sheiks wear turbans, they are now employed in the police service there. We experience this in Trinidad and Tobago where people wearing hijabs cannot get into the police service and the Nursing Council. Something is drastically wrong with regard to the treatment meted out to those people.

If we look at the National Anthem, “every creed and race find an equal place”, then we need to address this or either change the National Anthem. If we need to get the people to follow and build nationalism then we need to build confidence in these people. If someone is wearing a hijab they must be given equal opportunity with regard to employment.

Mr. Narine: What is a hijab?

Mr. N. Baksh: A scarf that the Muslim women wear to cover their head.

Mr. Narine: Why do they wear that?

Mr. N. Baksh: Why can they not get a job with that? There is a clear and undeniable racial imbalance in our police service, prison service, army, coast guard and fire service. Trinidad and Tobago protective services recruit persons for the police service, fire service, army, coast guard and prison service and never visited places where there was a predominance of Indo-Trinidadian. If you look at the advertisements for these job opportunities, they are always advertised for San Fernando or Port of Spain.

I have known of situations where in the United Kingdom, they went out to the ethnic groups and communities to inform them of the opportunities to get into the service. Why can we not do this in Trinidad and Tobago? When there are interviews, why can you not go to Princes Town, Penal or areas such as Barrackpore, Moruga or Sangre Grande? Why should they be held in two areas. This is something we need to address as well, so that people will be given the confidence in this country and we will be provided with equal opportunities.

When we speak about minimum height, it is time that we remove this requirement. No longer do you need to have brute force to deal with crimes and criminals as a policeman. Today you need to be smart. You need to remove the height requirement.

I have been a career public servant for several years. I have seen several colleagues wither under the stress of racial, political and sexual discrimination for promotional opportunities in the public service. I have seen the process of seniority exploited to serve particular causes. I have seen job qualifications and experience criteria altered overnight to suit particular individuals for promotional opportunities. I have seen many of my colleagues thrown in the towel, so to speak, and settled dejectedly in loneliness. Some of them could not take it and had to leave the service without qualifying for any pensionable benefits.

On the other hand, what does equal opportunity do to our citizens? To my mind, to grow and develop in a society where equal opportunities are practised, is really a gift of the highest form of motivation. As a driving force for quality performance and commitment, equal opportunity is the main motivating ingredient in life.

Equal opportunity conveys the notion that our society recognizes a merit system, one that promotes open competition and one in which justice and fair play form the order of the day and the main cornerstone for progress.

I have an article entitled:

"An Equal Opportunity Commission and Governance in a Plural Society by Ann Marie Bissessar"

I would read a section from it because when we have to consider the area of good governance to allow equal opportunities, we need to address this section of the legislation. It states:

"The term 'good governance' has, like the concept 'new public management,' been largely synonymous with many of the conditions laid down by the IMF

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and the World Bank. 'Good government' according to the World Bank Report on Sub-Saharan Africa (1989) was required to focus on mechanisms that allow for increased economic liberalism, the encouragement of investment, the equitable distribution of resources, increased political participation, accountability, transparency and increased efficiency. So, as far as governments were concerned, it implied privatization, reduced bureaucracy and contracting out 'in order to win the consent of the governed.'

What was surprising about this description of the characteristics of 'good governance,' was that while the Report was directed specifically to the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, no mention was made of the need to introduce mechanisms to allow for greater representation of ethnic and other groups in either the society or in the bureaucracy. In addition, the definition did not allude to the setting up of any institutions or the introduction of any legal remedy to prevent acts of discrimination. However, it can be argued that the emphasis of this Report on increased political participation, equitable distribution of state services, along with the need to have systems which were transparent and which were accountable to the citizenry could only be achieved by introducing mechanisms to allow for participation by the different groups which comprised that society.

It should be recalled that remedies to address complaints of discrimination have always been a preoccupation with policymakers. Indeed, many of the more developed countries have redefined their original concept of discrimination which had initially focused on direct or 'individual' cases of discrimination to include indirect or 'group' discrimination as well...in many of the developing countries, while there is reference to freedom of the individual and human rights, legislation to address complaints of ethnic, class, gender or other kinds of discrimination has generally been absent...this paper argues, that while this kind of legislation is critical in any society, it is particularly so in a plural society. It contends that by curbing victimization/discrimination and encouraging a more representative-type bureaucracy, there would be a number of advantages to be derived. For example, there will be greater participation by all groups, more trust in the legitimacy of the government and groups will perceive themselves as stakeholders in the society. Thus, this type of legislation should eventually lead to 'better governance' in these societies."

This is advice that we can use to better the Equal Opportunity Act when we are implementing this provision.

I would also like to raise one of the issues contained in the body of the Bill. I want to refer to Part III, which deals with discrimination, to which the Act applies. Clause 5 states:

"The Act applies to discrimination in relation to employment, education, the provision of goods and services and the provision of accommodation."

To my mind, this provision is very restrictive because these are not the only areas where discrimination is practised in our country.

Some very crucial and critical areas are missing. What about discrimination in relation to provision of state infrastructure, which are deployed and administered mainly in areas where the support of government is based? I am referring to the areas and constituencies which are controlled by the PNM Government. Financial resources of the State are used to establish industrial estates, refurbish, rehabilitate and pave roads in PNM constituencies. No industrial estates are located in UNC constituencies. The roads in rural—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Before I move the request for the extension of time, let me read some from May's for the benefit of Members. It is under the heading "reading speeches":

"...a Member is not permitted to read his speech, but he may refresh his memory by reference to notes. Similarly, a Member may read extracts from documents but such extracts and quotations should be reasonably short. The purpose of this rule is to maintain the cut and thrust of debate, which depends upon successive speakers meeting in their speeches to some extent the arguments of earlier speeches; debate is more than a series of sets of speeches prepared beforehand without reference to each other."

I know Members, in some Bills, one cannot help but make reference to your notes. There is one particular Member, the esteemed Member for Nariva who has perfected this art. In terms of reading extensively from the newspapers, I would ask Members to desist from doing that because the authors of those articles are not Members of the House. You can refer to them, but keep them reasonably short.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Baksh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and Members, for the extension.

I want to address the area of perceived discrimination. Very often when persons go for interviews and once they approach a panel that is composed of one ethnic group, right away they feel that they will be discriminated against. I would give an example. Let us assume that a person of African origin enters a room and sees a panel of Indo-Trinidadians sitting, this immediately will give a feeling that you do not have a chance. This perception sometimes leads to belief and is thus practiced. We have to address this. Very often this happens with regard to the police service and the fire services. This is something we need to address very urgently. This is something that we experience in the society at this point in time. If we fail to address it, then we will continue this imbalance and fear that people have when they go for interviews. We have to address these issues as well.

When you look at the scholarship programmes given by the CPO and the Ministries, you ask yourself whether they are fair because the people who are beneficiaries of these scholarships are of one ethnic origin mainly. What is happening to the others? You need to address this issue. This is what people feel we need to address and if the perception is there, you have to address it. You cannot sweep it under the carpet.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, when this Bill is debated and passed and eventually proclaimed, how would it affect the veto powers of the hon. Prime Minister in respect of the appointment of Permanent Secretaries, Deputy Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department in the public and statutory services? Within the past five years, we have heard of several recommendations of the appointment of senior officers that were turned down on the basis of political/racial discrimination. How will the provision of this Bill relate to the constitutional provision of the Prime Minister and the appointment of senior public servants? This is something we need to address.

7.00 p.m.

We have very good examples that were mentioned previously. One that comes to mind immediately is the Feroza Ramjohn case. This is something that we need to look at.

Mr. Speaker, at another place outside, I heard that the Prime Minister indicated that the President of this country has too much powers. So, if these powers are removed from the President, I ask the question: To whom will these powers be delegated to? Is it the Prime Minister? We want an answer for this as well.

The extent of political discrimination practised by the PNM Government over the last 40 years cannot be abolished by the strike of a magic wand. There is no magic wand in this Bill. It provides checks and balances and avenues for redress for those affected by discrimination.

I just want to make reference to clause 31 and it says:

“A person who submits to the Commission a frivolous and vexatious complaint commits an offence and is liable, on summary conviction, to a fine of one hundred thousand dollars and to imprisonment for two years.”

I feel this was deliberately designed to put fear in the mind of persons who feel that they may be discriminated against. You know, very often, aggrieved persons are mainly in the lower rung of the social ladder and, obviously, I feel that this is a deterrent to them to bring any complaints to the Commission. So, I think, this clause should be removed. If the fine is retained, it should be where a person repeats this kind of accusation on more than one occasion. It should not be on the first occasion where you want to implement the fine. I hope that in the consideration later on that we could address this issue.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM has shown, by action that it may not reintroduce this legislation once it is referred to a joint select committee. It may not appear before this august Chamber goes on vacation. Mr. Speaker, it would take a strong, civilized and mature leadership to make a difference with regard to this legislation.

To ensure the fullest development of our country in every sphere, such as health, public utilities, transport, safety and security, the citizens of this country must be participants in a national one-step plan that is to remove the Government in its next opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude, and I made reference earlier to the national anthem, where every creed and race find an equal place. If we cannot address this matter then we should remove this part of the national anthem so that people would get their benefits.

I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security and Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The time has come for me to venture a few comments in winding up the debate on this legislation that had been brought here quite sometime ago for the consideration of all Members of this House.

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Mr. Speaker, in my initial comments when I piloted the measure, I made the comment, and I would like to repeat, that this legislation deals with discrimination, generally, and it says so in expressed terms, not racial discrimination simpliciter or exclusively, but it is far bigger than that. Yet, again, while I prefaced all of my other comments with those truths, when you listened to the contributions of most of my colleagues from the other side, you would have come to the erroneous conclusion that it really had to do with race.

I think the highlight of the debate was the Member for Tabaquite. I do not think I heard the word discrimination used so often. It was a concentrated potent and poisonous application of the word to the point of being absolutely boring. I was predicting the next use of that word “discrimination”. Of course, the others were not so lavish in their dispensation of it but, essentially, the contributions were about discrimination, and it really does say something sad about Members for the most part, though not all of them. I can truthfully recall that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was a little more illuminating and magnanimous in her thinking and approach to the measures, though she is not without sin. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, it is really, in my honest view, a very sad thing to hear that kind of thing, because it says something about the collective psychological posture of those on the other side. I think if I had a recommendation to make it would be that the entire team should be subjected to some kind of counselling for the purpose of rehabilitation. It is really frighteningly sad that in a country like Trinidad and Tobago, with so many intelligent, educated and learned persons with collective experience in the politics of Trinidad and Tobago, they could be so “laser-beam” focused, to think that there is this kind of thing.

I walked down this Chamber today—we are not going to get involved in small racial talk, because we in the PNM understand bigger and better than that. We have governed and we have had the opportunity to be the Government of this country for more than 78 per cent of the life of this nation from 1962, and we have done a marvelous job. [*Desk thumping*] We have really built this country and there is no gainsaying that. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, I just want to remind Members on the other side that there is a twin principle on which the PNM is founded: one is morality in public affairs and, secondly, the concept of interracial solidarity, as it was then called. [*Desk thumping*] And no one, not even my friends on the other side, could deny that the PNM has provided solid, stable and settled governance for Trinidad and Tobago for 78 per cent of the live this nation. [*Desk thumping*] No one can dispute that fact.

Mr. Speaker, I want it to be recorded again that there is nothing in law or the Constitution of this country that stops any citizen whether he is Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese, East Indian or African from making it, in this blissful, beautiful land that is Trinidad and Tobago and the evidence is there before our eyes.

When I heard the Member for Couva South today, I had reason to leave this Chamber, and as I walked through the corridors of this very Parliament, thinking of what he was saying about the public service—he wants a headcount to see the names and how many police officers are Indian and how many are African; that kind of short-sightedness; that kind of dangerous wasteful application of thought.

Mr. Speaker, with my encounter down the corridor, I saw five members of staff of the Parliament, and four were our beautiful East Indian brothers and sisters. It just does not exist wherever you go in the country. It is really painful and frightening to hear our friends on the other side speaking this language, because they have come to believe this. They are sick; they need help; and, quite frankly, without apology.

Mr. Speaker, well, a lot of comments were made about Trinidad and Tobago and the economy. I just feel it is necessary, for the benefit of my friends on the other side, to highlight a few simple facts about the economy of this country, against the background of the fact that every citizen has access to the resources of this country. I just want to remind them, because the Member for Diego Martin Central was making the point that the ideal position in a country—we must have a Constitution to protect rights and to do all the other things to regulate the relationship between the three elements of the State: the Legislature, the Executive and the Parliament. The Constitution is very important; the laws are very important, but the ideal pinnacle position for equal opportunity is that every citizen in the country has equal access to the resources of the State. It is on that basis, the Member for Diego Martin Central made the point, I want to support that, by reminding us of a few simple facts about what is happening in terms of the economy of this country.

Mr. Speaker, one or two of our friends on the other side made the point that we would have spent something like \$120 billion and they cannot see anything for it. That is another foolish comment that I do not expect to hear from parliamentarians; people who were in Government to some extent, and people who anticipate being in government again—though that really takes some anticipation, given current, social and political circumstances. It really takes some acrobatic thinking to imagine that they would be in government again.

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The economy of this country doubled over the last five years. When they say that they cannot see anything for the \$120 billion, I am told that about 60 per cent of that is spent, not on tangible things by the Government on development projects, but about 60 per cent of that goes toward salaries and emoluments across the various ministries. So, in order to see where 60 per cent of the national budget is going, you have to go into people's homes, and there you will see new beds and televisions and development in people's homes. Everywhere your travel in this country people are adding on another level to their house, putting on a backroom; there are two cars in the garage; and they have a son in Miami studying and a son in some other place and they are sending money for that son. You would not see that—

Hon. Member: Washers and dryers.

Hon. F. Hinds:—in terms of expenditure by the Government, but it is right there. It is not going any place else. It is right here on this earth. I want my friends to understand that so that in future they would sound a little more useful and sensible when they speak.

Mr. Speaker, for example, if you take this part of the expenditure:

“Current Transfers

of which:

Educational Institutions

of which:

University of the West Indies

University of Trinidad and Tobago

Grants to Government Secondary Schools

Other”

In 2000 that was \$3.275 billion, and by 2005 those grants went to \$10.6 billion. It is right there. [*Desk thumping*] You will not see that, because that is largely intangible expenditure, and the documents are right here. When they speak to the national community, as I am doing now, they need to be dispensing truths and facts, not for short term political gain, but to educate the citizens of this country, so that the youngsters in this country could understand what the Government is doing for their benefit. It goes on:

“Households

of which:

Public Officers Pensions and Gratuities

Old Age Pensions
 Social Assistance
 Disability Grant School Feeding Programme
 Other”

In the year 2000 that was \$1.4 billion, and in the year 2005 that was \$2.69 billion; doubled. In terms of savings:

“Other Transfers

of which:

Infrastructure Development Fund
 Revenue Stabilization Fund
 Government Assistance for Tuition
 Expenses (GATE)
 Regional Health Authorities
 Community Based Environment Protection &
 Enhancement Programme
 National Social Development Programme
 Petroleum Relief for CARICOM States
 Other”

Mr. Speaker, that was \$916 million in 2000 and by 2005 that figure went to \$5.6 billion. [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go beyond that except to say that in 2000 we had foreign direct investment inflow of US \$680 million and by 2005 that figure went to US \$940 million. We could continue.

I could talk about our credit ratings; whether it is by Standards and Poor’s or Moody’s. I could demonstrate to the national community that after Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Trinidad and Tobago comes next in terms of Standard and Poor’s and the same with Moody’s [*Desk thumping*]. We could go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, I am responsible for the prison and every time I walk into the prison gate I remember a quotation that I heard from a calypsonian, the diseased Mighty Prowler. In a song he quoted: “Two men looking through a prison bar; one sees the mud, the other see the stars”; they just see mud! They are in a mental

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siege, a mindset, and they are not doing good for themselves. I feel sad for them. In a time of plenty, we should be growing; we should be happy to be growing along with Trinidad and Tobago. I want to save the youngsters who may be looking on now from them; the worst excesses from the UNC, and to remind the youngsters that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago during fiscal year 2004/2005 spent \$2.8 billion and \$3 billion respectively on 132 social sector programmes; 78 developmental programmes for young people in this country; 25 remedial programmes; and 29 preventative programmes.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Who are the recipients?

Mr. Partap: Propaganda!

Hon. F. Hinds: Are you calling this propaganda? This is an official document. That is why I said it is so sad. When the Central Statistical Office spoke about the reduction in unemployment to something like 5 or 6 per cent, they said that was propaganda also. They cast aspersions on every individual and every institution just to have their short-term wicked political way. They have no regard.

We heard a lot today from the Member for Princes Town—I am making the point about how reckless they are; how thoughtless they are.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Give information to the public. Come on!

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot today about the issue of this credit card, and I was absolutely proud of the response as has been presented to this House by my friend the Member for Arouca South. [*Desk thumping*] Whilst she was speaking, I said to myself, this is 2007 and this is the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and should a young educated, bright woman who has been serving this country has to come here to bare herself to this nation in the way that she did. But this is Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, while I was sorry for her, I felt a little sorry for me because last week when the issue broke, I got up in this House and made it clear that I never used the card. I received the card in February 2006, put the card in my drawer and travelled several times and made use of my own private credit cards. That is the problem. The only fault, if there is one, on the part of the Member for Arouca South is that she did not anticipate that once you make use of this so-called Government card, public scrutiny would be it. So, what I would have spent my per diem on, nobody would know, but just because she used the Government card, the world has to know, although it was her money and she paid it back.

Mr. Partap: And you say she is bright.

Hon. F. Hinds: You see, that is not about being bright, but we expected a level of integrity which your Opposition group mashed up over; splintered on the concept of integrity. My name appeared. When you heard the Member for Caroni East talk about eight Ministers, I was one of them. I cannot fault him because he was reading from a document that came from the Comptroller of Accounts. I want to know which right thinking, balanced or stable-minded government official could put my name on a list headed: “Contraveners”, those who contravened the regulations, either for over-using the card; surpassing the limit, or spending on personal expenses, when I never did one single transaction on the card. Why must my name be there? I deserve an apology from the Comptroller of Accounts.

Mrs. Job-Davis: You demand it!

Mr. Partap: We have the read-out.

Hon. F. Hinds: You could get what read-out you want; you are as short on integrity as you are in other ways.

Mr. Speaker: Be very careful how you address Members.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am so sorry. My Speaker, I do not want to “undignify” myself, if I may use that concept, or “undignify” anyone here, but the record would show that in the not too distant past, one of our colleagues fell ill in this Parliament, and I used my own private credit card to pay \$31,000 for an air ambulance to bring my friend to this country, but nobody would report that. [*Desk thumping*] This is not about exaggerating. I did that because of love for my colleague; love and respect for him as a Trinidadian; and because he is a decent young man. I would have done it for the worst on that side, because that is how we do it. I know he would have done it for me, but nobody makes a fuss over that. In this country, as Vidia Naipaul once said, “Dignity is accorded to no one, only power is respected.”

Mr. Speaker, I am obliged to put on record, if you would permit me two minutes just to read a letter that I received from the First Citizens Bank, those who managed the card, as I demand an apology from the Comptroller of Accounts for putting my name on a list of those who contravened. The letter is dated May 18, 2007. It is addressed to the hon. Fitzgerald Hinds and it says:

Dear hon. Minister,

Re: Government Travel Card - Visa Gold Card

And the number is laid out:

We confirm the above mentioned card was issued to you on 2006 February 1st. We also confirm that no purchases were charged to this card since it was issued and the card has, therefore, never exceeded the authorized limit.

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However, on the date of the issue and/or renewal of the card, a membership subscription fee was charged to the card and this fee was not paid and, therefore, late payment fees and interest were incurred.

Mr. Speaker, that was the \$20.21 that the Member for Caroni East regarded as a contravention. The letter is here and it is available to anyone who wants to make use of it. I do not have to tell a lie about a letter. No two police or somebody pretending to be a police, did not have to approach me in France. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to attend to some of the issues that were raised by some of the Members on the other side. Before I do that, let me read, for the benefit of this Parliament, what the working paper on the equal opportunity legislation—this was published since 1996—defines discrimination as. I think it is important to do so, in the context of our discussion. What is discrimination? Particularly, for the benefit of the Member for Tabaquite and I quote:

“Most legislation define discrimination in terms of the less favourable treatment of a person because that person possesses, or is associated with, a characteristic which carries negative or stigmatized connotations. Discrimination involves the making of a prejudicial distinction between individuals or groups which results in the experience of some type of harm or prejudice, or the imposition of burdens or the withholding of benefits. Accordingly, concepts such as prejudice, stereotyping and social disadvantage are all connotations of discrimination.”

And it goes on:

“What is equal opportunity?”

The concept of equal opportunity is concerned with ensuring that all people have equal access to specified public benefits and resources, such as employment and education. It is the objective of legislation to strive for equality of opportunity by prohibiting a decision maker from considering irrelevant characteristics possessed by or associated with a person when deciding whether to grant that person access to a particular benefit or resource. This can be described as “leveling the playing field” so that irrelevant considerations do not unfairly hinder due process.”

Mr. Speaker, I merely place on the record what in its broadest terms discrimination and equal opportunity is defined as in the working paper, the background policy paper that influenced this legislation.

An amendment was put forward by the Member for Baratavia/San Juan. He was suggesting that we consider political affiliation. I think that only has to be

stated to be rejected, if only because from a common sense perspective, it would be very difficult to know what a person's political affiliation is. In the short time that I have been in politics, I have seen individuals moved from NAR to PNM to UNC back to PNM and COP, and I am sure that within a few months when the results of the election are yet, again, known back to the PNM. They all had their beginnings in the PNM, most of them, as we know. As I said earlier, we built this city. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, so that amendment as proposed by the Member for Barataria/San Juan has really to be rejected because of that simple difficulty.

Mr. Speaker, there are just some things that you really cannot legislate against. It does not make sense. I am going to tell you what the point is, and I would give an example. At the Independence of India in 1947, Gandhi had to deal with this issue of the Brahmins and Chamars. He dealt with it. The writings and the learnings about Gandhi are replete with examples, where he did everything humanly possible, even spiritually possible, to deal with those issues. There were laws that were developed to deal with this problem of the so-called "untouchables", but they did not work. In fact, as late as 1989, India had to pass more laws to deal with the same problem that they attempted to deal with in 1947. You see, it is difficult; human behaviour.

The Member for Princes Town, in his usual excitable way, made the point—and I fear for him too, as he tends to threaten breaching his own health. He made the point that one of the reasons the law was struck down by the court was because it did not have any criminal sanction. I had made the point when I introduced these measures that would not be the first time that you have a law without a criminal sanction. I had made reference to the Race Relations Act of 1976, coming out of the UK. There were no criminal sanctions. The law was passed and I read the debates in the Parliament of that country, merely for educative or educational reasons.

It was not until 1986 or 1987, that they amended the legislation and began to impose criminal sanctions. In other words, they let the racists down softly. I make the point only to demonstrate that it is difficult to legislate human behaviour, and this is why I am proud to say, again, it appears on the face of it to me, as the person looking through the proverbial prison bar and seeing the stars that every one of the citizens of this country has equal access to the resources of this country; whether it is in landownership; small business; medium business; large business; vehicle ownership—private cars or heavy-duty vehicles like tractors and trucks; education; or winning scholarships, the results are obvious and patent. All

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the citizens of this country have equal opportunity. I think that is the real test and where the great pride is and success.

When the Member for St. Augustine made his contribution, energetic as ever, he accused me of dealing only with the question of race. I think I want to let the Member for St. Augustine know, though he is absent, that is not what I was saying. I was accepting that this country is blessed with a tremendous level of diversity. I was making the point that we do not have to be discriminatory; we do not have to be ugly to discuss the issue of race, but we could discuss the matter sensibly and intellectually without becoming racial or racist ourselves.

There were a number of reasons, as we have already discussed, why the Court of Appeal—this is in response to the Member for Princes Town—struck down the legislation as unconstitutional. I just want to quote Mr. Justice of Appeal Ivor Archie at page 10 in his judgment and what he had to say about the legislation that they passed in 2000 and I quote:

The combined effect is a piece of legislation that may have begun with laudable objectives, but was so disastrously drafted that it is impossible to rescue it by selective excision of its offending parts.

The learned Justice of Appeal was saying simply that the legislation was so fundamentally flawed in every respect; it was irretrievable by excising some parts and leaving others. It had to be redone and it has been redone.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, in particular, and a few other Members may have raised a point that required further thought, but we do not want to repeat the mistakes of the UNC. We want to ensure that the legislation—we had a full debate. If we had piloted these measures and there were no debates on them, then one can say that it satisfied all the Members, but there have been issues raised, particularly by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and, I think, notwithstanding what our friends on the Front Bench may say for political reasons—they want equal opportunity now—we should take this to a joint select committee to ensure that it is properly analyzed, and it comes with the level of perfection that we would want and not have to face the courts again and to be dealt with in that kind of a way.

The Member for Princes Town made mention of clause 7 that we excised from the legislation. He does not remember the history. According to the Member for Diego Martin Central, he knows very little. He was speaking about what Ministers do and what Ministers do not do, but the Member for Diego Martin Central was right. Clause 7 was the clause that generated the most discussion

throughout the national community. We felt it stuck out like a sore thumb in the legislation and, clearly, it was driven by thoughts that came from somewhere outside of the working paper. This clause caused the most trouble and we excised it.

Mr. Speaker, when you review legislation from the UK, Canada, Australia or Hong Kong which deals with this very matter, there were no provisions in any of those pieces of legislation from those countries, that are akin or resemble or treat with the issue of clause 7 and, therefore, we have excised it from the Bill. Mr. Justice Ivor Archie—I would not bore this House with the details of it, but at page 15 of his judgment he, too, dealt extensively with clause 7 and demonstrated why it should be pulled out of the Bill. So, the Member for Princes Town, feigning ignorance, seemed to have ignored that, but I would not go in there any further. *[Interruption]* I am dealing with the matter.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre supports a call for this Bill to go before a Joint Select Committee and, as I have already said, I support that fully. However, the Member for Oropouche felt that it should not; the Member for Couva South felt that it should not; but we feel that it should and I will be making the necessary suggestions to the House at a later stage.

Mr. Speaker, given that we are going to be taking this Bill to a Joint Select Committee, I think we could reserve all of the comments and the things that I wanted to say about this legislation, but before taking my seat, I recall the Member for Oropouche making some comments. This is very relevant to this debate, because we are dealing with equal opportunity and they accentuated on this question of race, I want to demonstrate how reckless they can be and, in particular, the Member for Oropouche.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that sometime during the contribution of the Member for Oropouche he said:

“Changing a mindset for and against crime also has a value system involved because people who are poor, by themselves, are not crooks and prone to banditry. If someone comes to my MP office and says: ‘I need a 10-days, and if I do not get it, I will go and thief’, I would say, ‘My brother or, my sister, you see that; I am not in that. I could help, but if you break the law, they should jail you forever.’”

I agree. The quotation continues:

“‘...and do not threaten that if you do not get CEPEP and URP money, you would commit a robbery.’ No, no, no. Mr. Speaker...”

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He is now making reference to us again:

“when you keep corbeaux as pets, eventually they will dig out your eye.”

Mrs. Job-Davis: What is he referring to?

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker he said:

“That is what they did. They kept corbeaux as pets and they dig out their eye and they wonder what happened to crime. Why are people being kidnapped and why is crime taking place?”

Mr. Speaker, this is the genesis of the criminal activity that we face. They were keeping corbeaux as pets. This is the Member for Oropouche, a supposedly learned man, representing the United National Congress in this, the highest debate in the Chamber in this country, referring to CEPEP and URP workers as corbeaux.

Mr. Partap: Nonsense.

Dr. Moonilal: Would the Member give way?

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I am not giving way.

Dr. Moonilal: The Speaker interrupted me and I clarified.

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I am not giving way. I am on my legs and I am not giving way. The Member finds it useful to refer to CEPEP and URP workers as corbeaux. Now, they do it all the time on platforms around the country, but he has now tarnished the name of the Parliament by calling people corbeaux. At the next opportunity he has to apologize to the people of CEPEP and URP.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of Order, Standing Order 36(5). The Member is imputing improper motives. In the speech, the Speaker asked the question to clarify and I did. The Member is deliberately ignoring that part of my contribution in the *Hansard*. He is maliciously misleading this House.

Mr. Speaker: All you need to do is just raise the Standing Order, and you have raised Standing Order 36(5) which says:

“No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member of either Chamber.”

Listen, I remember this matter very well. Please, continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, thank you warmly. All I would say further on that matter is that as protégé, he is following the lead of his leader, the former Member for Couva North. I have before me the *Newsday* of Sunday, March 25,

2007 where Mr. Panday, the leader of that party, notwithstanding his unproud record, he is the putative and the de facto leader of the UNC, and he told this country, in reference to himself and a matter that is before the court, and a matter concerning another high judicial official—hear what the then Member had to say: “One rope to hang two Indians”. Mr. Speaker, that is another example of the kind of reckless comment that does not help Trinidad and Tobago.

We presented the Equal Opportunity Bill before this House. There has been extensive debate. We have heard the comments from the other side and given those comments; given our own view on providing this country with solid legislation; and given some support to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—I rather suspect that she speaks for the Back Bench Opposition—we propose to cause this legislation to be better analyzed before it returns to this House for further debate.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security and Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I beg to move that a Bill to prohibit certain kinds of discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different status, to establish an Equal Opportunity Commission and an Equal Opportunity Tribunal and for other related matters, be referred to a Joint Select Committee for consideration and report, and provided that the Senate concurs that the committee comprise the following five Members of the House with an equal number from the Senate: Mr. Colm Imbert, MP; Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP; Mrs. Eudine Job-Davis, MP; Dr. Roodal Moonilal MP; and Miss Gillian Lucky, MP, and that this committee be empowered to consider the general merits of the Bill along with its details and report at an early stage.

Mr. Speaker: At an early stage?

Hon. F. Hinds: Within two months.

Mr. Sharma: That is too long; one month. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Valley: One month.

Question put and agreed to.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House continue to sit until the completion of the debate on Bill No. 2 on today's Order Paper.

Question put and agreed to.

NATIONAL LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SYSTEM (AMDT.) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Tourism and Minister in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

That a Bill entitled an Act to amend the National Library and Information System Act 1998, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple and straightforward Bill. [*Laughter*] So, we would not detain you for too much longer in this House. As I said before, this is a simple Bill which proposes minor changes, but amendments to this existing legislation. These amendments are intended to remove certain anomalies which affect some of the staff of NALIS, and which are not in the best interest of the smooth management and operations of the National Library of this country.

Hon. Members will recall that the National Library and Information System Act of 1998 repealed the following Acts: the Central Library of Trinidad and Tobago Act, Chap. 40:01, the Public Library Act, Chap. 40:02 and the Carnegie Free Library Act, Chap. 40:03. The effect of this Act was to place all of the libraries and entities under one umbrella, and that umbrella is to be referred to as the National Library and Information System (NALIS).

Under section 19 of the Act, persons employed in the library established by the Public Library Act and the Carnegie Free Library Act became employees of NALIS. By section 20(1) of the Act, persons employed in a library, ministry, department or the Central Library established by the Central Library Act were given a choice of three options to exercise within a six-month period. These three options were: to transfer to NALIS with the approval of the appropriate service commission on terms and conditions as are acceptable to him or her, NALIS and the commission. In this case, under the Pension Extension Act all officers' pension continued to accrue as though the officer had continued his or her employment with the library to which he or she was formerly attached.

The other option was secondment to NALIS, with the approval of the appropriate ministry and service commission for a period not exceeding three years.

The third option was to take up employment in the public service at remuneration commensurate with that of the office held immediately prior to the commencement of the Act. Where no office was available, an officer became eligible for the terms provided in section 15(4) of the Pensions Act.

The existing legislation also provides that an officer who opts for secondment under section 20(1), immediately at the end of the period of secondment, could exercise an option to transfer to NALIS or take up employment in the public service where no office was available. An officer became eligible for the term provided at section 15(4) of the Pensions Act.

The anomalies are rooted in the fact that there are approximately 200 public officers who have not exercised an option to be transferred or seconded to NALIS. Many of these public officers have now indicated a desire to be transferred or seconded to NALIS. However, no further approval can be granted as the statutory period which said within six months of coming into effect of the NALIS Act in 1998 has elapsed.

We have a situation where these officers are working in the national library system but are employed by the public service of Trinidad and Tobago. This causes administrative difficulties for NALIS since the organization finds itself in a position where it cannot promote employees who work within its systems and who qualify for promotion. The reason being that these individuals are public officers, and we end up in a situation where the employees of NALIS are being promoted ahead of their senior public service counterparts. Reports are that this anomaly complicates the management of staff also making it a very onerous and tedious exercise, as in many cases, human resource issues could only be resolved after liaising with various government ministries and departments.

The situation is further compounded by the fact that whilst the existing legislation at section 21 provides for the secondment of public officers for a period of three years to and from NALIS, generally, otherwise than section 20, the Act did not provide those persons with the option to transfer to NALIS at the end of their period of secondment, as was provided for those persons who seconded in accordance with section 20.

In some instances, persons namely librarians and library assistants who have been seconded have no position to return to in the public service. These persons

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must be provided with the option to transfer to NALIS at the end of their period of secondment. Mr. Speaker, clearly, the situation cannot be allowed to continue. We have, therefore, brought this Bill before the Senate and before the House as an important corrective measure.

The proposed amendment to the NALIS Act will do the following: It will extend the period within which public officers can exercise an option under the Act until an extension of December 30, 2007. It will also ensure that those persons in the public service who failed to exercise any of the options listed in the Act amended, be deemed eligible for terms provided at section 15(4) of the Pensions Act, Chap. 23:52, and provide for the general option for transfer or secondment of public officers to and from NALIS. This applies to public officers who were not employed in a library, ministry or department or the Central Library of Trinidad and Tobago immediately prior to the Act coming into effect.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, at the start of my presentation, this is a very simple, but important amendment to the NALIS Act, 1998 and it is certainly in the interest of all employees involved in the process, and will help in improving the management and operations of the national library system of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words I, therefore, recommend that this Bill be supported by the House. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute on this matter before us. As the Minister in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information—I must confess that this is news to several of us. I was not aware that the distinguished Senator was also the Minister in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. I wonder how long that has been done. I was not aware.

I would like to begin by first congratulating the hon. Senator on his appointment as Minister in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. I say that in the context, because I reflected earlier on this Bill and the thought that came to me was that Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith is the Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and I thought that Sen. The Hon. Dr. Saith would need some help. I am really pleased to know that the hon. Senator has been appointed in that Ministry. I am convinced that the Senator would do very well in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. He has good experience in ministerial office.

Mr. Speaker, the matter pertains to public officers employed in the National Library and Information System, and it speaks to several important issues as the Minister indicated, to take corrective action in the aftermath of the parent legislation of 1998, and to bring about some type of efficiency and smoothness to the managerial operations of NALIS which is quite an integrated and fairly complex system—managerial efficiency, staffing, promotions, the line and chain of command in the system—as opposed to the central public service where public servants have been working in NALIS for several years. So, it is a very important matter, and might I add that the Front Bench, the United National Congress, would have little difficulty in supporting this measure.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, it is also my duty to raise some matters pertinent to the issue of public officers in the information system, the operations of NALIS and to what extent this measure will bring about increased efficiency and increased managerial competence in the information system. On the surface, it is a simple matter, a couple pages, but it really speaks of an important issue of staffing, promotion, personnel and human resource matters within NALIS that involve both Trinidad and Tobago. So, it is a very important matter.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that the law pertaining to NALIS was passed in 1998, under the government of the United National Congress that had the vision to integrate our information systems and our libraries under one umbrella, so that we can bring about maximum efficiency and competencies as we sought to pursue very important national objectives consistent with developing a quality nation; the vision of the United National Congress.

Mr. Speaker, the NALIS legislation sought to deal with the provision of information service to maintain easily accessible materials and information on Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean; to develop a library network; to facilitate library and information services at schools; and a host of very laudable objectives, including an important objective of bibliographic records to promote our heritage; to promote literacy skills and awareness in the use of library materials and information.

Mr. Speaker, in preparation for this debate, I had the opportunity to speak to several persons in NALIS including those who work incidentally, next to my office, at the Debe Junction. The Minister would be aware that we do have a NALIS run public library service and information services. It has been my pleasure over the years to cooperate fully with those librarians with their work in developing heritage programmes and information service, particularly to young primary school children and so forth. I wanted to share that experience as well in

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this context because I had heard before of this problem that the Minister is seeking to correct; this problem of the anomaly with staffing public officers vis-à-vis NALIS and the problem with transfers, promotions and secondment and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, the first issue is the matter of having a structure that is efficient and that lends itself to competence in the National Library and Information System suggests that we must have the most qualified persons working in the system; working in the National Library and Information System.

This is a very important area that on the one hand requires not just experienced public officers, because it is a public service, but specially trained public officers. My first point to the Minister, new as the Minister may be there, is if he could give us—whether it is today or in the future—some analysis or some type of brief discussion on the state of the staff vis-à-vis training and development, and whether those persons who work in NALIS and in the libraries are trained. What training are they exposed to on an ongoing basis in terms of library sciences? There is a host of specialized professional areas dealing with documentation. I want to make this point early, the Minister, like some of us, regrettably not all of us in this Chamber, is well in tune with the latest technologies and methods used for retrieving information and documentation and so forth, and not just simple rather outdated palm pilots and so forth, but really state-of-the-art cutting technology. It is important that the staff in our information system are themselves on the cutting edge of technology with such training for documentation and retrieval; with such training to understand the latest sciences now that go into the work of librarians. It is not like the old days where you would dust out a shelf and maintain magazines and books that you subscribed to. Those days, I mean, for better or for worse, are coming to an end.

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Today a lot of the library work is driven by IT, by information and communication technology. The chances are any information you want in a modern library will not be in the hard copy form in a library. You will have to access that through a series of different technologies, not just the traditional Internet as we all know it to be, because in our traditional *modus operandi* we still have a system where we subscribe for journals, magazines and so on. But very few of us ask the question: "All these journals we subscribe to, anybody reading it? Anybody using it? To what purpose do we put it?"

Sometimes even in libraries at the University of the West Indies—where I also spend some time—even at the library at the Parliament—where I also spend time

before a sitting—I have cause, when I talk to the very helpful people in the library to ask whether or not the journals that we have here are being used, because they may well be journals that were important 20, 30 years ago; but today it is not as important. I am one—and I know I may have other colleagues, certainly a couple of colleagues on the Back Bench I know—I have been recommending and suggesting to the library in the Parliament to bring in new journals that I think might be more relevant, certainly to my work, if not for others.

Not only to subscribe to journals but to subscribe for the electronic copy; meaning that if you pay an annual fee to a journal for example called *Industrial Relations Law*, you will not need to get the book coming in every three months with twine and gazette paper fold up, but you could just go on the Internet and access the important articles and reviews you want. I have been suggesting several journals for the library to consider, including the famous LexisNexis Database for research law and so on.

The point I want to make is that persons in the library and in the information system must be kept abreast of this type of development by regular training and some of the information I received is that, because we have a traditional public service, where training—and indeed the senior Minister in that Ministry has a long history there with public sector reform issues—many of the staff members themselves may not be well equipped to handle information and communication technology and understand the latest technologies that drive that type of work. It is a matter I think that the Minister of State will want to reflect on, as we seek to present, actually a better condition of work to the 200 staff members that the Minister referred to, and we are all in support of that.

The Front Bench of this Opposition has always been in support of the stabilisation and regularization of employees so that they have the best benefits and the best working conditions. And as this measure before us seeks to provide them with social security, accessing pension benefits under the Pension Act and now with their transfer or secondment to the NALIS. We also believe that workers, when they are given such benefits, opportunity, stability and regularization must also be trained to deliver the best service to students, members of the community and so on.

The next point consistent with the mission of the NALIS and the importance of proper staffing has to do with an issue that I have almost adopted as a pet issue, because I think we are leading to a crisis eventually, maybe not now but certainly. It has to do with the use of the English language.

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Mr. Speaker, I must confess, having to go through many, many years of education both at secondary level and the university level and coming to terms with some of the better methods in the use of English and developing your vocabulary base and your use of grammar, all of us are not perfect and it takes years of schooling and reading to come to terms with that. But we face a crisis today in this society, where certainly the younger generation, if not at all levels, is losing their appreciation for English, because we are also having at the side what is developing as a popular culture that bases itself, is rooted in another use of language. So today, I am afraid that if you ask a youngster to spell a word like “ecstatic”, they will spell one version, the pop culture version. If you ask a youngster to spell "boys" it will be from "Reggae Boyz".

If you ask a youngster to spell words, they will not have the English, while our generation—and I say with respect—and the generation before me had both good English but we could also understand dialect and local language and use it appropriately. There was an extent to which we knew language, and that language is being lost today. Young children are developing an ability to speak, because how you speak will determine how you spell and how you use grammar, and they speak one language and they cannot write.

I want to tell you I lectured at the University of the West Indies and we have some of the finest students and brightest people at the UWI; I want to tell you that. The brightest, finest people at the UWI, but a crisis we face among some people is spelling. Mr. Speaker, I just completed—I can say some of my business but not all—reading 130 research papers, each of about 30 pages; then 130 examination papers, each about ten pages or so, and that really is a lot. You know if I tell you some of the spelling problems and use of language problems it will blow your mind that this is also the University of the West Indies, but it is a minority. I want to tell you it is a minority, certainly not a majority that I have seen. As I said, we have some of the brightest students at the UWI, but this crisis is developing with language and understanding English.

I want to make an important point about understanding English; when people speak, listening, understanding—because there are Members in this House who may have difficulty understanding when we speak and we are all speaking the same language. Unless I am mistaken; it is against the Standing Order for us to speak in Hindi, Spanish or French, although we may use words every now and then from another language. Sometimes, I hear Members misinterpreting what we say.

In recent memory the Member from Laventille East/Morvant rose in this House and said that the Member for Oropouche came to the House and quoted one section and said I was referring to CEPEP and URP workers as corbeaux and so on, and not reading properly, not understanding properly, not taking the time to understand. When I look at a contribution I made some time ago, where I said clearly and, incidentally, where the hon. Speaker himself, asked me for some clarification and I said clearly:

"I am not referring to CEPEP workers and please do not quote me as referring to CEPEP workers, but I was actually referring to the few criminal elements that infiltrate the CEPEP and the URP."

I am dealing with the use of language and the understanding of the English language critical to the NALIS mission. The Speaker was making some very valid observations on that evening. The Speaker said and I quote:

"Secondly, you referred earlier in your contribution to Members who keep corbeaux as pets; it can cause them to dig out their eye. The inference here is—I hope I am wrong—I hope that you are not inferring that CEPEP workers are corbeaux. If you are, I do not think that is really—"

The Speaker stops there because somebody interrupted. When the Speaker made such a valid observation; the first observation I do not want to refer to it here because it is not important. Dr. Roodal Moonilal on page 20, Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme. I quote:

"When I made the reference to corbeaux as pets, clearly I was not referring—please I do not want to be quoted as referring to CEPEP workers but, rather to the few individuals involved in the criminal enterprise that are involved also in CEPEP." [*Desk thumping*]

"...the few individuals involved in the criminal enterprise that are involved also in CEPEP" [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I now use language, a rudimentary understanding of the English language—[*Desk thumping*—and no pun with the rudimentary. A rudimentary understanding of the English language will suggest that I was not referring to the CEPEP workers. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant himself, a beneficiary of tertiary education has really brought some doubts as to the thinking of the—I think it is the Counsel of the London University that conferred a degree upon the Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

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Mr. Speaker, if Members of the House cannot understand English, cannot read English and cannot present themselves, what do you expect for persons out there? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: What do you expect when Members of this House cannot read and understand and get the language right. Standards are an important mission of the NALIS and the 200 officers at the NALIS will also and must also learn that to promote language among children they themselves must be well trained. They would not be trained by listening to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, but they must be trained as well to come to terms with some of these issues.

I say this because a couple of years ago, I had cause—in fact I must say, I was a beneficiary of a programme called the "Visitors Programme of the United States." They take professionals from Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere and we get a tour of the United States. In fact, I visited from Boston on one side of the United States to San Francisco on the other side of the United States, but I had the opportunity to go to several universities where they specialize—

Mr. Valley: Hinds, you went to that programme?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Who went to the programme? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Valley: Mr. Hinds.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Let me tell you something; if you did not say that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant went on that programme, I would never have believed that he would go on a programme where they teach you about library science and English and the use of language.

Mr. Speaker, I got this tour of the United States. Regrettably, at that time there was no travel card, I had no Government credit card and so on, I used my private money and all I say in passing is that that matter of the card has created quite a national debate. You know we heard from the Member for Arouca South today and all I say in passing is that Colonel Shultz, when he gave his story at the Nuremburg trial, it was more believable. [*Desk thumping*] It was more believable. Colonel Shultz at the Nuremburg trial had it easier than the Member for Arouca South. I have much more to say on that in this House and elsewhere, but I thought Colonel Shultz was better in defending an almost indefensible position.

As I toured the United States, I visited libraries associated with Harvard; libraries associated with what is called State Universities, California has Berkley and another university; the University of California, Berkley; I visited the Library Sciences Department. What was amazing just a few years ago, there are now several areas that specialize in library science and the work of librarians; several areas, and one had to do with developing heritage; developing the framework, the institutions, the structure, the thinking, the public education about heritage.

This matter of heritage is central to the mission of the NALIS. I would ask the Minister to tell us this evening or on another occasion—because these questions are coming to the Minister like a shot out of the sky, so he is not prepared here for this—among the staff of the NALIS how many officers have been trained in this matter of heritage science; in understanding and developing programmes, structures, institutions that promote heritage? This is a country with a lot of heritage.

The UNC government had said before and we say it again, on returning to office we will name the National Library in Port of Spain the Sir Vidia Naipaul Library in tribute to the Nobel Laureate Sir Vidia Naipaul. [*Desk thumping*] Unless I am mistaken I want the Minister with now responsibility for this area, to tell us. A few years ago the former President, His Excellency, Nelson Mandela visited our shores; we were blessed. There was a fight to see who would meet him at the door of the plane. There was a conflict between top Government officials, Prime Minister, President and the world renowned Vice President of FIFA, His Excellency, Mr. Jack Warner.

Hon. Member: His Excellency?

Dr. R. Moonilal: He carries the title. There was a fight as to who would meet President Mandela at the steps of the plane and then they sorted it out. The President of Trinidad and Tobago in company with the President of Concacaf; so they sorted it out. His Excellency, Mr. Mandela came and Members on the Government side jumped up and danced; they were so happy to meet this great man. I want to know from the Government, because I do not know, I honestly do not know, I innocently do not know. I am not into fraudulent misrepresentation as my friend from Laventille East/Morvant; I honestly do not know. Has this Government done anything at all in honour of Nelson Mandela?

Mr. Hinds: Point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche has just accused me of what is clearly a criminal offence, a crime in this country. I take offence and I ask him to withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well he has accused you of being fraudulent misrepresentation. I do not think he really meant to do that. That is what you said so I ask you to withdraw it. [*Interruption*] The Member is going to withdraw it; I am directing the Member to withdraw it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I accused the Member of fraudulent misrepresentation. I will withdraw it. I have no problem withdrawing the statement, but I just want to put as a footnote that the Member raised a matter concerning me and I believe, deliberately did not read the *Hansard* that was relevant. So to mislead the public about a statement I made, if that is not fraudulent misrepresentation I am sorry and I withdraw it. So I withdraw that.

Mr. Speaker, let me press on before the Member distracts me and I get more into his comments. Again, I was wrong; I thought the Member was on his legs to tell us that the PNM Government did something in honour of Nelson Mandela. They named a statue; they named a street; they named a building; they put up a picture in honour of Nelson Mandela, who they all believe and we all believe is an iconic figure that is still alive. He is possibly the only global freedom fighter of such global magnitude that is alive and the Government of the People's National Movement did nothing to honour the work and the life contribution of Nelson Mandela. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Job-Davis: He has our love.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh! he has their love. Well this is good; I am so happy to know he has your love. Mr. Mandela came here on the invitation of the Deputy Political Leader of the UNC, not only of our love, but the UNC is committed to honouring the work and the contribution of Nelson Mandela on returning to office in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Because our heritage is not just our heritage of sons and daughters of our country, but those sons and daughters of other countries that have contributed to our collective consciousness, to our sense of value, to our sense for equality.

The other name I want to leave with the Government— You know what is fascinating; it is such a pity that the Prime Minister is not here, I am sure he would not have allowed me to get away with that. The Government admits this evening that they did nothing in honour of Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa. That is a crying shame by a country that stood toe-to-toe in the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa; that a Government of the PNM has done nothing.

In any event, let me move on. The other name I would just raise and leave is the former President of the Republic, the deceased, the distinguished public servant, former President Noor Mohammed Hassanali, who also left us with a great and noble contribution. The UNC has said before, this is part of our heritage, we will name a suitable public building and facility in honour of Noor Mohammed Hassanali and we will promote an information learning centre supported by the NALIS in honour of Mr. Hassanali. [*Desk thumping*] You know why I say this, it is because I have a bit of passion about that.

When I finished secondary education and went to the university, you know I was looking for something to read on Adrian Kola Rienzi and there was nothing. Krishna Deonarine, as he was called before, became Adrian Kola Rienzi and made a huge contribution to the labour movement; to the politics and the development of Trinidad and Tobago. When I looked, as a youngster, as a student, as a reader, I could find nothing on his life. I did not even know what the man looked like—a picture—and the children of the future will not know what Mr. Hassanali looked like; what contribution he made to jurisprudence, to public life as President. He was a sportsman; a tutor at Hugh Wooding; a past student of Naparima College—but we will not hold that against him—who made a valid contribution to public service. The Government has a track record of not recognizing our heroes. [*Interruption*]

I, being the Member for Diego Martin Central, would not have responded had he not asked me in such a probing way, but the UNC, both in and out of Government have made a suitable contribution and we will make a bigger contribution to honouring the work of the former Prime Minister and Opposition Leader, Mr. Basdeo Panday. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I never seek to sell my own fish, but if it is good fish I can sell it. In 1988 I had the distinction of co-editing the first book of speeches of Mr. Basdeo Panday called "An Enigma Answered"; myself and a gentleman by the name of Samaroo Sewah. So, I made my contribution, as small as it may be, but a government with the resources of this Government must make a contribution in honour of persons like Noor Hassanali; persons like Rienzi; persons like Mr. Mandela and others.

There was a San Fernandonian, Wilkes, the weightlifter—what is the first name; Rodney? Rodney Wilkes. A few years ago I visited his house at Bertram Street in San Fernando. He took me in his house showed me all the pictures of his

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Olympic triumphs and his greatness. When I looked at the situation he found himself in, in the twilight of his years, I wept; that this son of the soil who brought such distinction to this country was allowed to wither away in the twilight of his life; and others.

In fact, what is so regrettable is that the Member for Tunapuna knows our heroes, but he will not impress upon his own government to honour those persons. The Member for Tunapuna is a repository of all the data and information on the great men and women who have contributed in sports and culture in public life, but this Minister and Member for Tunapuna, our distinguished friend, will not exercise his known power; he will not exercise the influence that we know he has in the Government to bring to bear on the Government to honour such men.

I wanted to speak about heritage. While I agree with the Minister 100 per cent on this matter of settling the personnel matters involving workers at the information system and information division; I agree with this. I also want to ask the Minister whether it is in the contemplation of the Government, given these challenges and others that face the information documentation sector or subsector now; whether they are also considering to increase, in some cases, the professionals that can come outside of the Public Service and make a contribution towards that sector, because it is a specialized area. That is one.

A related point I want to make for the Minister to comment on and consider, if not this evening; in the traditional operations of libraries, documentation centres and archives and so on—in fact we have something called the National Archives, I do not know if it still exists. You know what happens? Every single Ministry has a library, a documentation centre. You have CSO around the Brian Lara Promenade and you have all these ministries, departments and state enterprises as well, with libraries and information centres and you had a traditional problem of a lack of coherence, of coordination; a lack of integration of what they do, so you can coordinate and get the best product out. In the traditional systems, in every library in every ministry they are cutting newspaper clippings; everybody is cutting newspaper clippings.

So, on every one day 25 ministries buy three daily newspapers and they are cutting clippings, and nobody decided, let us get one central department, get dedicated staff and let them cut the clippings; put it on a database and have every ministry, every department and every state sector entity access the clippings that would be in every single conceivable sector and area. Whether it is sports, because of course, some ministries are involved in sports; whether it is crime; but everybody cutting the clippings; everybody has staff now coming in and they are cutting.

Do you know at the office of Members of Parliament we also have staff and when you look at them in the morning they are with a pair of scissors cutting newspapers. I am wondering is there not a method to get a central department set up within the ambit of NALIS, where all the offices of Members of Parliament, Government departments can simply access newspaper articles. I will tell you—*[Interruption]* We are talking—I mean, come on, you are a graduate. But in the newspaper you begin with the assumption that everything is relevant.

Mrs. Job-Davis: What is relevant for you may not be relevant for me.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, hold on, because different departments will have a different concentration, that central unit goes multi-sector in every area; simply put, and allow everyone—and I have seen this in another country. You know what happens? You charge a user fee to the public that wants to do research with newspaper clippings, and you actually collect some money from the research community, because it is not just members of the public coming in. In every country that is developing you have a huge research community and you—*[Member talking on cell phone]* Should I wait for him to finish?

Mr. Speaker, let me speak above the voice on the cellular phone. I have seen it in another country where the research community, all their universities—In fact the Government is now boasting of a massive expansion in university education and tertiary level education; the University of Trinidad and Tobago; all the different training institutes and so on.

Do you know that if you have a central unit doing this you charge a user fee to all libraries in the tertiary sector and you can actually pay, collect money and make an income, if not a profit, from using such a central system? Do you know right now they call something the University of the West Indies and this is the only university in the world—we are checking; not checking the whole world but a big part of the world—without a library. The University of Trinidad and Tobago has no library. They cannot have a library; they took three or four buildings and put it together.

The people at the current training college have no library. In other training institutes there are no libraries. So, instead of investing a massive amount in library facilities in every conceivable area, develop a central unit, access it through our online technologies and you solve a big problem of hundreds of people cutting newspaper clippings everyday from Guayaguayare to Point Fortin to Port of Spain to Scarborough; simple.

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8.30 p.m.

In all respect to the Minister of Tourism, as well as he is, many of us who are on this side, it is almost with some sympathy that we look at this Minister, he was in his first incarnation as the Minister of National Security and, Mr. Speaker, really, it was unfair to the Senator to appoint him as Minister of National Security, because apart from being spectacularly unqualified for that area [*Interruption*] the Minister was qualified in other areas, and today, finally, the Prime Minister has been able to use his talent in the area of tourism. I am seeing him on TV everyday sampling some exotic foods in his Hawaiian shirt attending a trade fair or promoting tourism. The Minister is someone who will not revolt at the idea of attending a nightclub and a social function in the late evening and so on. [*Interruption*]

I took the statement in the press, the Minister had left, I believe, before that obscene act was committed. [*Interruption*] I am convinced that had this Minister been at Zen nightclub that incident would never have taken place. [*Interruption*] I am convinced of that. Mr. Speaker, the Minister is finally in an area that he can bring his talent in the entertainment recreation sector to bear on tourism, he can now bring his considerable expertise in information systems and in technology; his appreciation for heritage, his appreciation for the objectives of the NALIS to bear on improving the services that are available.

Mr. Speaker, another area that I want to raise consistent with staffing and human resource development has to do with facilities available throughout Trinidad and Tobago, not only in the cities. While the PNM in any incarnation is always a citycentric type of Government, and this has to do with their history, they were born in the city, somewhere near the cemetery down Mucurapo there. While they are citycentric and that is their history and ideology, in the modern world today, you need to develop information systems, library facilities and services in different parts of your country, in traditional rural areas where you have children now going to schools there, in the rural community and they need support service, not only IT but books, proper staffing. Always creative and innovative programmes for learning through the network of the NALIS institution, there is a great opportunity to do this.

I want to raise one matter related—in Ste. Madeleine in the constituency of San Fernando East, a few years ago there was the old police station they called at Ste. Madeleine Hill, everybody knows that, and under the United National Congress we built a new police station at Petit Moon near the Caroni factory that they closed down. We had the new police station there. It was the intention of the

United National Congress government to establish a library and information system unit there to help all the children, youngsters and so on from Ste. Madeleine, Cedar Hill—a huge catchment area. These are the children who would be rushing on a maxi-taxi to go to San Fernando to sit on the floor to read. They had to go to San Fernando and sit on the carpet floor and pull out books and read on the ground, and the UNC vision was to open this library information centre in Ste. Madeleine.

Incidentally, I want to underline Ste. Madeleine in the constituency of San Fernando East, so when I hear people talk about discrimination by the UNC, they wanted to put a library in San Fernando East, and I imagine the Member for San Fernando East would have been happy with such a facility in his constituency. But, Mr. Speaker, over the last six years that building has completely collapsed, it is now overrun by scorpion, snake, bush and grass, and it is really now a health hazard to the community, and the Minister may want to look into the possibility of that project at Ste. Madeleine as a library information system. The catchment area is huge, and anytime this Minister would like to visit that area, I can assure him that the Prime Minister will support him and I will join him to point out the location at Ste. Madeleine; very important as an information site. And it is not only Ste. Madeleine, but throughout Trinidad and Tobago, this Minister must have a map of Trinidad and Tobago in his office and map in all the areas in terms of the density, Mr. Speaker. This forward thinking Minister—

Hon. Member: IT.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—this IT driven Minister.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and Members on both sides of the House. I was asking the Minister for a bit of information and he dramatically held up a sheet of paper that looked from here to be a map of Trinidad with lots of dots. I imagine the Minister is telling me that he has already considered such a plan for the decentralization of information units, [*Interruption*] and what a pity that in their final year as they are now demitting office [*Laughter*] they would appoint the Senator as a Minister of Public Administration and

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Information. What a pity! This is how they use resources! In fact, we should bring a Bill to deal with the PNM misuse of human resources, so the Minister will tell us or not, but it seems clear that the Minister has some plan for this decentralization process that will create these learning units in different parts of the country in both Trinidad and Tobago that will promote literacy, promote all the different areas in relation to work of a library and information system and so forth.

The staffing matter of the NALIS, which this Bill speaks to, is a matter that involves another issue of contract workers in the public sector, whether or not we bring in professional staff. The UNC Government in its vision placed in the parent legislation several areas of responsibility for the NALIS to undertake a host of other work, and the extent to which this Government has been promoting the work of the NALIS is something we are not clear on at all. Regrettably, there are still several information centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and you know why many of us may feel that there is some hope with this recent appointment of the Senator? Because the Senator, IT driven as he is, may see the need to place computers into the information centres. In fact, the Senator may feel the need to provide computers that are working into the information centres, because at several schools, at several libraries throughout Trinidad and Tobago they have a computer that is not working. They have a computer, it is not on the Internet; they have a computer, it is not high speed. When you click, you have to put down the mouse and go and get some tea and come back and you are still on the same page waiting for the page to come up. So, it is one thing to provide technology in terms of hardware, it is something else to have working equipment at the proper connections and so on.

I have received complaints from several information units that they do have hardware, they do have the computers and so on, but they break down, they do not work; like the same thing as police cars. You have a lot of police cars in VMCOTT in the garden, if you move some of the tomatoes, “caraili” and so on you could see police cars parked in the yard at VMCOTT, the same problem we have with the IT equipment under the library systems in Trinidad and Tobago. It is something that this Minister who has some type of interest in IT driven learning and lifelong learning will undertake to improve in the coming days.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will not detain Members longer than it is necessary, but to make those points and to indicate that consistent with our position in supporting workers to better obtain working conditions that they will promote such information systems, they will regularize—[*Interruption*] Why, Mr. Speaker, the Member is interrupting me again.

Mr. Speaker: Talk to me.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The last time, Mr. Speaker, you rose on a point of clarification it was misinterpreted, so let us leave that. On this matter I want to assure the Minister that we are in support, we will be monitoring closely his work at his new Ministry and we hope that we will see some type of turnaround in the mission of the NALIS.

I thank you.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security and Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. We got a mini-thesis of sort on the use of the language. I saw my friend, the Member for Oropouche, he gave the impression he was speaking Chinese, I heard him saying “interrupting”. [*Laughter*]

I rise actually, to support the hon. Minister as he presented a Bill to amend the National Library and Information System Act, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the presentation of the hon. Minister and I listened to the response, the rather interesting response by my friend for Oropouche. I think I wanted to put a particular perspective on this, because we have to account to the citizens of this country and it is the taxpayers who made all of this possible. The concept of the establishment of NALIS would have come from the Government and it would be maintained by all governments thereafter. However, I think the public ought to understand some of the things that have been happening in that wonderful institution since its establishment, in particular last year. But before doing so, I just want to say to my friend for Oropouche that His Excellency cousin Mandela, Nelson Mandela, as I like to call him, [*Interruption*] he was a man and he remains a man in my view of impeccable integrity and good international standing, and to honour him with a statute or plaque simply would not be good enough.

Mrs. Job-Davis: He is in our hearts.

Hon. Member: Do not interrupt.

Hon. F. Hinds: I think my friend from on the other side and his colleagues would do better to try to honour His Excellency cousin Nelson Mandela with decency, honesty and integrity. [*Interruption*] I think that would go much further.

Mr. Speaker, while he said, so I remembered sometime ago, very quickly, when his leader began talking about the concept of civil disobedience, which thankfully has been largely ignored across Trinidad and Tobago. I was pained to hear

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him speaking of civil disobedience because as you study Ghandi and you study Martin Luther King, Jr. both who espoused and practiced this very spiritual concept of civil disobedience applicable in situations where you had no other choice. It was an undemocratic experience, for example, apartheid in South Africa and the Jim Crow laws and that sort of thing of the United States in those years. Both these men were spiritually attuned, clean, honest men, so if one seeks to practice civil disobedience outside of that kind of realm, it is really a mockery of that, and I am suggesting that is probably why the concept of civil disobedience, as espoused by the UNC was flatly rejected by the population.

I want to go further to talk about heritage and legacy, since the Member for Oropouche quite properly in my view, raised them in the context of this debate. I want to say to him, we consider the importance of legacy and heritage, and we began again in 2000 by winning the elections of that year. We continue to preserve the heritage and the legacy of this country by keeping the UNC out of government and to ensure that the corrupt ghost of the UNC stays far. I think that is the greatest contribution the PNM, as a government, could make to the heritage and the legacy of this country by keeping the UNC far from the reins of power again in this country. [*Laughter*] And more importantly, purging the country of the corrupt ghost of the UNC, depicted in my imagery by two very slimy hands and the Treasury door, [*Interruption*] not far from. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, only today—talking about heritage and legacy—I said to two friends, I said to Clive Nunez sitting here and I said to Minister Anthony Roberts—

Mr. Speaker: No, as I ruled on the last occasion that you cannot refer to members in the Public Gallery.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged and I am gratified. I did not hear that ruling, Mr. Speaker, but I am really guided by it. Speaking to a member of the public and my friend, the hon. Member who represents the constituency of St. Ann's East, I was saying to them with hindsight, I hope this country would come quickly to the point where we would honour personalities, we do not have to go as far as Nelson Mandela again, in South Africa, but we have personalities here who made major contributions. Take for example, and the Member for Oropouche highlighted some, I would like to think we should consider Makandal Daaga, Khafra Kambon, Aiyegoro Ome; these gentlemen made a contribution and an intervention in 1970 and thereafter, and it really took a new direction for Trinidad and Tobago, and I look forward to that. I would be happy to be a part of that, because these gentlemen made a major social intervention, though misunderstood by many at

that time, but I think as the years went by the value of their intervention has become larger as we proceed.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, *[Interruption]* let me share with those who matter, those to whom he must account for what has been happening in NALIS, *[Interruption]* at least over the last year and then I shall retain my seat. *[Interruption]*

During the last fiscal year there were the following upgrades: Registration and Internet usage by the public at all branches of the National Library System were increased; new network infrastructure was installed in the 22 public libraries throughout the country, along with upgraded additional computer equipment for staff and public use. Many students go to these facilities on a daily basis, as happens in libraries everywhere to make use of those facilities in preparation for exams and such like.

Thirdly, computer centres for children were established in 15 branch libraries, for the children, 5,000 users were trained in the use of the Internet, a very outstanding contribution on record. The NALIS website was established and launched in 2005 and a draft digitization policy including guidelines for scanning different media and data entry was completed. The success continues, NALIS commenced upgrading the model library at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, the branch libraries and the libraries in schools and teacher colleges throughout the country. Ramps—very importantly for the benefit of the disabled community—for wheelchairs, have been constructed at three libraries and that process will continue. I think that is very progressive, and I am sure that the disabled community would be happy to learn of that. Training has begun on equipment to assist visually impaired persons with that kind of technology installed at service points. Nine members of staff have already been trained in sign language to facilitate service to be provided to the hearing impaired.

In keeping with Government's all inclusive policy, as a pilot project and this is very relevant, we went into the Youth Training Centre within the prison institution and these youngsters in there needed training in literacy, improving their spelling and all the other things. And yes, Mr. Speaker, within the last year reading programmes have been instituted by NALIS within the Youth Training Centre, and if I am not mistaken a substantial contribution of books was given to the adult prison sometime ago during the last year as well, and that has to be applauded.

Mr. Speaker, one hundred and fifty—and this is in direct response to the Member for Oropouche who was talking about working computers and that sort

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of thing, 150 new computer systems were deployed in 22 branch libraries; electronic access to 10,000 digitized information files was enabled; 488,303 items were listed in the online Public Access Catalogue; new subscriptions for seven additional electronic research databases for children, teens and adults were made; 134 library management software licences for secondary schools, under the SEMP were purchased; the digitization of two recently acquired heritage collections began; and a NALIS Help-Desk System was implemented to provide increased efficiency in service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the things that were introduced in the last year by NALIS and I reported them for the benefit of the national community that supports all of this in terms of their hard earned and tax-paying dollars, so we account to them for the work that has been done. And I also want to take the opportunity to compliment the management, the leadership at NALIS for what I consider to be very progressive developments over the last year. [*Desk thumping*]

I conclude by saying, Mr. Speaker, we must not forget, while we enjoy more resources now than ever in the past and while we may be able to boast, with humility, of being probably one of the better off countries in the region, we must never forget that it is not a bottomless pit. Our resources do not constitute a bottomless pit. It is also important that with humility, we never forget that we are a developing nation, a nation on the move, whether it is in education, whether it is in health, whether it is in the area of these services as provided by NALIS.

And I just said when I studied in London, notwithstanding the doubts that my friend from Oropouche might hold, and I saw he had difficulty—you know language is really a wonderful thing. My friend was attempting to demonstrate that there was inefficiency in my analysis of his comments in respect of “corbeau,” but he ended up right back in the same place. He found himself trying to say that he did not say CEPEP and URP workers were “corbeau,” he was saying so about the criminal elements who happened to be working in CEPEP or URP. Same thing but different, if I am permitted a colloquialism, and just for the record, the benefit of language and learning includes saying what you mean.

Mr. Valley: And mean what you say.

Hon. F. Hinds: And mean what you say. And more than that, apply your intellectual capacity if you have some, and I credit my friend with a modicum of that, and make sure to speak sensibly, say the right things. Speak soft words so you would not have to eat them at a later point. That is the lesson—

Mr. Valley: Just in case you have to eat them.

Hon. F. Hinds: Just in case. Speak soft words on your way up, you may have to eat them in the other direction. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I was saying that I lived on a street in South East London and there were two libraries on the very street on which I lived and there was another on the eastern end; about 25 yards around the corner there was yet another library and if I went to the western end of that street, about 50 yards from that corner there was another library. I had four libraries right around me. In fact, I held eight library cards during my student days in London. Those were libraries and you could still find one in the Bromley Borough Council, there was a massive library there, and when you went to those libraries, you had access to the Internet and if you requested a book that they did not have, they treated that request as an indication of their own deficiency, put the book on order and within two weeks they would give you a call or send you a notice, saying that the book was now available.

Many times I got a brand new book from the library, perhaps two or three weeks later, that is the kind of development that we are aiming towards, and it helped me no end as a student and I want to say thanks to good old Mother England for that. That is the kind of thing along with the information technology systems that the Member correctly spoke about, that we want to see in the development of the NALIS system. It is happening, I compliment the leadership again, and I am faithful in my feeling that NALIS will continue to grow along with other facets of our social, economic and even political existence.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words and in full support of the measures offered by my friend the hon. Minister here today, I thank you very kindly.

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank you for allowing me to enter this debate this evening in an area which we must recognize as the future of Trinidad and Tobago. When we look at the Act to amend the National Library and Information Bill, 1998, the second part information system is something that we must look at seriously in this country.

Trinidad and Tobago is but a small country, we all know that, but yet to find information from ministry to ministry, for example, you have to go there and spend a day almost, in a ministry to find out something that is happening. If you want to do certain businesses in Port of Spain, you will have to spend a day to get

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your birth certificate, another three or four days to get a passport, and rather than systems be improve, they are not.

I believe firmly that the National Information Systems or ICT as it is commonly called would have the answers. I have been talking about that every time I get up to speak on certain matters, about really bringing Trinidad and Tobago up to the accepted standards of Information Technology. We have to do it quickly. So, when you hear people talking as if things are okay, I am definitely not one of those, because I see the problems that we have in our country as we move throughout various ministries.

I heard the Minister talk about all libraries coming together and creating NALIS as it were in 1998 and really trying to have the libraries connected via the Internet, Intranet etc. I know and when I hear the Member for Laventille East/Morvant talk about the achievements in that booklet as I always say, and to repeat it, that those are books of propaganda that accompany the budget—because we have visited some of the places he spoke about and nothing what he said is true. It is propaganda!

If you heard that speech, Mr. Speaker, or some visitors to Trinidad and Tobago who listened to that speech would believe we have a perfect system, and that is so far from the truth. Yes, advances were made, I am not saying no, but to come here and make that speech, to convert whom to fool whom, Mr. Speaker? Because people out there attempted to use the system and they found themselves in trouble.

I asked the question in this Parliament a couple of years ago about the building of the Chaguanas Library. When the UNC was in Cabinet at that time proposals were made to have a library built in Chaguanas, as a matter of fact the land was already identified and purchased by the Government of the day; money was paid. And within the 1999—2001 budgets, moneys were allocated for the Chaguanas Library and then I saw the money disappear around 2002, and I asked the question, what has happened to Chaguanas Library?

Mr. Speaker, just to remind you and this honourable Chamber, I talked about the Chaguanas constituency and environs, where at least six or seven secondary schools were built, and of course existing with Presentation College, Chaguanas, which as we all know is the institution in central which would have produced many outstanding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and yet there is no library that we could call a library in today's world in Chaguanas. To me that is quite unfortunate. So when I see this Bill come here today, and if I remember correctly, the Minister of Public Administration and Information came to this Parliament

and said that he cannot build a library in Chaguanas, because he said NALIS is now doing a survey as to what will happen in the future. Therefore in the meantime Chaguanas would have to stay without a library. We must put that into context in today's Trinidad and Tobago, Chaguanas and its environs are, you could say the fastest growing urban areas.

Mr. Valley: Like Diego Martin Central.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It is growing rapidly. If you look at the electors list for example, and I have said that more than once, Chaguanas Borough itself has now 46,000 and counting electors which is in contrast to Port of Spain which is about 30-plus thousand. Chaguanas continues to grow almost on a daily basis because of the infrastructural developments that are taking place. Schools have been built and no library is there to offer services to the people from the Central area.

Mr. Speaker, worse than that, is that you get the impression that nothing is being done to assist students. I agree with my colleague from Oropouche, where in today's world people are leaving out books, and that is a fact. People will not read as before so we have to encourage them, and how could we encourage them by not having books available? It is no sense that we do not have books available and people have to come to Port of Spain to the National Library and go elsewhere and while nothing is happening in Central Trinidad.

One of the main reasons I got up to speak here this evening is to make again an appeal to the Government, and we earlier discussed discrimination, and this could be seen as discrimination by region with Chaguanas. We all read the newspapers, President's medals, scholarships are won by students of Chaguanas every year, and yet we are not getting that kind of encouragement for them to get involved, in more of today's technology. And now with the availability of the Internet and so on, not everybody could afford a computer in their homes. We have students who cannot have that available, and I know that people will agree with me in this Parliament and outside that a good library, a modern library could have the facilities available for people to go in there and do their research and what have you, Mr. Speaker.

9.00 p.m.

We have the University of Trinidad and Tobago, we have many tertiary education institutes in this country which must be supported by good library services and if we do not have it, we are in trouble.

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My good friend from Laventille East/Morvant had eight library cards. He had a collection, I do not know if he had books to match the cards, but he had eight library cards. In Trinidad and Tobago we cannot have one and that is the irony of it and that is why when I get up to speak I sometimes I have difficulty. All of us would have the experience of going to the larger countries. We do not have to reinvent the wheel, but when we are in position as Ministers in a Cabinet, do we speak out on these issues?

Earlier today in passing, when my friend talked about Trinidad and Tobago developing and we will have a bottomless pit and so on—recently, I visited Guyana—and just to put this Minister's mind at rest—in the 1970s as a youngster to play cricket for Trinidad and Tobago at that level and at that time we were scared because we were told by the management of the team that you cannot even go outside in Guyana because of the “chock and rab” as they called it in Guyana in those days. You were scared. The Trinidadian people accepted that and when we talked with our Guyanese counterparts, they told us the same thing that we cannot go out there, you had to stay indoors; if you go out there, you had to go out as a team and so on.

Mr. Speaker, recently I spent three days in Guyana and you know that is the contrast in Trinidad and Tobago now. When you look at their news and you are not hearing about murders, robberies or what have you and you feel free to walk on the roads. It is reversed now, Trinidad and Tobago in the '70s to Guyana now. This is something we commend our neighbours on wherever they are, whatever part of the world because it is a big turnaround and there is that peace and tranquility. We could have all the money in Trinidad and Tobago as the Member alluded to; we could have all the facilities, bottomless pit of money what have you, but if we cannot get our people safe, we are in trouble. So, let me remind the Minister of National Security that his concerns should be about safety and not necessarily libraries, if he does his work and concentrate on what he has to do.

This is the problem we have in this country; people always want to do somebody else's job. Concentrate on the Ministry of National Security which is the worst ranked in Trinidad and Tobago by statistics. People are not safe; people do not feel safe, so to come here and stand up in this Parliament and talk about Trinidad and Tobago, as if paying glowing tribute to this country, I feel worried because if you are satisfied with that performance, that is where the worries come in. If you get up here and admit that we have problems; the crime rate is

unacceptable what have you, we could work with you. But when you are satisfied in your non-performance and your mediocre performance, then the country is in trouble and I think I a warning to the reader of many library cards should be enough.

Mr. Speaker, I have in front of me and I said it in the recent debate, Sir Vidia Naipaul and see people twist up their face when they hear Vidia Naipaul, but this is a man that should be celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago and in the West Indies. He should be celebrated and this evening I am pleased to hear my friend from Laventille East/Morvant quoted Sir Vidia Naipaul. This is what we want to see in this country, I said it the last time and people questioned it, but I went and did some more research.

Sir Vidia Naipaul is the most known Trinidadian in the world. His books are translated in many languages and people read his books, especially in North America. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, winning a Noble Prize for Literature and we talk about it as if something has happened, something was said or something was done and we are not looking at the achievement of the person, but indeed some little thing here and there. If you examine, it could just be rumours and rumours, but forget that and put country first and not wait until another Government comes into office, but name as early as possible and give Sir Vidia Naipaul that credit he deserves and name the library after Sir Vidia Naipaul. [*Desk thumping*] I call on that immediately for the Government to do. So, this is how we have to look at it in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, heritage, and I want to put on record because people in this country tend to forget very quickly. My colleague from Tabaquite looked back at me when talking about heritage and national heroes. Under my watch, as Minister of Sport, Youth and Community Development, a national hero's policy was put in place. There was a national policy to deal with heroes; there were criteria how to assist heroes; and there was a fund available in the Ministry to assist heroes. There was also Rodney Wilkes and I want to say that he was the person who really had me thinking about national heroes. Rodney Wilkes walked into my office almost a pauper and he spoke to me.

I remembered Rodney Wilkes, the first medal winner in Trinidad and Tobago at the Olympics; people would not even remember that. He sat in my office and gave me the whole story about himself, and how it happened—he should have won gold, but being a youngster going into Helsinki in Finland, how he went and “lime” the night before with the little extra strength he lost to win the gold. He admitted it that he could have won the gold, but he did not, he won silver.

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Rodney Wilkes spoke about the hardships or the hard times that he was facing in San Fernando. The next morning I sent my officers to San Fernando and what I did for him, I went to Cabinet—I go to Cabinet to do things that will help people—and the Cabinet of the day approved a special pension for him. We went into his home; we paid all the outstanding bills that he was owing and we put him back on his feet. We did not stop there, I am sure you remembered Beryl McBernie. Beryl McBernie in her later years, her last days was treated like a queen by my Ministry up to her death. We refurbished her house and what have you because we recognized that she was one of the great exponents of dance in Trinidad and Tobago and a national figure.

We went on, McDonald Bailey. McDonald Bailey is still there with us. We gave him subsistence to last his life—I hope that has not been stopped by the Ministry, but he is there on that. I remember helping Jack Noriega, 1994/1995. A couple years before he died he came to me—I know him as a cricketer—and he said, “Minister, things not real good with me, I am owing for my house; I am owing this, I am owing that.” Do you know why I help these people? Cricket is a game that you played in those days as amateurs, long hours. Sometimes you give up your own life for cricket because you had to practice, you have to play hard—that was in the late ‘30s and so on. I did certain things for him and before he died whenever he saw me, he would hug me and thank me. I told him, he does not have to thank me; he has to thank the caring attitude of people in the country at that time. Of course, we also assisted Sonny Ramadin, Sundar Popo, Ras Shorty, Hasley Crawford and many others. Hasley Crawford was given a house by the Government—

Mr. Speaker: I think the point has been well made in that we are talking about all these national heroes and I understand the link in terms of the Bill before us, in terms of, you were able to get some books or you were able to heritage, but I think that point has been belaboured, so let us move on.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Would you believe, Mr. Speaker, that is the last sentence there. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] But what I want to add to that, is that something be set-up to deal with this. Something should be set-up in the National Library so that the young people of today and tomorrow could go to the library and punch in national heroes and come up with people who contributed to the development of this country, whether they are in any field; sports, culture, health, politics—you might have a few in politics—but still, let us understand there were

pioneers at least in Trinidad and Tobago and if you do not know where you came from, you cannot know where you are going. So, I want to make that special plug to deal with national heroes in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come directly to this Bill about public officers offered to come full-time in NALIS. We know that we had many problems in the past of civil servants moving into closed department so to speak and would end their lives there. I would like the hon. Minister to tell us—maybe if he did, I missed it at the beginning—is there an organizational chart as to how NALIS would be set up? What are the responsibilities of the officers? What are the promotional opportunities? How will these people be trained—It is a specialist area dealing with library.

Recently, I visited a library in British Colombia and as you walked in, you felt that it is something out of the world. The Clerk would meet you at the door; find out what are you interested in; direct you to a computer to do your research and then you can go and take a book, you do not have to walk the whole library. IT assisted the people who would use these libraries. So I want to say that we do not just talk about the National Library, we must really create the atmosphere where people would feel that they can go into a library and benefit. So, I would like to ask the Minister to give us an idea of how people would be recruited? What are the training courses offered to these people to make them worthy public servants? If we do not do that, we would just continue to create more and more mediocre of offices and we have to deal with that.

The questions of promotions; as a former public servant myself, that is a dangerous situation you described where the people within the close division or department that people outside being promoted ahead of each other and so on. When you do this thing, you got to make sure it is operational and could redound to the benefit of the people involved. Also the question of Trade Unions, I did not hear you say whether PSA was consulted; whether negotiations took place because we do not want to pass a Bill or create an Act in this Parliament and then you go out there and there are problems that you have to face. It deals with employees; it deals with people; you are dealing with the needs of people, so we have to really understand what we are doing here.

As you have said, it is a simple Bill, but that is when we get worried. When something is so simple, is where mistakes could be made. So, we got to consult the Trade Unions, we got to make sure that people are comfortable in what is going to take place and then we could say we are coming with progressive legislation. So, Mr. Speaker, the whole question of NALIS and bringing our library

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operations to a place that we can accept across Trinidad and Tobago, is something that we have to talk about.

When you sit in this Parliament and you hear what is taking place, the attacks and counter-attacks in our Parliament, I want to just mention one thing before I take my seat and this has to do with code of conduct of parliamentarians. I believe the time has come and all international agencies are talking about that, we have to get that together because the parliamentarians—Mr. Speaker, you said it this morning and I want to congratulate you, thank you for it really not congratulate you; thank you for that ruling. You are elected to Parliament first before anything else. Before we had a Prime Minister; before we had an Attorney General; before we had a Speaker, we are MPs first and we were elected by the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we must be accountable to the people.

Sometimes I get the impression sitting here that after a while we forget that we represent the people and we get personal and everything is personalized, I do this, I did not do that and the whole question of code of ethics for the people we represent. We have a “I” man and I said it to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, everything is “I”, “I”, “I”, I know he is a Rasta, but still we have to have collective responsibility. So, we have to understand that we as parliamentarians do not have a code of ethics because when everything happens—Mr. Speaker, you know this evening listening to some of the debates and I am not critical of anybody, is the habit of it.

When you sit back and pull-back you would realized no reason why people out there are losing faith in us because we come here and we make everything a banter and I have said, elections are near, so we are vying for positions, we are cuffing down each other here that is verbally, what examples are we setting for the young people? So, I want to just put that plug there and I am sure I would speak on it more in the future about parliamentary code of ethnics and also the immunity of parliamentarians. This is another issue that we have.

Mr. Speaker, we have power so to speak in contrast with the people out there. We are elected MPs. We believe that if we sit in this Parliament, we could do things without care and we have that kind of immunity that once you are an MP; once you are a Minister, that nobody will touch you. This is something that is going to be dangerous and that is in an area that we have to talk about. So, I would like to end by asking the Minister, please, let us make Trinidad and Tobago a first world country, not only propaganda and theory, but to practice and I believe the place to really start that is to have a strong information system; strong connections; Internet; Intranet; what have you to ensure that when something

happens in Port of Spain, it will be shared across Trinidad and Tobago, Government offices, libraries, so that our country will come an informed Society. We could walk into any library and know what is in Port of Spain or in London available at the tip of your fingers.

So with these words, I thank you very much and hope that things work well.
[Desk thumping]

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just rise to make a very brief intervention just to raise two simple matters. I thought that even though it was fairly late in the evening and we have been here since 1.30 p.m, that the Minister in his presentation would have taken the opportunity to give us an appreciation as to what are the policies, programmes and plans that the Government has for the library services in Trinidad and Tobago? I know he stuck very much to the two clauses in the Bill and very little in terms of the context in which this Bill was being debated. I want to support the other speakers who have spoken on this side before. You know a lot of children, a lot of people nowadays are not reading as they used to read before and one of the reasons has to be that we do not have libraries services as we used to have.

In the—at least when I was growing and when I was in school, we had mobile libraries that used to come to the schools, even in primary schools. We had mobile libraries that used to come and on a regular and weekly basis we would borrow books and return them the next two weeks. We would borrow two or three books and so on. Now as you are moving into the age of technology, we would really like to see, in addition to the libraries that—you showed us a map, Mr. Minister, of the libraries that would be established in different parts of Trinidad and Tobago and we would like that information to be relay to us as well, especially the libraries that would be set up in the rural areas that you also reintroduce the mobile library system that will be going to different communities, not only schools, but the different community, maybe community centres and so on. Also the libraries that you would set up and even some of the community centres in the rural areas can be used where you can have members of the community having access to Internet because a lot of people as was said before and all of us know, you cannot access a computer in their own home. If you have them in the community centres, in the libraries and so on they will be able to access these.

A lot of research now has to be done by children when they are doing O levels and especially in the new A level exam that has been introduced, the CAPE. They have to do a lot of research for this exam and to do that research, a lot of them need the services of computers, Internet and so on. Some of them have this

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available at school, but when you have sometimes 10 computers available and you have 50 or 60 children having to use these computers they do not always have—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Sorry, children. What did I say? Yes, 50 or 60 children having to use these computers, they do not always get the time that they need to do the proper research. So, I just want to reiterate that point and to make the books that are locally written.

Recently, I heard a lecture by Prof. Brinsley Samaroo, he was talking about the Hosay riots some years ago and I was asking whether he had documented anything on that and he told me he had wrote a couple books on that and a couple other books on very important historical issues and so on and those are not easily available. There are many local writers, local authors who have written so many good books and if these can be made available in the libraries, particularly, as I have said in rural areas so people can come familiar with the work that has been done in all fields; in politics, in history, in religion, in sports and everything. That is the first point I would like to make.

The second point I would like to make, we do have some experience, Mr. Minister, in this issue that we are debating here today with the Regional Health Authorities. The Regional Health Authorities as you would recalled, came into being approximately 10 years ago, 1994—a little more than 10 years ago—and still up today, they are having serious difficulties with the workers transferring from the Public Service to the Regional Health Authorities. Even up today, you still have the dual employment system where you have workers that are employed by the Regional Health Authorities and workers that are employed by the Public Service are causing serious problems and difficulties in challenges within the health sector. I wanted to mention this to you and to tell you some of the serious concerns that prevented members or workers from going across from the Public Service to the Regional Health Authorities.

You said that today you have 200 workers who are still with the Public Service to go across to NALIS. Some of the concerns, one of course, is the pension. Now in the Regional Health Authorities, the Regional Health Authorities had set up their own pension fund as required by law and my understanding is that NALIS is also required to set up its own pension fund. I do not know what is the status of that, whether that has been set up as yet or whether it is still in the

process of being set up, but that is an important consideration, because when people are moving from one employer to another employer, they want to be assured that their pension is preserved, and if not, even enhanced. In the Regional Health Authorities when they go across from the Public Service they would have had an enhanced pension, that is one of the areas.

The second area, of course, is the terms and conditions under which they have been employed. In terms of medical benefits, their gratuities, their pension leave arrangements and so on, whether all of these are similar to what they had been accustomed to, whether they are enhanced or whether they are less. When moving workers from one entity to another, you have to make it attractive for them and the terms and conditions of employment are very important. The other one is the union representation. Again, as you know the recent battle with MPATT and the Regional Health Authorities for recognition of MPATT as the bargaining body for the doctors, so union representation is another very important issue for workers who are going from one area to another.

In the Regional Health Authorities when workers went across, up to today, when workers go across from the Public Service to the Regional Health Authorities, a lot of them are being offered contract employment rather than permanent employment. Again, this is an issue that a lot of employees are not comfortable with, they want to know that when they go across to the Regional Health Authorities or to a new entity, that they would be able to have the facility of being able to go to the bank to get a loan, to buy a car, maybe to build a house or so, but if they are offered contract employment only, then most times they do not have that facility.

So, Mr. Minister, I thought that I would raise these issues because these are the experiences that are there from the Regional Health Authorities and I want to make this final point, and that is, in the Regional Health Authorities as well, if you have a staff nurse for instance who has had 20 years experience and that nurse have been given a transfer to the Regional Health Authorities, at what level would that nurse be coming into? And similarly, a worker in NALIS who has been in the Public Service and coming into NALIS, at what level would that worker will be coming; whether that worker will be coming in at an entry level or whether that worker will be coming in at a senior level, seeing that that person already had 20 years experience in the library service.

So, Mr. Minister, I thought I will raise these issues because up to today as I said, the Regional Health Authorities are experiencing serious difficulties and they are now offering VSEP to a whole body of workers to encourage them to go across. So I thought I would raise these points for your consideration.

Mr. Hinds: Very good.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I enter into this debate to make a few comments on a Bill entitled, an Act to amend the National Library and Information Act, 1998. But, Mr. Speaker, in a sense of nostalgia this evening that I entered this debate because the school libraries initially from the period 1995 to 1998, fell under the Ministry of Education and it is in this context that I make this intervention. Because at that particular time during those years, the school I raised was run centrally from the Capildeo Learning Resource Centre in Couva and there was a startle light approach where the school library were being coordinated from this particular centre.

Mr. Speaker, what we heard here from the Member for Laventille East/Morvant when he read from a document that we are not sure is factual, when he spoke about software, management, license purchased by SEM. Mr. Speaker, look at the state of education in this country today in terms of advancement in technology. I am very happy that the Minister is here with us today because with my intervention, I hope that the Minister would make some improvement to the technological capability, especially to all secondary schools. Because we have heard from the Minister of Education from time to time in this House on many questions asked about computer distribution in our schools.

This particular amendment deals with the transferring of staff from various areas of the public service into NALIS. As staff would include, librarians in our secondary schools, they can also access this facility to go into NALIS for secondment, but what are the facilities in our secondary schools to date? We know that in many secondary schools, there maybe one computer in the library and we do not even know if that computer is functioning and to hear from the Member for Laventille East/Morvant of the purchase of software by SEM, should it not have been first, proper hardware in terms of up-to-date computers in our libraries?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. A. Nanan: I know, but I just want to put on the record that if you are going to purchase software, you must have proper computers. As he introduced SEM, I just want to briefly talk about that particular programme because it is important in terms of the libraries in our secondary schools because the libraries are under this programme.

Mr. Speaker, when this ad came into being in 1998, the whole concept would have been the upgrade of school libraries being facilitated by NALIS and what we have seen from NALIS in terms of performance to date, if we look at the secondary schools in terms of the capability, we would have seen a failure by the board of NALIS to really improve or enhance the secondary school capability in terms of library services. And it is very timely that this particular amendment is being introduced in the House today because the Minister if he is not aware, would be made aware of the state of our secondary schools in terms of our library capability. Part of the negotiation under the secondary loan programme, the IDB loan was for full upgrade of our secondary school libraries, it would have included multi-media capability of the highest level.

So to hear about software management license, I thought that the Member would have read the amount of audio visual equipment, the amount of video recorders, DVD recorders in our secondary schools. I thought the Minister would have given us a listing of the capability of these kinds of equipment and the number of computers being given to all secondary schools which is facilitated by the particular loan programme. But, with this little intervention, I hope that the Minister can take this on board to improve the school libraries with respect to the audio visual capability and multi-media capability.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

9.30 p.m.

The Minister of Tourism and Acting Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee): Mr. Speaker, I brought a very simple amendment to the Parliament to amend the National Library and Information System Act of 1998. The intention really was to bring 200 of the persons who were previously employed in the system across to the National Library and Information System (NALIS). After the Act was repealed and several Acts were also repealed, the NALIS Act was enacted and many persons were unable to either be transferred or seconded to NALIS or take up employment in the public service. This is a very simple and straightforward amendment.

From what I have heard so far, the other side is in agreement with it and will certainly support it, but while I am on the floor, I would like to address some of the issues raised by certain Members. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I do think that a fair number of Members would need some refreshment, so we will break for dinner and resume at 10.15 p.m.

9.33 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

10.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: Mr. Speaker, before we went for dinner I was saying that this was a very simple amendment to the National Library and Information System Act of 1998. The Acts that existed before were repealed: the Central Library Act, the Public Library Act and the Carnegie Free Library Act; now all these was brought together under one umbrella, the NALIS Act. In doing so, 200 employees were left out from under that umbrella, so today we are bringing this amendment to ensure that those persons can choose one of three options that I mentioned in my opening remarks. Those options are either to transfer to NALIS, be seconded to NALIS or take up employment in the public service.

Mr. Speaker, today was very enlightening for me, in that I heard a lot of comments on the other side, some of which made a lot of sense and some of which made no sense. I would like to address some of the issues raised by the Member for Oropouche who stated that there should be managerial competence as we move forward with NALIS; a very relevant point. He also spoke about the idea of coordinating all the information amongst all ministries. He spoke about cutting clippings from the newspapers, I did not understand the relevance, but he was making a point to which I would also like to respond.

With respect to the coordination of all the information, there is a programme in place, particularly the GIS, where information in different forms: video, data, in some cases in the form of data voice, is now being digitized to a point where there is a search engine, similar to Google—you know when you can Google information on the World Wide Net—and you can find information on anyone. We are developing a similar system within the GIS to have the ability to first label tapes, videos and data so that one day if we are looking for footage on a particular topic we will have the search engine that could access that information. The coordination of information is absolutely necessary. There are things in place that the Government is doing to ensure that we can coordinate all of that.

Added to that there is a programme now within the Ministry of Public Administration and Information called “netservett” which has the ability to join all the portals that exist throughout all the ministries, so that any ministry or organization can be accessed via intranet, not Internet. It is a circular loop, one that can be accessed by the general public.

With respect to managerial competence, this particular amendment is necessary for us to regularize those employees. A job evaluation was recently completed in March 2007 to decide on the level of competence to ensure that best practice was maintained and that we brought the best persons within NALIS to develop and further the growth of this organization.

I know that the Member also asked about locations, as to where new libraries were being built, what the future plans were and whether there was an overall structure and plan for NALIS. We have a public library development plan, which basically addresses all the concerns within the service and some of the solutions and plans. I would just like to outline some of them for the House tonight.

The vision for NALIS is for it to become a dynamic network, to be innovative, businesslike, customer-focused and community oriented to offer information services to the nation and the world. Its mission is also to provide an international standard of service that delivers equitable access to information in all formats through highly capable and motivated staff utilizing state-of-the-art technology and facilities to support the development and recreational needs of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

That was the vision and mission that was outlined in the development plan. What it also addressed was some of the flaws that presently exist within the structure of the organization. Some of the problems that presently exist are, for example, a lack of space to expand some of the collections that NALIS may have; a lack of space for the ICT, which is the information communication technology; limited public seating; inadequate parking and health and safety problems.

Before we address those, issues we have an overview as to how many libraries there are in Trinidad and Tobago. Presently there are approximately 20 public libraries in Trinidad; three are mobile libraries. In Tobago there are three public libraries and one mobile library. The purpose of the mobile library is to go to persons in rural districts who do not have direct access to the main libraries. The idea really is to afford Internet services and computers for persons who are otherwise unable to access some of those facilities.

There are presently 20 public libraries and the population they serve is over 517,536 persons. The mobile units are presently serving 77,457 persons. In Tobago, the three public libraries are serving 18,343 and 5,760 persons. I brought a plan for the sake of the House to show where all the existing libraries are, where the existing mobile library stocks are, where the new libraries are to be built as well as the new mobile library stops. [*Minister shows document*] Of course, there

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is also a proposal for a children's library; all of this is dotted throughout Trinidad, in this instance.

I have a list of the libraries to be rebuilt; NALIS has identified six public libraries, one children's library for construction and three mobile units for acquisition in the first phase of the project between 2008 and 2012. Of course, the justification for choosing these sites for the first phase of the development plan is based on the population size; it is also based on the inadequate current library service and, in four of the six locations, the availability of land for the early start of the project.

The libraries identified for construction and for mobile libraries to be purchased are as follows: a library in Arima which will be approximately 32,650 square feet; a children's library; one in Couva, which will be about 18,625 square feet; one in Diego Martin, 32,650 square feet; one in Rio Claro, which will be about 12,000 square feet; one in Toco and one in Tunapuna. The mobile units which we spoke about will also be moving around in areas such as Bristol Village, Chatham, Granville, Icacos, La Lune, Mainfield and then in Maracas, St. Joseph, Lopinot, Valley View and Matelot. There is a plan to expand the number of libraries and to also use the mobile facilities to give access to people who otherwise would not have access to the main libraries.

An analysis of the population density, the access to the library and access to computers was done and that formed part of the overall plan. I can circulate this document at a later date for the ones who asked about the public library development plan, to show that there is a vision to ensure that all our people are educated through the education system and that they have access to libraries throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche also spoke about the need for cutting out clippings in newspaper and centralizing it. I do not think that makes very much sense. As every minister would know, there is a different interest for each one and a minister's communication specialist will know that his needs are different to other ministries. With information in a newspaper, you have to know right away, you have to have access to it and your communication specialist will understand what your needs are and, therefore, will cut the clippings out for you.

In my case as Minister of Tourism, I am continually informed, not only on what the Ministry has done, but also what is happening in the tourism industry. I want to know what is happening in Curacao; I want to know what is happening with the Caribbean Tourism Organization. I want to know what Cuba is doing, the

Dominican Republic or Barbados. These things are very important for my understanding and, therefore, I cannot see a centralized information area that would be disseminating information to me, hence the reason I think the practice of cutting clippings ought to be done and it certainly works well for me.

There was a lot of talk today about information technology (IT). I wish the Member for Oropouche was here, because he spoke about access to computers and whether or not the computers were up to mark. I think what is more important for expanding the information age and for persons to acquire knowledge and information is not only access to computers, but really the ability to access the Internet. This Government has a plan and that is certainly to ensure that in the near future what is done would be similar to what we did with cellphones. We have seen how in Trinidad and Tobago that within the last three years almost everyone that we know has a cellphone. That was because of deregularization, bringing in competition and ensuring that this was a vital utility to a person's general communication.

Today I understand that the penetration rate of cell phones are almost over 90 per cent of the population, from young adults to children and older people. Similarly with today's technology, very shortly, if not already, people are using their cellphones to access information, to surf the Internet to search for topics. I have heard of instances where children in schools are actually telling the teacher things on topics he or she is speaking on, by searching the Internet, having the information at their fingertips and correcting the teacher, because of access to information on the Internet.

Apart from having computers and software, what is more critical is the ability to have access to broadband connection, to have access to the Internet. It is certainly the policy of this Government to have Internet access for 100 per cent of the population very shortly. It is a policy with a clear understanding that with the Internet we are connected to the rest of the world.

Just for the information of this House, information that moves from the United States to Trinidad and Tobago comes here via two ways. It is either transmitted over satellite or it comes over fiber optic wire that runs between Miami, down through the Caribbean and to Trinidad and Tobago. At one time there was only one highway of information, one fibre optic cable that existed. By the end of this year there are going to be four fiber optic cables, which will allow cheaper access to the Internet and certainly more information being transmitted back and forth between Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the world.

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The Member for Chaguanas spoke about a library for Chaguanas. There is one, but I want to inform him that Cabinet did approve a new library for Chaguanas; that is well on its way. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Caroni Central spoke about mobile libraries, the age of technology and the availability of good books in rural areas. All this I addressed with the age of technology and the benefits.

Mr. Speaker, you would know that information today could be accessed by just using any search engine, whether Google or Yahoo. You can find out about anyone you want to know at any time. I remember someone came to my office and told me that he was an industrialist, a tourism czar and that he had this investment of a half a billion dollars in the United States and that he had hotels all over. When I Googled this individual I realized that he was evading tax; because of that information I was able to act or not act accordingly. That is where the world is today; you cannot hide, for you are always seen on the Internet.

That is going to continue and it is going to get more and more transparent. We have seen that with the ability to do videos on demand. I was listening to a story recently about a reporter in Iraq who used his cellphone to film a scene that was happening on the battlefield. He sent it via satellite and it was on the air on CNN within a four-minute period. That is where the world is today, whether it is in a nightclub where videos are transmitted on YouTube and accessed by hundreds of millions of people through the press of a button. It is a new world and the Government is up to the task and we are certainly ensuring that there would be Internet for everyone to have access to this information age.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is a very straightforward Bill. It is intended to amend and lengthen the period of time for which these 200 employees can access the benefits under the NALIS Act, to give them the options of either a transfer to NALIS, secondment to NALIS or to take up employment in the public service. From all that I have heard on the other side, it appears that they are all for this Bill.

In closing, I thank all the Members on the other side, for my goodly colleague from Laventille for his contribution and ask that this Bill be passed with amendment.

With those few words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

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Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Question proposed, that clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 3 be amended as follows:

Delete the words “30th June, 2007” and replace with the words “31st December, 2007”.

Dr. Nanan: Mr. Chairman, can we get an explanation, please?

Mr. Chin Lee: It is really just to extend the period of time from June 30, 2007 to December 31, 2007; just to shift the deadline further back. That would be sufficient time to allow those transactions to take place for the 200 employees.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House be now adjourned to Friday 25 May, 2007 at 1.30 p.m. I want Members to note that is Private Members’ Day, therefore, the Chief Whip may want to inform us concerning the matters for that day.

Dr. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, we continue with Motion No. 1 by agreement, the Motion on CEPEP.

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the Motion for the adjournment of the House, may I remind you of the annual general meeting of the EXCO and also there is a function to which all Members have been invited; it is the unveiling of a plaque in memory of Dr. Eric Williams which take place at 11.30 a.m. on Friday.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.41 p.m.