

*Leave of Absence**Wednesday, June 13, 2007***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, June 13, 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 two Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House: hon. Roger Boynes, Member of Parliament for Toco/Manzanilla; hon. Ganga Singh, Member of Parliament for Caroni East. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

Hon. Members, may I also, on your behalf, welcome back to the House, the Leader of Government Business. [*Desk thumping*]

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, as you are aware the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is not here today, he is ill and therefore I will ask that these questions be deferred.

**Mr. Speaker:** There are three questions down for the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs; you will need a deferral for one week?

**Hon. K. Valley:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, one week.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas):*

**Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation  
(Financial Contributions)**

- 82.** Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:
- (a) inform this honourable House of all financial contributions made to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation for World Cup Football 2006; and
  - (b) advise whether any contributions were made to Government regarding FIFA's profit sharing for the World Cup Football 2006?

**Sporting Organizations Coaches  
(Financial Assistance)**

- 83.** Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:
- (a) advise whether financial assistance was promised to coaches attached to various sporting organizations; and
  - (b) if so, would the Minister inform this House of the quantum promised to each body?

**(CWC) Cricket World Cup 2007  
(Financial Returns)**

- 84.** Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:
- (a) inform this House whether the Government received any financial returns with regard to (CWC) Cricket World Cup 2007; and
  - (b) also provide the total financial contribution made to the Local Organizing Committee for the Cricket World Cup 2007?

*Questions by leave, deferred.*

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTERS  
(LEAVE)**

**San Fernando General Hospital  
(Deplorable Conditions)**

**Dr. Hamza Rafeeq** (*Caroni Central*): 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 as a definite matter of urgent public importance: namely, the deplorable conditions at the San Fernando General Hospital.

The matter is definite since it deals with the specific issue of overcrowding and lack of basic amenities at the San Fernando General Hospital.

The matter is urgent since several patients have had to sleep on the cold, hard floor of the medical wards for hours and even days and there was a lack of running water.

The matter is of public importance since over half a million people seek medical attention at the San Fernando General Hospital.

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**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have carefully considered the Motion moved by the hon. Member for Caroni Central; regrettably it does not qualify under this Standing Order.

**Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation  
(Non-payment of Moneys)**

**Mr. Manohar Ramsaran** (*Chaguanas*): Thank you very much, 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 as a definite matter of urgent public importance: namely, the failure of Government to intervene in the non-payment of moneys by the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation to the Trinidad and Tobago footballers for World Cup 2006, which has resulted in a dismantling of our Soca Warriors.

The matter is definite as Trinidad and Tobago has been denied the opportunity to have the best team represent us at the very prestigious World Cup tournament now being played in the United States of America.

The matter is urgent since our most talented and experienced players have not been chosen to represent Trinidad and Tobago.

The matter is of public importance as it shatters the national pride of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Speaker:** Again hon. Members, regrettably this Motion does not qualify under this Standing Order.

**Government's Administrative Complex  
(Defective Sewer System)**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with you, we on this side of the House join in welcoming back the Member for Diego Martin Central, who looks very, very fine indeed; we wish him good health.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12, I seek your leave to move the adjournment of this House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance; namely, the lack of a proper functioning sewer system at the Government's Administrative Complex at the corner of Allies Street and High Street, Siparia, which has resulted in the complex becoming a public health risk and as such, being shut down by public health inspectors.

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The matter is definite as it involves the immediate closure of a public building, housing several important government ministries as a result of the defective sewer system.

The matter is urgent because the compound has been shut down without notice and there is no indication as to when the public will regain access to these critical services.

The matter is of public importance because tens of thousands of persons are being deprived access to these very vital government services as a direct result of the existing closure of the complex, which was closed down yesterday.

**Mr. Speaker:** Again, whilst the complex was in fact closed yesterday, it is not of sufficient public importance to be debated under this Standing Order.

Again, hon. Members, I ask you, please, to use Standing Order 11 liberally—*[Interruption]* Order, please—and I will urge the Government when we come to that item on the agenda to have the matters debated, because it is a three-day notice—*[Interruption]* Order, please. I will use whatever influence I have to encourage the Members on the Government benches to debate these matters.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You do not have so much influence anymore.

#### BAIL (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL

Bill to amend the Bail Act, 1994. [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage of the Bail (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2007 be taken at the sitting of the House of Representatives on Friday, June 15, 2007.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### FINANCE BILL

[Second Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [June 01, 2007]:*

*That the Bill be now read a second time.*

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** On the last occasion when this Bill was in progress, the hon. Member for Oropouche was on his legs; he has 41 minutes of original time remaining. I now call on the hon. Member for Oropouche.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the last occasion when this matter was debated on June 01, 2007, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. the Hon. Conrad Enill moved this measure and I thought it important,

since some time has gone by, to just recap very briefly some of the issues raised by the Minister.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. Enill, spoke about several issues related to the Bill before us, the Finance Bill, which is an umbrella Bill which seeks to amend approximately 22 pieces of legislation to give effect to several policy measures of the Government; some policy measures dating back to the budget presentation in October 2006.

The Minister took the opportunity to address the issue of inflation and what his Government was doing to reduce inflation and indeed he recorded some of the achievements in this area. The Minister also dealt with health care, in particular, the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme and work that the Government was doing to provide affordable medication for chronic diseases and to provide better health care for all citizens, particularly the elderly.

Another key issue the Minister dealt with in some detail, was to explain to us clause 5(a) and (b), which deals with the Gambling and Betting Act, where there are provisions that now define slot machines and tokens removing ambiguity as to whether slot machines would be considered gambling machines and indeed to enforce the ban on the importation and use of slot machines from March 2007 and other matters related to the gaming industry.

A central matter in this Bill deals with the renaming of the pension to the Senior Citizens Grant and the provision of a new ceiling arrangement to lift the monthly pension allowance or Senior Citizens Grant by a couple of hundred dollars for specific groups of persons qualifying. There is also a proposal to amend the Public Assistance Act to increase the disability assistance grant by TT \$100 and, of course, some issues relating to the GATE programme and to provide for greater assistance to local institutions and regional public institutions to benefit from the GATE programme.

I thought I would remind the House of some of these issues because they are issues which I intend to deal with in my contribution. As I said on the last occasion, this is an umbrella piece of legislation that covers almost 20 different pieces of legislation dealing with matters from investment to tendering and procurement, retirement, gambling, pensions, corporation tax, production companies, et cetera. It is quite obvious that several colleagues on this side of the House and particularly on the Front Bench would have a lot to say on some of these matters. I would restrict myself to a few key issues in the time permitted.

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While the Minister was very eager to boast of his Government's achievement in the area of managing our economy, economic growth, the reduction of poverty, the reduction of unemployment, it really masks some of the central problems facing this country in terms of employment, poverty, social development and social policy.

In my introduction, let me say that social policy, particularly as it relates to pension, grants and so on, is integral to any strategy to alleviate and reduce poverty. There is a very important link between social policy planning and poverty reduction and alleviation. The very first time an estimate was done on poverty in Trinidad and Tobago was actually in 1975.

In 1975 the poverty rate in this country was quoted at 25 per cent. Since then this country has experienced minor fluctuations in the poverty rate, hovering around 25 per cent. Of course that is significant in the context of an expanding population; population growth of 1 per cent or so per year. So that we have always had this difficulty dealing with poverty alleviation and social policy is critical to reducing poverty; that, to me, is an important link. I will deal with some of the social policy issues shortly.

Mr. Speaker, on the matter of poverty and the role of this type of legislation in dealing with poverty, one also has to consider health care, education and of course, security. If our social security programme is weak and our social security system is weak, clearly we will find an increase in poverty and not a decrease.

One of the problems that we have identified with this administration, is their inclination to veer away from any legitimate process of accountability and responsibility. The twin problem is really accountability and responsibility. We are now in a situation where this country has been earning and generating excess revenues from oil and gas, primarily, but from other sectors as well and this Government has failed to account for moneys spent, moneys committed and indeed they have failed to assume responsibility for enormous money spent.

I want to begin by looking at this issue of the Senior Citizens Grant as provided for in the Finance Bill. My first question really is one important question to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance and indeed the Minister of Social Development; where in the world did you get the idea to change from pension to a Senior Citizens Grant? Who told you to do that? And if nobody told you to do that, why are you doing it? What is the conceptual basis? What is the policy basis for changing the name from pension to Senior Citizens Grant?

Implicit in that change is the same means testing; the same formatting of determining whether senior citizens should be entitled to a grant or not, and if so, how much. This came in the last budget almost like some pie in the sky arrangement; it just dropped from the sky; the change in name from pension to Senior Citizens Grant. We cannot find any basis for that change. There is no World Bank report, no IADB report, no Government report that suggests that there is any qualitative difference in the change of name.

More than simply a name change, it is our contention that given the wealth that this country enjoys; given the state of destitution of large segments of this population; given the incidence of poverty; on another occasion I pointed to the incidence of pension poverty where persons who are in receipt of a pension are still living in poverty; where persons who are in receipt of public assistance grants and disability grants are still living in poverty.

We submit on this side of the House that this negligible margin and almost invisible increase of a few hundred dollars will mean nothing when you consider inflation and increase in the cost of living in Trinidad and Tobago with a mere couple hundred dollars increase to some particular groups for this Senior Citizens Grant. They are suggesting that we move the ceiling using the old sliding scale methodology so that today our ceiling will increase so that some catchment groups within the categories would benefit from Old Age Pension or Senior Citizens Grant, will get \$150 more per month.

Mr. Speaker, \$2,150 as a new ceiling; they have annual income \$25,800, which we reduced to get a monthly figure. The long and short is that they are proposing to increase these grants by, in some cases, \$150. One hundred and fifty dollars is much too little, given the escalation in inflation in the cost of living, building materials, housing, transportation, et cetera, et cetera.

So we are not sure what qualitative difference this marginal increase will make in the lives of our elderly. As it is now, an elderly person receiving \$1,000 per month as a pension needs to take money from that \$1,000 a month to buy, in some cases, medication and pharmaceuticals that are not available under the CDAP programme. I have a constituent, an elderly lady who will go to see a doctor and so on, particularly eye specialists; and she buys medication; the medication costs \$300 that she must pay.

That same elderly must spend \$400 for two tanks of water, because we buy water from our own money; barrels of water. And the pensioner is required to spend about \$400 minimum for water. So when you spend \$400 for water, \$300

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for pharmaceuticals that you cannot get under CDAP, what is left; \$300 or so to live for an entire month for a pensioner. Even under their obscene poverty level that is really irresponsible to propose such a marginal increase for pensioners; whatever you call it; Old Age Pension or Senior Citizens Grant. That will mean absolutely nothing.

On a related matter, last December the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, proposed this ceiling and immediately when one undertook the research, one discovered that former Caroni workers who are in receipt of a pension of \$650 plus the NIS benefits of \$1,000, would then have to receive some incomes to reach the new ceiling. Since October last year to now, June, this Government has taken six months or more to come with legislation to give effect to that increase, which is such a small increase. Hundreds of constituents, whether in Oropouche, Naparima, et cetera, who are retired sugar workers, have been coming to our office and complaining week after week about the failure of the Government to meet their obligations, to meet their promises as outlined in the budget presentation last year.

Mr. Speaker, I raised this matter of the old age pensions and the fact that this increase is being proposed by the Government today, as outlined by Sen. Conrad Enill, when he spoke in this House and gave the figures for the new ceiling in terms of what it would mean and he admitted that you are dealing with \$150 per month as an increase. This is so laughable in some cases when you consider—

**Mr. Panday:** Ludicrous.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** —ludicrous, to use a good term from my friend from Princes Town; ludicrous, hypocritical, to use another term; that \$100 means nothing. Because the old age pensioner has to pay for pharmaceuticals. I was bowled over today when I saw the newspaper of Wednesday, June 03, 2007 where a patient at the San Fernando Hospital had to walk with a bed. Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing unprecedented levels of wealth; we have a situation where in the San Fernando hospital an elderly person, recipient of pension, now needs to go to the hospital and carry a bed. In the hospital before, you had to carry a fan; if you get admitted there; the place is hot.

A few weeks ago I visited the San Fernando hospital to see constituents and so on and above in one of the wards—I think it was nine—they have a fan spinning but all the blades fall out. You have this piece of round thing in the middle spinning for weeks and weeks. So the constituent told me they had to buy a fan and bring it. Incidentally the cheapest fan might be \$200, which is 100 per cent more than the increase in the pension. They have to take their own fan when they go to the



hospital. Now we read in the newspapers, "Walk with your bed". This is where we have reached.

In a recent article in the *Guardian* newspaper, a front page story, "Hospital hell hole in San Fernando". Pensioners, elderly persons on disability, persons on public assistance, these are the persons who themselves are more likely than others, to use the hospital, the public health system. Of course, they cannot afford private treatment at the high-priced private institutions. "Hospital Hell Hole" and outlining the "big stinking toilets", water systems that do not work at the San Fernando Hospital. For over two years we have been speaking to the Minister of Health about this.

In December 2006 I brought a motion to this House dealing with the issue of the lack of availability of pharmaceuticals. I came again a few months after on another motion to speak about the fact that critical equipment at the San Fernando Hospital had broken down and poor people had to go and pay thousands of dollars to get CT scan and so on.

The Minister stood up here in the normal public relations style, told us all the good things that are happening in the health sector; read off a few PR releases. That was before the Commission of Enquiry gave its report—which as I said before was really the longest autopsy report ever written—to announce that the health sector had collapsed and died. The health sector is crippled today, pensioners, persons on public assistance are using that hospital and must suffer.

Mr. Speaker, you know what hurts us, is that you do not have a bed, but they have a situation in the San Fernando hospital where, when you read of the statement of Dr. Petronella Manning—this is one person, she is not her brother's keeper—all you can say is the inmates have taken over the asylum. She is suggesting that people bound to hang. There are criminal activities taking place in the health sector.

There is a Human Resource Manager at the San Fernando hospital, appointed at a \$25,000 salary per month. You know who is the lead consultant to the Human Resource Management Department? The husband of the Human Resource Manager. That is what they preside over. A consultant nobody ever heard about in South, Central or North, receiving over \$60,000 for training. The people who go on training come back and tell you that is a scam. That is the San Fernando General Hospital. That is why they cannot buy beds. That is why a 51-year-old patient is sleeping on the ground. That is the state of health under the Minister from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West; under the People's National Movement.

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Then you come in this Bill to say—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, let me not deal with persons who are recovering and so on; it may be unfair to beat up on persons who are now recuperating.

As if that was not bad enough, the North/Central Regional Health Authority is now in a fight with the Minister and Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, where they want to appoint a Medical Chief of Staff in the North/Central Regional Health Authority with a package of \$84,000 per month.

Mr. Speaker, North Central Regional Health Authority hiring a person; the position is—what is the name of the position—Medical Chief of Staff, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. A combined package of \$84,000 per month: basic salary, \$32,000; travelling allowance, \$15,000; transportation allowance, \$5,000 monthly. But there are some interesting allowances right here; administration allowance, \$17,000; you are a manager but you have an administration allowance; telephone allowance subsistence; now it has something called an on-call allowance, \$16,000. They have something called a communication allowance, \$1,000, but that communication allowance is not the allowance for your telephone bill that is just for talking. If you can speak the English language you have a communication allowance of \$1,000; you have a next allowance for use of telephone and that type of thing.

**2.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, continuous medical education allowance, \$3,000 monthly. What are you doing with \$3,000 monthly for a continuous medical education allowance? Every month you are subscribing to a magazine, some journal, you are reading some paper for \$3,000 a month. Housing allowance \$5,000 monthly. A total package of \$84,000 per month, Medical Chief of Staff—what is this—North Central Regional Health Authority, and I am sure equally qualified as the Minister. [*Laughter*]

When you spend money like this where will you get money to buy fan and buy bed? [*Interruption*] As if that was not bad enough, I point to just one more example, just one more because really, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West could be drafting his resignation letter any day now, if he has not already, because he understands what is happening and so on. In the Minister of Health, they have given a contract to a company called Infotech Caribbean Limited. That company beat off the internationally known IBM Company to get a contract to supply IT solutions for the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. On another occasion we will connect that company to relatives of the Minister, but we are not doing that today.

**Mr. Rahael:** Do that now. Do it now.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** This company got a contract for US \$1 million to supply IT solutions to the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. They are supplying this IT solution TT \$6 million and they have a recurring annual cost of TT \$1 million. They got it through evaluation procedures at NIPDEC, where interestingly, three persons sat in a room, ruled out IBM and gave a local company.

I am not here today to dispute the company and whether the company is capable or not, all I want to tell you is there are some fascinating aspects to this contract. [*Interruption*] The Ministry of Health—and I will break it down in a nutshell without reading extensively from contracts and so on. Mr. Speaker, do you know the Ministry of Health is paying a company to develop IT solutions to make in electronic form for the CDAP, so people can use cards, like a vending card or so to get their pharmaceuticals at the pharmacy. So an IT company is being paid to develop software, develop the research and development to provide this. But do you know that same IT company is also billing the ministry annually for a licence fee, so you are developing the technology paid for by the ministry and then that very ministry pays an annual licence fee to the software company.

**Hon. Member:** Who is that company? Identify the company?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Infotech. Mr. Speaker, the Minister will clarify in due course, I am sure, but when you first asked the question, and the Minister could tell us, as of this date—this contract was August 2006—June 2007, do we have those cards? Do we have those cards in circulation for CDAP? The Ministry of Social Development issued 15,000 Smart Cards and then they said they have to review the programme after issuing 15,000. To this day, I am just asking the Minister to tell us whether he has these CDAP cards in circulation, because there are drugstores, pharmacies with the terminals, the terminals are there, but the card to use the terminal is not available, and you are paying an annual fee to use the terminal as well. There is an annual fee to use the terminal; the terminals are being supplied at US \$1,000 per year.

**Hon. Member:** Per unit.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Per unit. We are told to buy one of those terminals is \$300 in the United States. You can buy a terminal for US \$300 in the United States, the Government is paying US \$1,000 per unit, per year for these terminals, maintenance, support and application licence, but as of this time we do not have the cards. The terminals are there which the taxpayers are paying for, but you do not have the cards.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is interesting with this CDAP, and I will leave the rest to the Member for Caroni Central to speak about. What is amazing about

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this business is that, do you know it costs the Government more to give away pharmaceuticals? It costs the Government; I will give you the figure up to June 2006, six months into 2006; the value of items purchased by the ministry, approximately \$12 million, purchased by the ministry, \$12 million; value payable to pharmacies, \$10 million. It cost \$10 million to give away pharmaceuticals costing \$12 million. That is what it costs. Staffing cost, presumably at the ministry, \$2.5 million; TTPost cost \$450,000. To give away the medicine is more expensive than the medicine, where as this medicine could have been given away at the hospital, at the health centre; you could have given away the pharmaceuticals at hospitals and health centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Today at the pharmacies, the Government pays \$10 million to give away \$12 million. That, Mr. Speaker, is spending on health, but let me move on from health and let me say that in an election year when the Government cannot be certain at all that they would return to office, it is understandable that you have this type of spending taking place.

While the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill would boast as he did about the reduction in the poverty rate, any citizen in Trinidad and Tobago that has not been incarcerated in a mental asylum would tell you that the poverty rate is much more than 17 per cent. I said before, the Minister is quoting the poverty level here in his presentation, and I said before that they are using a poverty report which is not public, which they admit is a draft, but they are trying to hoodwink the population on the fall of poverty. The Ministry of Social Development issued a centre spread in the *Sunday Newsday*, and they do this well, because they have a company connected to their party that does all of this work for them. "Understanding How Poverty is Measured in Trinidad and Tobago" and I just want to raise one or two points, because the intent of this centre page spread is to remove the myths, is to clear up the misconceptions about poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. You know while this centre page ad wants to clear up myth, they also perpetuate myth, and I will give just one example because we do not want to spend all day on this.

Myth 5, the level of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago in 1999 was 35 per cent. Fact, no official study on poverty was ever conducted in 1999. In 1992 a Survey of Living Conditions was conducted, this data was analyzed in 1996. The analysis revealed that 35.9 per cent of the population was judged to be poor and the poverty line was TT \$623 per capita in 1992. Mr. Speaker, I just want to focus on that, 1992 Survey of Living Conditions said, according to the Ministry of Social Development, 35.9 per cent poverty. I have in my hand here a document with reports on poverty, and I just want to quote from one to deal with this matter.

It was a paper called *An Overview of Social Sector Conditions in Trinidad and Tobago* by Prof. Carl Theodore. Prof. Theodore is quite a reputable name, an economist at the University of the West Indies who specializes now in health economics, but has written on poverty. Prof. Theodore is making the point here that the rate of poverty estimated in 1992 was 22.5 per cent; 22.5 per cent according to data published by Prof. Carl Theodore. Yet, Mr. Speaker, the ministry is saying that the 1992 survey said 39.9 per cent living in poverty. This is October 1993; it is a report prepared for the Inter-American Development Bank, Prof. Carl Theodore.

Now if you do not want to believe Prof. Theodore we can find some other pieces of literature that will support this, because, as you know some of this business I follow. In another report called *Trinidad and Tobago Poverty and Unemployment in an Oil Based Economy* in the executive summary they are quoting the poverty figure for Trinidad and Tobago, and I just want to get the exact figure so we do not again perpetuate another myth. They are putting the poverty figure based upon 1991 data at 21 per cent, so 21 per cent in a document from the World Bank, Prof. Theodore, 22 per cent for that period, but the Ministry of Social Development stating 35.9 per cent for data in 1992. I can find other reports to quote that figure for you but I would not do that; I also have a report from the European Commission. I just wanted to get another figure on poverty. In a recent publication from *Growth to Prosperity Policy Perspectives for Trinidad and Tobago* edited by Rojas Suarez, Carlos Elias; it is a publication of the Inter-American Development Bank 2006. Now, as far as books go it is hard to get more recent books than 2006. They are looking at the poverty figure for Trinidad and Tobago and they are using a poverty figure from page 66, data from Caribbean Development Bank and Inter-American Development Bank: Trinidad and Tobago poor, 24 per cent based upon 1997—1998 data. These are really reputable documents based upon 1997—1998 data, 24 per cent, but the Ministry of Social Development is putting a figure at 35.9 per cent and the gist of their article is to clear up misconceptions and myth.

Mr. Speaker, that was one; I also want to make reference to another issue in this ad here. The 1992 survey of living conditions was based on a monthly per capita poverty line figure of \$623. Now this is interesting; in 1992 poverty based on \$623. How much US dollars \$623 would be in 1992, anybody? Mr. Speaker, \$623 in 1992 could buy much more than \$655 in 2007, that much we must be clear; the prices of food, of building materials, of transport, of medicine; everything has gone up by over 100 per cent since 1992. So in 1992 we used \$623

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and by the admission of the Government in 2007 they are using \$665 per month. I have said before that no ordinary person can live on \$665 per month when you consider the price of items at the supermarket.

Just recently NFM announced 15 per cent hike in flour, now that has not reached the hops bread as yet. When you start going and looking for hops bread it will move from 70 cents to 85 cents. When I raised this matter, Members of the Government side said hold up, you are looking at this wrong and you are misinterpreting this data. Members of the Government suggested that you cannot look at \$655 in the context of just going into Hi-Lo or Food Basket and buying items, but you need to look at it in the context of buying for a month; how much it will buy you for a month. That is utter rubbish because if you go to buy a sack of 25-pound flour, rice, oil and so on with \$665 you will not even live two weeks on that with the price of oil.

Mr. Speaker, even by the Government, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs usually publishes a list of food items in the newspaper and when you read this list the basic commodities that people would use, you will be bowled over: Tomatoes—well we call this Mr. Tomatoes, “eh”—\$7 a pound at the San Fernando market; \$9 at JTA supermarket. Tomato is a basic necessity; pumpkin, carrots, \$5. [*Interruption*] Now you do not have “chokhaa” and so on, you will not enjoy these types of things, he enjoys caviar, lobster and so on, on all these foreign trips, and all these types of expensive things that people like us cannot normally see.

**Mr. Valley:** I have a backyard garden.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Where do you have the backyard garden; in St. James? [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, dasheen bush \$4.90 at the supermarket per bundle; Greens—you know I spoke on the last time and when I was speaking here the price of greens went up. Mr. Speaker, I say all of this to tell you that the poverty of \$665 per month is obscene and the Government cannot boast about that as a poverty level.

I also want to say it, because the increases that we are getting for public assistance of \$100 is obscene, when you consider that somebody on public assistance cannot use \$100 more to buy anything. But do you know what is the other crookery in that discussion? They say, well, hold on, do not go in the supermarket and buy items one by one, buy wholesale, so you assume everybody on public assistance could cook, you assume everybody is a chef, but if they could cook they might open a parlour somewhere and sell something to eat and then

they will take their public assistance. Persons must live a decent life in Trinidad and Tobago and you require much more than \$665 to live on.

Mr. Speaker, so I dealt with that matter of the Old Age Pension. A burning issue here in this Bill before us deals the issue of the gaming industry. Now last year in the budget the Prime Minister, influenced by what we now discover is a prophethess, decided that he—

**Mr. Panday:** [*Inaudible*] divination.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—does not gamble and nobody should gamble. Now, it is interesting with this Government to get a house they pick a lottery, so you get a house by gambling but they do not promote gambling with gaming machines and so on. But to get a house you have to gamble.

**Mr. Panday:** Lady of divination.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, eventually to get a box drain with this Government they will pick it by random selection and gamble. So the Prime Minister announced that his moral and spiritual values suggest that we should not be gambling, so the Executive President so decree. They came in the Bill now to make it clear what is a slot machine, what are tokens and to outlaw this form of gaming. What this Government has not considered is that by conservative estimates over 5,000 persons work in this sector; 5,000 persons who are, if you profile that group of workers they would be young—

**Hon. Member:** Single mothers.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—single mothers. Mr. Speaker, do you know when you look at poverty data the majority of people in poverty almost double the aggregate would be youth. Youth poverty is a very significant problem in this country, and 5,000 young persons; female, single mothers, working in the gaming industry in these casinos and related entertainment centres will now be out of a job. What will you do with them? Put them in OJT?

**Hon. Member:** CEPEP.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** They will take these 5,000 workers and shepherd them into all types of make-work programmes for three months, six months, so that their life would be going to a Government Minister and getting a piece of paper to recommend you for a work. That is the perpetuation of dependency that this Government is about.

I said before, it is when young people receive training in the private sector they are then bitten by a bug to go themselves and engage into business, so it is

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quite conceivable that a young person will be working at a casino, an entertainment centre, learn all about managing that business and eventually may make contacts to go out into that business and open entertainment centres and so on, create entrepreneurs, create more employment. That is how we create entrepreneurs, not by shepherding them into make-work public sector jobs. This Government; the uncaring irresponsible Government will take 5,000 young people and throw them on the breadline from that industry, because the Prime Minister decides that he does not like gambling. Now, there are several prominent Ministers on the other side, who I know, they like their entertainment at the English horse racing and so on, where you go and sit all day and you bet on racing.

**Hon. Member:** Racing pool.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes, the racing pools, and so on, there are Ministers who would enjoy that, who would enjoy other forms of gambling. The Prime Minister is not concerned with that. He is being told that you should not have gambling.

**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. [*Mr. C. Sharma*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Before the hon. Member resumes his presentation, may I suggest to him that he address me, because these cameras are placed here for frontal view. If you address the gallery you would only get a side profile. If you address me you will get a total profile and the public at large will have a better view of you. Please continue!

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your advice on photography. [*Interruption*] May I remind you this is not still photography; still photography is in the media gallery.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of the gaming industry, a very serious critical issue where young people would be out of jobs. I would ask the Government to reconsider this matter and look at the sector, have constructive dialogue with the main players in the sector and seek to permit that sector to continue, even if you may decide that you would like to curtail the expansion of the sector, but allow the persons who are there to continue working in the sector, otherwise I am afraid that you will have 5,000 people lining up for CEPEP and URP work, because they will not be able to get employment elsewhere.



Mr. Speaker, another issue I want to raise, concerns the issue of the Smart Cards. I would like the Minister of Social Development to tell us whether or not his ministry undertook a review of the Smart Card programme and what are the results? As the ministry promised us when they gave out 15,000 Smart Card and stopped, and to this day they have not continued, so they gave out Smart Cards quickly, persons received, we never knew how they were received, and when we raised an objection, because legitimate deserving persons were not getting Smart Card they stopped and said they have to review that system, and the system has never yet taken off.

I want to move quickly to another matter involving education. They are also making changes to ensure the importation and widespread diffusion of technology with certain provisions to exempt payment of custom duty on certain groups of hardware to promote, of course, the diffusion of IT in both the school system and throughout the wider society. As of today Members on this side of the House have complained bitterly that there are several schools without computers, community centres are without computers. Where there is a computer, it is not working; where there is a computer, there is no access to the Internet which is a key function that persons will undertake. The Government speaks about removing duties on ICT equipment and so on, they removed the duties but they do not provide the hardware to community centres and to schools.

The Ministry of Tertiary Education which oversees a lot of the matters dealing with technology and so on in the education sector; this ministry has been preoccupied with GATE and this ministry has been preoccupied with UTT. This provision is really to exempt payment on duties for another emperor operating at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. This is the only university in the world without a library. This is a university where they have, somebody get PhD last week and this week you call them a professor.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Really, are you serious. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And that professor would be the candidate for the PNM in the next election; they have a professor, he got a PhD last week and this week they call him a professor; that is a candidate for the PNM. At the UTT, students have complained bitterly, the student body has written letters complaining that they do not have a library, they do not have books. It is a big scandal at the UTT; persons are teaching sociology when they are trained in physical education. [*Interruption*] Persons are teaching in sociology, when you look they have no training in that area, no qualifications; they were recruited to teach PE.

**Mr. Sharma:** They have a level head, though?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** That is the madness that is going on at the UTT and they have taken \$19 million within recent time, additional for overseas travelling, staffing and infrastructure development. We need a public enquiry into the funding of UTT and the operations. [*Desk thumping*] They call themselves a university, they do not have academic staff and while they are doing that they are undermining the UWI. [*Desk thumping*] The last principal, they now call him “Principal without portfolio”. [*Interruption*] He was earlier a Minister without portfolio; he is now, principal without portfolio. It is called a Japanese promotion. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, undermining the University of the West Indies the money goes to UTT, students are complaining no library, no books, persons are not trained to teach in specific areas and are getting enormous money; their salary there is almost twice the salary of the UWI. [*Interruption*] But, the person who runs UTT he is not accountable; he will not account to the Parliament; he will not speak to anyone. In fact, he speaks to God alone and then God, of course, brings the budget. That is the problem we have at the UTT and this measure to bring in mouse pads and antiglare device, and so on, is really a trivial matter in the context of the millions spent on IT equipment that has been provided for the UTT. While the community centres in Oropouche, Naparima, Nariva and Couva do not have access to technology.

**Mr. Ramnath:** They closed all the centres that we used to have.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** But, Mr. Speaker, others will deal with this matter of UTT and the scandal involved there where millions of dollars are going to UTT, very poor academic staff, complete mishmash in the delivery of academic training at the UTT and hundreds of millions of dollars expended because certain people like to develop a concrete and glass campus that they saw in Hamburg, Germany; they want to replicate that in Wallerfield, Trinidad and Tobago, so the money goes there and the money will not go to buy beds in the hospital; the money will not go for that item.

On this matter, I wanted to go one step further to suggest to the relevant Minister and ministries that while it is fine to remove duty on hardware, mouse pad, mouse, antiglare devices, chairs and so on—two related matters, one of the key cost items with using technology is the price of software; is annual subscriptions for key software and the Government must now consider a programme to subsidize in the first instance, if not pay completely for key software that is required by the

schools, the community centres, the village councils and even the office of the Member of Parliament, because you cannot pay subscription fees for some of the software that you require for your basic work for learning. It is important to look in that direction.

But, Mr. Speaker, another related matter to IT, while we talk a lot about the computer and the antiglare device and so on, so we would not destroy our eyes. Do you know in Government offices today, forget private sector for a moment, there are persons using computers and monitors and they are using furniture that is ill suited to using monitors and keyboards? The ergonomic chairs, they are using longtime small waiting chairs that they used to have in the waiting room. *[Interruption]* If the Occupational Safety and Health Bill is fully implemented, they will close down the Siparia Regional Complex. At the Siparia Regional Complex they have problems with sanitation, they have problems with their waste disposal; at the Siparia Regional Complex, there is the Ministry of Health housed there and they did not get any certification of clearance from the Ministry of Health to open the office.

**Hon. Member:** Administrative office.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Administrative offices. Mr. Speaker, at the administrative complex in Siparia they buy water from the truck, barrels of water. That is Government administrative offices. The furniture persons are using in the Government service will damage your back, will damage your wrist, your hands, your fingers and it is only a matter of time before you have mass protest by public servants over furniture; the use of relevant furniture to use the technology that is now being provided.

**2.30 p.m.**

And the Government must take seriously the OSHA. But we know by our experience they took seven years or so; they came kicking and screaming before we got them to pass the OSHA because they are not interested in OSHA. They are not interested in equality of opportunity; they have instructions on that side that when the Equal Opportunity Bill comes here, they call it kill Bill, kill the Bill at all cost. They go to the committee meeting, all the PNM Ministers late and never arriving; you will never ever pass the Equal Opportunity legislation in Trinidad and Tobago under this Government. Kill Bill and while that is happening, they come with this negligible type of measure so that you could get a mouse pad cheaper. That is what they come with to fool the population.

**Dr. Khan:** Better software.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Software is the cost, that is what you have to look at. Mr. Speaker, while that is happening millions of dollars—with this Government they are now nicknamed "Pirates of the Caribbean". [*Desk thumping*] They plunder from CEPEP to YTEP, from the North West to the South West, from UDeCott to UTT. They plunder, when they cannot get from direct state agencies they take credit card and go all over the world for hairdo and lighting fixtures, dress and dusters and what have you.

Mr. Speaker, these are the pirates of the Caribbean, that is the problem we face, million of dollars. Calder Hart on national television, he said he made a mistake. The mistake the Member for St. Joseph pointed out was—how much was that mistake, \$300 million?

**Mr. Ramnath:** Only \$300 million.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Only \$300 million, we made a mistake, but 5,000 workers from the gaming industry must go home. We made a mistake with \$300 million gone, but somebody does not like to gamble. I do not know why they do not buy a Lotto ticket for him every week and let him try, but he said when he demits office he wants to become a pastor. Well, he is trying to make more money, obviously.

Mr. Speaker, the disability assistance grant, let me just speak about it, \$100 more, hurray. Well, thank God for that. \$100 more for disability assistance grant. This Government's treatment of the disabled, differently-abled is scandalous. The President of the Disabled People's International, George Daniel, had cause to write the Prime Minister and write the country, calling for the removal of the Minister of Works and Transport who promised to have access for the persons who are differently-abled on the walkover at El Socorro and then at Cocorite. Nothing happened and they called for his dismissal.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something. In Government buildings, how many can boast that they have access for persons who are differently-abled? In the next election you could never tell, do we have access in the Parliament Chamber for persons who are differently-abled? So, if someone has to take an oath as a Member of Parliament and that person is on a wheelchair, wheelchair ridden, how are we bringing the person here to take the oath? They may not and then they would not get paid as some of us found out. But that is the crisis that we face; access to persons with disability and not only access, equality of treatment for jobs. Equality of access for jobs.

Today another key area in equality is this area of discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS, a big issue now with this Government. But you know, the PNM as a party—and this is really a discussion for another time—and I direct this discussion to the Member for La Brea, who I considered to be a ideologue of the PNM; the others just came last week for office. The PNM has to face one or two ideological challenges now after 50 years in dealing with this issue of equality and diversity.

**Mr. Valley:** [*Inaudible*] after 50 years.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** After 50 years. Would you like to stand up and say something? Say it.

**Mr. Valley:** I think the Member should be congratulating the People's National Movement for providing service to the national community for 50 years. [*Desk thumping*] How old is your party? [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot thank the Member for intervening this way because I really wanted to raise an issue of that, so I am happy he raised it. After 50 years as a political party, their political leader of two decades said, "You know the problem is we need to build a multi-racial party." After 50 years in existence and 20 years of having the same political leader, he is now crying up and down the place, we should build a multi-racial party; it is not multi-racial. [*Crosstalk*] He said of the PNM. The political leader of the PNM tried a smart one, he used to walk on Saturdays and when they chased him out of one place in Oropouche, he sneakily returned on the Tuesday afternoon. He was walking in Fyzabad; I think the Member for Fyzabad gave him permission.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says "any society that is diverse, the diversity conspires to divide the society rather than unite it and we need to deal with diversity." Words of the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Ramnath:** No, I do not believe that.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** His Government took six years before they brought Equal Opportunity legislation to address the issue of equality and diversity.

**Mr. Ramnath:** He suspends the Chief Justice because he is an Indian, you know.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, this Government took six years, they send it to a Joint Select Committee and they will not deal with diversity. But the ideological problem facing the PNM is that to build a modern developed country, you need to address the issue of diversity and equality that is the challenge. So, you know

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what is amazing? In the modern world today, the police needs to build a culture of cooperation with citizens; citizens must have confidence in the police. You know to deal with terrorism now, what is the policy they outlined? They say if you see something, say something, meaning, communicate with the police; work with police, but in a country like Trinidad and Tobago where the Member for Diego Martin West filed a complaint against the police, nobody never take him seriously. The Police Complaints Authority does not work, 4 per cent of their matters they report to the DPP. So in a society where the police themselves, you cannot talk to them, you cannot challenge them, they say if you see something, say something. That is the clash between the modern requirements to developed country status and the historical inequality.

Mr. Speaker, I raise this matter of diversity in the context of what the Member for Diego Martin Central was boasting about a few minutes ago. After 50 years they discovered the diversity is a problem, we need to deal with it. After 50 years, what were they doing all the time? That is the question. What were they doing? They were dividing the society and now the Prime Minister says diversity is the challenge.

Well, on the last occasion Diego Martin Central was not here and I would not repeat myself, but the same Prime Minister that he is talking about said to the workers in Caroni, that 60,000 people will be affected, a PNM Government will never close down Caroni; we will develop Caroni for it to be efficient; we will develop Caroni for it to be efficient and be a modern sugar producing entity. The words of the Prime Minister himself in dealing with the issue of Caroni (1975) Limited. So that is the level of hypocrisy and then the Minister in the Ministry of Finance speaks about inflation going down. I want to correct one myth again.

Mr. Speaker, this Government and through the spokesman, Sen. Enill, says that the problem we have with inflation now is related to employment. He said in his statement—but they have said it before—that the increase in inflation is in a way a natural corollary of the decrease in unemployment. That is their argument saying that if you are going to decrease unemployment more people are working, therefore, people are spending, therefore, you have inflation. That is a matter that some economist and so on could deal with, but I want to ask him what happened between 1995 and 2001? The rate of inflation decreased at the same time in parallel with the rate of unemployment.

The data is there, we have the data. So under the UNC administration, inflation went down, unemployment went down, but now they argued that inflation must go up because we are creating more jobs. But what jobs are they talking about? What

jobs? The expansion in the state sector jobs. While Caroni gone, BWIA gone, NBN, TTT gone, gaming sector gone, while workers who in productive employment have all left and gone and their jobs of course are not linked to the productive sector. I think it is Dr. Morgan Job who told them once if they could use grass as productive raw material then CEPEP will be viable.

Mr. Speaker, they create jobs that are not viable, they are not productive jobs and then they create entrepreneurs; that is their legacy of being useless, irrelevant, inefficient and incompetent [*Desk thumping*] and now I notice that they want to poll them in the PNM. They have a poll they are going to take for each of these MPs. They are going to see if—but that is a scheme to get this entire Front Bench out with a few from the Back Bench. They want to poll. In the last mini budget they took \$10 million more for MORI so they could go down in Point Fortin and ask some selected people if the Member for Point Fortin was seeing them; if he was doing a good job? When the poll results came, you see 80 per cent of people say the Member for Point Fortin doing a horrible job. Out, at the screening committee. That is what they are doing.

**Mr. Achong:** Not in Point.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** [*Crosstalk*] I am happy to hear not in Point because that is why they set up the Member for Point Fortin. That is why. Far from being charged, he is now charged. That is how they set him up and they are going to set up one by one by one—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** And Laventille East

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And Laventille East/Morvant, well, you do not need a pollster to tell you that that Member—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Panday:** Gone.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—gone. You do not need polling for that, but you need polling in San Fernando West in the marginal. They will pay MORI to do polling in every PNM constituency to see if people are getting service, representation. I know how they will do it because I have colleagues in polling organizations, the poll will ask if the people are receiving services. Do they see their Member of Parliament? Does the Member of Parliament take up their grievances? When those poll data comes in, half of them gone, that is what they are going to do. I can alert my—well, I do not have friends on that side, so I cannot alert them as friends, but parliamentary colleagues.

I want them to know that there is a colleague in Jamaica who has already indicated to several other academic staff that he is working and will be working in Trinidad and Tobago to undertake polling—it is a very reputable polling agency

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out of Mona—but they only targeting cities and selected areas. I wonder why? Why cities and selected areas, but not UNC areas? Because they are interested in getting Diego Martin East out quickly. This is a man who in his first incarnation climbed up on the roof to move a dragon, in his next incarnation they went in the middle of the night to destroy people's house at the interchange. Mr. Speaker, this is the gentleman, the people in Cuchawan Trace are looking for him.

Mr. Speaker, by accident, some engineer from Petrotrin went to Cuchawan Trace, he was nearly beaten. It was a Caucasian expat, they thought it was the Minister of Works and Transport [*Laughter*]*—*he was about 4 feet 2 inches. They thought it was the Minister of Works and Transport because he promised on March 16, 2007 that he would fix the road and the retaining wall and he did not to this day. They are looking for him down there and I want to tell him that notwithstanding the closure of the sugar industry, they still have that three canal and a file. Let me move on, but I will save him yet again.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say in the few minutes—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

**Mr. Speaker:** Point of order.

**Mr. Imbert:** The Member is inciting violence. I think three canal is another word for cutlass or something. He is inciting violence.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, it is not a point of order, but I think the Member is very concerned that you are—

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Lying.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, not lying. No, no, that you are in jest, you are talking something which could be interpreted differently about inciting violence.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, I withdraw of course, and 3 Canal is the name of a band, I think. It is the name of a musical band; I was referring to that entertainment group.

The Member for Laventille East/Morvant, I would not say anything, he has his hands full. [*Laughter*] What his hands are doing, we do not know, but he has his hands full. I want to tell him that all the time he is in the House pelting mud at everybody, being nasty to everyone, God works in mysterious ways. When you wake up in the morning and read about his alleged activities.

Mr. Speaker, in my closing minutes, I want to indicate to this country that the United National Congress upon returning to office which will be sooner rather



than later, will commit ourselves to reviewing our social policy programmes, to reviewing the level of social support, subsidy and financial support to dispossess groups to disadvantage persons, we will review the level of support in line with inflation, in line with the cost of living. The UNC Government would also, in discussions with a wide cross-section of the national community, consider the reduction and/or removal of VAT on home construction materials; on essential materials needed by the small man and woman to construct their homes. We would consider significant increases for persons on public assistance, on disability grants, and of course, the pensioners. We must recall that the first major leap in the pension figures came during the administration of the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] And this is something that is dear to us.

It goes without saying that the first time this country ever adopted a minimum wage to provide minimum protection to workers, was under the distinguished leadership of the Member for Nariva and the Government of the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] They never knew about minimum wage before the UNC, so we have a track record of performance. We are about people, policy and performance, minimum wage, maternity protection, increases in old age pension, disability—in fact, if I am not mistaken some of these grants were started by the UNC administration—increase for self-help. The UNC commits itself for that policy.

I want to indicate as well to the groups that are now protesting, whether they are protesting from the gaming industry, whether they are protesting from different departments of the Government and so on that we are extremely concerned with the industrial relation problems; we are concerned with the closure of private sector businesses; and the UNC Government will be much more compassionate as far as it relates to laying off people in the gaming sector and in other critical private sector operations.

The UNC Government will look again at the NBN, TTT, they have almost squandered and plundered and scandalized that whole operation of the government broadcasting. When we were in office, we were proposing government broadcasting for education to build awareness to alert our population as to their rights, equality, freedom of information; under this Government, that has all collapsed because it is not in their interest to promote knowledge of rights.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to indicate to the Minister of Social Development, I threw out a challenge for him which went on deaf ears a few days ago. I challenged the Minister; I ask the Minister to join me in a poverty challenge to ask him if he could live on \$21 a day, have three meals on \$21 a day. Of

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course, he ignored me thoroughly and that is quite evident of the fact that \$21 cannot buy one meal for this Minister. So, I want to appeal to the Government that they must understand social policy planning and poverty.

The UNC Government also made a distinction between poverty reduction and poverty alleviation, they are two separate policy areas and you should not confuse them. Reducing poverty is not the same as alleviating poverty and there are measures that you take to alleviate poverty and there are a complete set of measures separate that you take to reduce poverty. It is not just Smart Card, CDAP card, OJT, MuST, HYPE and so on, that is not the long term solution.

Mr. Speaker, they would not like to hear, but it was Prof. Dennis Pantin—an I am quoting from people like Prof. Carl Theodore, Prof. Dennis Pantin—in an article in the *Sunday Guardian*, June 10, again, indicated to this Government that the time when you have plenty, when you have abundance, you must plan for when you do not have. The message to this Government is, please do not squander our resources, yet again, and have this country, the future generations suffering because you came, you saw and you plundered.

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

**The Minister of Social Development and Minister in the Ministry of Housing (Hon. Anthony Roberts):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to make a brief intervention in this critical Bill before the Parliament at this stage. I had the opportunity to listen to my colleague from Oropouche, who in my view was making a lot of wild statements, jumping here and there, like Jack—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** The Deputy Political Leader?

**Hon. A. Roberts:**—without being able to substantiate most of the statements that he has been making, attempt to misinform the national community because I believe that he knows the right thing. But in this political season, the Member is attempting to win votes by any means, providing misinformation. He says that the UNC has a track record, big joke.

Mr. Speaker, I get the impression that my friend from opposite and he is my friend from opposite—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Rahael:** He said he has no friends here, you did not hear him or what?

**Hon. A. Roberts:** I do not believe him, even that he cannot speak the truth about.

**Mr. Rahael:** He cannot speak the truth. They are friends, right? [*Crosstalk*] "Ent all yuh" was in some organization together?

**Hon. A. Roberts:** So, he is my friend, Mr. Speaker. I was saying that I get the impression that he was trying to put life to an old calypso, "Kicksin in Parliament" because indeed the Member for Oropouche was really "kicksin". At this time in this political season I get the impression that he is convinced that he is on his last leg and he is preparing for another profession; profession of being a comedian. So what he is really doing to us today, he was actually preparing; it was a dry run he was on.

He raised a number of issues wild as they were. He talked about poverty and he admitted that the document from the last survey of the living conditions in 2005 is not available, but yet he went ahead to make certain statements, so I do not know where he got his information from. All we indicated in this Parliament from this side is that there was a preliminary report and that report put the poverty level at 17.1 per cent. That is all, but I would not engage in any discussion on that document until it is laid in the Parliament and it will be laid in this Parliament in due course.

Mr. Speaker, it is an opportunity for me to correct some of the misinformation this is being placed and spewed in the public domain. The intention really of those who make these wild and informed statements from time to time, I get the impression is to create confusion, and particularly, with the senior citizens in this country to create confusion to frighten them and to upset them. They are trying their best to create a level of disenchantment among the senior citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Because you see, they know of the kind of relationship that now exists between the senior citizens and the People's National Movement. So they are worried about it and their approach to dealing with it, is to try to create panic with misinformation and this is what we intend to deal with on this side. But I want to assure them and they are aware that the People's National Movement has kept the faith over the years with respect to the senior citizens.

These persons who have lived long enough and to see and understand the kind of transformation that the People's National Movement has made [*Desk thumping*] with respect to the development of Trinidad and Tobago over time. The kind of responsible and disciplined approach that this Government under the PNM, that the PNM has taken in terms of transforming Trinidad and Tobago. So that going to them at this time with all this misinformation and "ol' talk" as I would want to put it, is pure nonsense at this stage and I want to let you know that notwithstanding what you would say to them, you would not be able to convince them to support you.

We have heard some of the nonsense here this evening, but what is some of the nonsense that you hear from time to time? You heard from the Member his concern as to why the name was changed from "Pension" to "Senior Citizens Grant"; there were no international reports as to why the name was changed from "Pension" to "Senior Citizens Grant." Imagine that is a concern.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard other concerns as well, other concerns that they have raised. They are trying to give the impression that the name was changed because this Government wants to reduce the sum that is being paid at this time to the senior citizens, or as a matter of fact, they are trying to give the impression to the senior citizens that the Government at some point in time will put an end to the senior citizens grant because you have changed from "Pension" to "Senior Citizens Grant".

So, Mr. Speaker, I am aware of some of these comments they have been making in the community because we have a relationship with the senior citizens and I could tell you from sometime last year to date, we have had 12 senior citizens fora so that we can discuss and interact with them, hear their concerns and be able to deal with issues as they affect the senior citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. So, we are aware of nonsense that they are spewing in the society, in an effort as I indicated earlier on to create the kind of panic in the society, particularly, among the senior citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

**3.00 p.m.**

If I should look at the history of social assistance in Trinidad and Tobago, it came out of the recommendation of the Moines Commission sometime in 1937. The payment of old age pension began somewhere in 1939 with the passage of the Old Age Pension Act. This was one of his concerns as well: The payment of what was referred to as "old age pension" was always a grant that persons had to qualify for. The criteria you had to satisfy in order to get this grant were age, income and residence. You still have to satisfy these in order to get the grant.

Throughout the years, amendments were made from time to time in an effort to make this grant more acceptable to the people of Trinidad and Tobago who had to receive it. I have done so, as we discussed, in the respective sessions with the senior citizens, and I want to make it very, very clear to put it on the record that this Government has absolutely no intention of reducing the Senior Citizen Grant or removing it. I want to repeat that: This Government has absolutely no intention of removing the Senior Citizen Grant or reducing it.

On the contrary, when we came into government in 2002, a grant of \$720 was being paid to senior citizens as a pension. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Hinds:** By whom?

**Hon. A. Roberts:** By the previous government.

To date we have almost doubled that figure, in the sense that senior citizens are now receiving \$1,350 as the grant. So to give the impression that this Government “doh like ol’ people”, as they put it, disrespectful as they are, is wicked. It is malicious to give that impression. We have always worked with the senior citizens of this country, ensuring that in the sunset of their lives they are made comfortable in the land of their birth.

**Mr. Hinds:** That was not all they got. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. A. Roberts:** You are right, Member for Laventille East/Morvant, the grant is only one payment that they get, there are other payments or other initiatives that the Government has in place that they could participate in as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to the increase of the Senior Citizen Grant, the Government went a bit further. During the budget debate, I used the opportunity to explain to the national community that our intention was to widen the net—and the Member did make reference to it—so as to allow more persons in the community, who were not able to benefit from the Senior Citizen Grant, as it is now called, to benefit from this measure. So the Government looked at the income criteria and did some modification in terms of putting in the sliding scale approach, so that more people would be able to benefit. When we looked at it, approximately 10,000 more of our citizens were able to benefit from this measure. [*Desk thumping*]

Persons who were included in that net were persons whose income went over the income ceiling of \$1,000, even if it was by one cent. Once your income went over the ceiling of \$1,000 but did not exceed \$2,150, you were able to get the difference to make it up to \$2,150. The Government continues to do whatever is necessary to ensure that our senior citizens live comfortably. There are many other benefits that they can access in order to make themselves comfortable.

The Member made reference to the initiative of the C-DAP, a programme which is unheard of in any other part of the world. This programme allows any member of this society to access medication at the cost of the Government. We started with medication for three diseases; now we have expanded the programme to 11 diseases. If I should just maybe mention a couple of them: hypertension, diabetes, asthma, glaucoma, acid reflux, arthritis, Parkinsons. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Khan:** What about the disease of the PNM?

**Hon. A. Roberts:** Approximately 300,000 of our citizens—no discrimination—*[Desk thumping]*—everybody—as my deceased mother would say, “Toute monde”, everybody is entitled to access that programme of the C-DAP. *[Crosstalk]*

Sometimes when you listen to my colleagues across the floor, you would get the impression that they never had the opportunity to be in government. They had the opportunity to come up with initiatives to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago and they chose to do otherwise. *[Crosstalk]*

**Dr. Khan:** C-DAP was Dr. Rafeeq’s plan! *[Crosstalk]*

**Mr. Rahael:** No, Sir.

**Hon. A. Roberts:** They argued that there were a number of other persons who were unable to benefit from the C-DAP, because they could not get the medication; but in addition to the C-DAP, the Ministry of Social Development has a pharmaceutical grant that we make available, particularly to senior citizens of this country, so that medication they are unable to get under the C-DAP, they can now access it through the pharmaceutical grant from the Ministry of Social Development.

When it comes to the health of our people and providing them with opportunities to access medication, this Government is being as innovative as it can be, to assist the citizens of this country. *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Rafeeq:** Just for clarification, can you inform us how senior citizens could access that particular grant you are talking about and whether it is a non-off or continuing assistance that they can access.

**Hon. A. Roberts:** Mr. Speaker, it is open to the senior citizens and they can access the grant through the local board offices of the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Social Development. We consider the need of the patient. If you cannot access assistance under that particular grant, the Ministry will make provision to assist you.

As it relates to housing, again we assist our senior citizens and other citizens to do repairs to their homes by grants. There are grants from three different ministries. The Ministry of Housing provides a grant of \$15,000; it is a grant and not a loan. It is a grant of \$15,000 in materials so that persons, and particularly our senior citizens, who have to do repairs to their homes can go to the Ministry of Housing to access these grants to do their repairs. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs also has another grant of \$10,000 for housing under the Self-Help Commission. *[Desk thumping]* Again, this is another

opportunity that our citizens can access, including senior citizens, they do not have to use their pension money to do repairs to their homes. They can utilize these grants to which I have referred.

More than that, there is another grant with respect to housing in the Ministry of Social Development. We have “a small ting in the hole”, as the young “fellas” would say; a grant of \$5,000 in case a senior citizen might want to do some repairs; for example, to remove a couple sheets of galvanize; in case you need to change a door frame; in case you need to change a door; minor things. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Hinds:** You know sometimes the step might separate from the house.

**Hon. A. Roberts:** And you need to put it back. [*Crosstalk*] These are some of the facilities that we make available to senior citizens, so you understand why they like the PNM. You understand why they believe in the PNM, because the PNM will continue to look after their needs, to ensure that they are comfortable in the sunset of their lives. These are some of the facilities we use with respect to housing.

There are a number of other grants available to senior citizens in this society. You can access them through the local board and the local offices of the Social Welfare Division. There is a medical equipment grant for some of our senior citizens who might have to acquire a wheelchair. We provide that facility in terms of acquiring the wheelchair for them. They might need walking aids. As you get older and the legs get weaker, you might need some assistance in getting along, maybe a walking stick, a walker or whatever it might be; we provide that facility.

As you get older you might have problems with your eyes; we provide spectacles for the senior citizens. While it might appear to be free to them, it is at the cost of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; there is a cost to it. We provide a grant for those persons in our society who may be diabetic; there is a dietary grant. You know that the foodstuff you have to use as a diabetic could be very expensive sometimes. The Ministry of Social Development provides a grant to assist our seniors, so they could eat right and have the right kind of diet to be able to cope with their illness.

I just want to take a couple minutes to deal with this; there is another grant that we refer to as the “home help grant”. You might have a senior citizen and the adults in his home who would normally take care of him, for one reason or the other, might not be available to give the kind of attention required. So the Ministry of Social Development, as it relates and collaborates with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, under which you have the

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Geriatric Adolescent Programme (GAP), we are able to pay, not for any extended period, but until you can make alternative arrangements, we can pay a caregiver to take care of the senior citizen.

My friend opposite made reference to something, and I know he was being deliberate about it. I want to give him, at least, a little credit, because he has some intelligence, so I knew he was being deliberate when he spoke about the Smart Card. He knows it is not a Smart Card. He knows that at this time we have the debit card in place. He understood clearly—because he was not contesting it—why we had to move from the SHARE programme into the debit card. When the SHARE programme was in place, the way some of our senior citizens were treated affected their dignity as human beings, because some people really did not know how to speak to them.

They would embarrass them, “You come back again?” “We eh giving you no food dis month”, that kind of approach. The PNM is not prepared to condone that kind of thing; we must preserve the dignity of all our citizens and that was one of the reasons to move from the SHARE programme into the debit card system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, under the SHARE programme, persons were given foodstuff, but not in the quantity that they wanted. You could have gone and you were given a hamper with a sack of flour, when what you really needed was about 10 pounds of flour; you need maybe more rice; you needed oil. So that with the debit card you have the opportunity to shop and purchase food items in the quantity that you want.

In addition, unlike the listing of foodstuff that you got under the SHARE programme, there are additional food items under the debit card programme. You can now get perishable items. You could not get perishable items under the SHARE programme. A person can now access fish, meat and fruits through the debit card system. We think that it is much more beneficial in terms of providing them with a more nutritional meal or a set of items that could provide nutrition for our senior citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member understood clearly that when they ran the system, how they corrupted the SHARE programme. It was a question of being the good friend of somebody to get a hamper; that was one of the criteria. By being a good friend of the MP you would be able to access the hamper. What we find at this time is that there are a number of persons who are now on the SHARE programme. We utilized the listing provided to us from the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that participated in the programme.



We did not invent the list of persons who were on the programme. The NGOs involved in the programme provided the list of persons they were interacting with, from time to time. We know and the Member knows that there are persons on the programme who should not be there. He knows that.

**Mr. Valley:** Especially Siparia!

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Not Siparia.

**Hon. A. Roberts:** That was what he referred to when I indicated in this honourable house that we were going to clean up the list. This Government is targeting persons in the community who are in need; persons who are experiencing grave difficulty in putting food on the table. Our policy as a government is to ensure that no citizen of our country goes hungry. [*Desk thumping*] We are targeting these persons who are experiencing, at this time, some difficulty in putting foodstuff on their table. That is why we are going to clean up the list; we have the means testing.

The Member also gave the impression that when we distributed the cards to start the programme, that was the end of it. It was the furthest thing from the truth. As we speak now, the Ministry through its various branches throughout Trinidad and Tobago are processing applications for the debit card; we are continuing. We are giving out the debit cards. As persons are processed and they meet the criteria, we are delivering these cards to them so that they would be able to access foodstuff to feed themselves and their families.

With the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, the intention is really not to continue to keep persons on handouts. This Government is not going to promote giving handouts to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Our intention is to empower our citizens; to extend a hand to those in this country who require some assistance to pull themselves out of an impoverished state. When they talk about the poverty line, the problem they have is that they cannot deal with the good news. They are complaining that the poverty line is now 17.1 per cent. I want to alert them, because from information I have, it is even lower. [*Crosstalk*]

The Member talked about the inflation rate, but more persons are employed. [*Crosstalk*] The reason we are getting the kind of results we are getting today is because we are taking a structured approach in dealing with poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. This Government is serious about removing poverty from our landscape. We are working together, at this time, with the European Union, and we have put a structure in place working with the NGOs and civil society organizations in Trinidad and Tobago, to actually reach out to every household, wherever it might be in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Mr. Speaker, it is important to collaborate with the civil society organizations, because they come from the bowels of the community; they know the community; they know the people in the community; they understand the situations in the respective communities, and as a result you are able to reach out to persons in the community who find themselves in this unfortunate situation.

From the report that they were talking about, that is not yet laid in this Parliament, we know the parts of Trinidad and Tobago experiencing grave poverty. So we are able now to target the approach in certain communities and reach out to these communities together with the civil society organizations to weed out poverty. I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, to this honourable House and the national community, by extension, that with some time we are going to bring poverty down to a single digit; I am confident. I am not talking from a hat; it is not just “ol’ talk”. I am one of the Government Ministers who go out there; who walk the streets with these civil society organizations. I understand and I am able to feel and I know what I am speaking about, instead of just coming here and shooting my mouth off in order to create an impression to catch the media.

We consider the whole issue of poverty to be very, very serious, ensuring that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are able to benefit from the resources of Trinidad and Tobago. I recall that my friend, the Member for St. Augustine—and I will remind him of this every time I have the opportunity—I think it was in a budget debate, I cannot remember exactly, saying to this Parliament and this country that the Government's approach in terms of its investment in social programme was a waste of time and money. I want him to go and tell the persons out there who are experiencing burn in their bellies, that it is a waste of money. That is why the Government understands what is taking place in the respective communities, so we have developed a number of these programmes to empower the citizens to come out of that poverty situation.

Mr. Speaker, the measures that we are seeking to get approval for in this House today, is very important and critical to the needs of the people of this country. I would hope that my friends on the other side would allow good sense to prevail and understand that some of the decisions they take here sometimes are hurting and affecting the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that they profess to love. [*Crosstalk*] It is the same people who they have to go to in a short time. We hope that they would support the measure that this Government is putting forward in an effort to assist the people of this country as we proceed to developed nation status.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**Mr. Winston Dookeran** (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the Minister of Social Development. When he made the statement that he remembered some time when I said that the Government's social expenditure was a waste of time, I was somewhat surprised that he did not attribute the source of that information. Today, he has given me an opportunity to explain, in this budget debate, why the Government's economic plan and economic strategy and economic performance are, at the same time, creating a higher level of discomfort and poverty in the country on a permanent basis. I will get to that a bit later.

This debate on the Finance Bill is, indeed, a very important one and one that opens up the responsibility for the Government to account for what it has been doing. I would raise a number of issues which will now raise the spectacle of whether this Government is acting in the national interest of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of its economic management. I am disappointed that the hon. Minister who presented this Bill is unfortunately not here.

**Mr. Valley:** I am here, do not worry.

**Mr. W. Dookeran:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central is a very poor substitute. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Valley:** Hinds will take you on!

**Mr. W. Dookeran:** The Member in his presentation made a few assertions. He started by saying that the economy was built on strong foundations and was now well positioned for sustained growth and development. He went on to make a second assertion regarding the management of the economy, with respect to inflation. I believe the Member for Oropouche quite correctly made reference to this point. He said that an increase in the inflation rate was inevitable, because of the fall in the unemployment rate and that if almost everyone was working then there was more money being spent; consequently, demand increases and that in turn increased prices.

That was an example of a theory which has now lost its credibility. The Member for Oropouche made reference to it and he said that some economists may debate it: That a necessary result of increasing employment, was high inflation. I would like to tell the Minister if he were here that theory has lost its credibility, even in the world of the academics.

It is referred to as the Phillips Curve and it has been proven more than once by empirical studies that it no longer holds. It was what we learned in the 1960s. [*Desk thumping*] It also reflected that the Minister responsible for financial

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management could still be enslaved by a theory that has now lost its entire relevance. To argue that raises real doubts as to the knowledge competency of the Members who are running the economic life of Trinidad and Tobago.

He went on to attribute that there might be some supply considerations, but he did not go on to explain why there had been a fall in that. Everyone knows that there are three reasons for inflation: Because there is high spending, some refer to it as wild spending, of the Government; secondly, there is no plan to increase local production in the country, especially in the agricultural sector, which has led to food prices rising and, thirdly, the management of the monetary and fiscal accounts of the country have left a lot to be wanting. Here is the Minister responsible for this not even attributing to these failures in the management of the economy.

So everything that our ordinary people would gain from the few dollars that the Minister of Social Development spoke about is being eroded by the inflationary spiral in the country and will continue to do so. [*Desk thumping*] The real issue, therefore, is not how much you spend, but how effective is the expenditure on increasing the quality of life of the citizens of the country. If the Minister was to address it, he would realize that the recent quality of life index done by the United Nations Development Programme, which was, in fact, published, would show a deterioration in the quality of life index for Trinidad and Tobago.

Here again the Minister of Social Development talked about a programme of expenditure, but what was the effect? The effect was not to improve the quality of life. If he has to judge the management of his portfolio, it is not by how much he spent, but how much the quality of life of the people has been improved by his expenditure. Figures would suggest the opposite. So when he claims that I said it was a waste of money, he did not even appreciate the point of how should his Ministry account for that expenditure. We can use the same funds that are there and do much more for it. There is enough for all of us in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is not so because of the way in which the economy, in fact, has been mismanaged.

Dealing with the Finance Bill, there is no doubt that this must be put in the context of which the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance placed it, which is in terms of the economy. But I just want to put on the record a comment made in January 2007 regarding this issue of the fiscal accounts, because we are talking about the fiscal accounts. This is a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), "Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussions". I will just put on the record what it said on fiscal management:

“The Government’s balance sheet has improved with rising energy receipts, but the underlying fiscal position has deteriorated due to the rapid increase in public spending.”

It goes on to substantiate its claim of a deterioration in the fiscal position of January 2007. It is something that is very worrisome, especially as you go below the headline in this particular note and you see what they were talking about was a rise in the non-energy fiscal deficit. It is a point we have raised here many times, which is but an indication that while there is increased spending in the country, there is, in fact, a fall in the non-energy sector in terms of production and contribution to the fiscal accounts; another part of the evidence.

So to sit here and say that there is transformation taking place, my friend, is, in fact, to once again attempt to hoodwink the population about security for the future. There is no doubt that there is a lot of money still in the coffers and there is no doubt that the Government in this election year would yield to the temptation to use that money for the sake of trying to hoodwink the population into believing that everything is all right. But those of us who are sure we will be here to handle the responsibility of government after the next election, have to look beyond. [*Desk thumping*] We have to look at the inheritance they are going to provide to us on this particular matter. I want to assure you here today that is a matter of real concern to all of us who are looking beyond.

We hope that we will not fall into the trap in which this Government would like this country to fall, which is to believe that the underlying problems would simply go away. Because there is a future ahead and that future will not change unless some of the underlying problems we have are dealt with, including social policy, including the issue of poverty. I myself have been hearing a lot of references made in this Parliament to the whole question of poverty. I myself read in the newspaper the headline:

“Getting it right”

I am so happy that the Government is now mickeying what we have been saying when we said, “Let us get the politics right in Trinidad and Tobago.” They headlined it, “Getting it right”; they are now talking, not about consultations, but conversations. They are talking the same language that we on this side have introduced in the political vocabulary of Trinidad and Tobago. I congratulate them for that. I am happy that they too are buying into the philosophy that we have been enunciating here.

When they went on to talk about poverty, they made a number of statements about the report commissioned in this very article. It was stated by the European

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Union; to date that report is not public information. We heard the Minister say that the statistics are even better than what was quoted, but to date it is not so. I called the European Commission and I said that in Parliament the matter was being raised; in the newspapers was a reference to it and that the European Union was a body that ought to be independent; therefore, I would like to get a copy of that report so I could respond to it properly, in the interest of public information.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that the representative was very polite, but he said that he had to check to see whether that was possible. To date, that has not happened. Why has he got to check? A study that was, in fact, commissioned, done by an independent body, the European Commission, remains a secret document in Trinidad and Tobago, on a critical issue of poverty. Today I call for that report to be immediately released to the public of Trinidad and Tobago. I believe the Government has a responsibility to release that report, because in terms of accountability, they have always tried to keep the real information from the people. We look forward to it.

We have an entire programme, not to deal with the symptoms of poverty or to create in the minds of the people that they are better off. We have a programme to handle the cycles of poverty in this country and to remove that cycle in the next generation or, at least, attack it at that level. Giving people a few dollars here and there is fine; it deals with some contemporary problems, but if you want to tackle the problem of poverty, you have to remove the cycles and forces that generate poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

I look forward to this report being made public and having a full debate on our approach to handle poverty in Trinidad and Tobago, and for the Minister of Social Development to participate, as is his responsibility. He is doing so under the guidance of the Prime Minister, who is presiding over this situation of misleading the country and giving it a false sense of security. Mr. Speaker, we can go on and on and talk about the poverty issues. The myths they have pointed out are all part of the public relations job. Imagine, this is being paid for by the funds that the Member for St. Joseph spoke about, when he spoke sometime ago of the increase in expenditure by, I believe, an opinion survey company, which the Government is now using in order to politic in the name of public policy. That itself is wrong in a democratic society that they could use public funds for narrow political purposes and get away with it.

We have got to put a stop to that. We will be raising more and more of this issue, because we are calling for an election that will have to be free and fair, and we say that the State must not use its resource to politic so blatantly in this

country as they continue to do everyday in the newspapers. We have no problem with the enunciating of Government's programmes, but when it is very clear that those programmes are misleading the people, we are, in fact, not using the funds for the purposes of public policy, but to mislead and hoodwink the population. It is part of the political agenda to which this Government has been accustomed.

As we looked into the Finance Bill and we understood that there were some underlying problems, I began to reflect what really were the three key issues we were facing. The first one which the Minister responsible for this particular debate should raise is the issue of the priorities of expenditure, because that, essentially, is what we are talking about. In the last six years, something to the order of \$114 billion has been spent and when we add, as was pointed out by the Member for St. Joseph, the additional support from the state enterprises through its borrowing capacity underwritten by the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we are talking about \$200 billion being spent in this country. Where is it going and how are we accounting for it? What are the priorities of that expenditure? A most classic case of trying to underline why the priorities are wrong and while the pittances are being given to poor people, as he calls them, the old age pensioners and others, the priorities are going in the wrong direction.

I read a letter that was placed in the newspapers recently regarding the Chaguaramas Golf Course. For the sake of trying to establish the facts as they have been pointed out, I will read parts of it. This person writing to the *Express* said:

“I understand that Cabinet has agreed to fully subsidize the extension of the golf course facility in Chaguaramas to the tune of some \$125 million and also subsidize its maintenance at an annual cost exceeding \$8 million. This is another aspect of the subsidy which includes some 321 acres of prime agricultural land which would also be given over to this group of golfers. Such an area of that Chaguaramas real estate can be easily valued in excess of \$32 million and given its classification as prime agricultural land it should be put under intensive cultivation to control inflation and assist us all in our daily lives by keeping the price of food down.

The golf course project is being managed and pushed ahead by all others at Chaguaramas by the Chairman of the CDA and his staff at the HDA. The latter of course falls under the portfolio of the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley who despite his demanding schedule can be seen at most times at the golf course.

My problem with this decision of the Government is that it falls under the heading of a subsidy, one for the creation of those in the society who can well afford to pay for such recreation.” [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. W. Dookeran:** “Golf is not the chief sport and the ensemble of personal gear recruited for this can exceed \$10,000 and this is only the personal gear. Most of the local golfers go abroad and pay full fees. I have nothing against the game, but playing it quite regularly at a place called Epsom in England when I was a teenager.”

He himself did.

“The fundamental however is that should we apply a subsidy that it should be for this or for indigent, the underprivileged, the young, the infirm, the old and the challenged, if not for any other of these, it should be for the greater good, the benefit of the larger majority.

The subsidy is not for any of the groups cited and its estimated scale upwards to \$480 million, at the front end, and \$8 million plus per year thereafter.”

Mr. Speaker, the question of priorities. This Government has chosen to spend, according to this letter, \$480 million in subsidizing an activity that does not deal with the real social problems of the indigent, underprivileged, the young, the infirm, the old and the challenged. It is really a question of the priorities of expenditure that is at stake here, because that reflects what the Government is doing and, hence, the quality of life of the ordinary people of this country is not getting the benefit of it.

But we go further; we can talk about other expenditure taking place and today I want to say a few words about an important one that is now gaining great public attention. That one deals with the issue of the Tarouba Stadium. The best thing about the Tarouba Stadium is the name, the Brian Lara Stadium. We must retain that name, but we must ensure that it is given the kind of honour that will be deserving to the country. I have absolutely no problem with that, so I refer to it essentially as the Tarouba Stadium.

Let us look at the stadium and what has been happening there for some time. It comes, first of all, in the context of the Government's history of having white elephants. For almost a decade, Mount Hope remained underutilized; in the context of the Caroni Racing Complex, which never happened; in the context of Project Pride; LABIDCO, this is all part of the legacy of this Government over the years, and more recently we have had the legacy of the Scarborough Hospital.



It is in that context that we must be concerned of another situation in which the priorities of expenditure are wrong. I believe it was the Member for Toco/Manzanilla in the *Hansard* of June 24, 2005, the Member responsible for sports, who told us in this Parliament that this project was about eight or nine facilities that speak to cricket in the first phase. So cricket is only the first phase of eight or nine, and we already have 100 per cent overrun on the first phase. and it is nine months behind schedule. Given the figures, it is well expected that this project, if it were to continue, would cost this nation near to \$1 billion. The estimates have already moved from \$275 million to \$558 million for the first phase.

This project was told to us by the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, and I quote from the *Hansard*:

“It is important that in order to ensure transparency and keep the cost down, UDeCott has also decided that they are going to use a fixed price contract structure. I repeat: It is important in order to ensure transparency and to keep the cost down, that we shall use a fixed price contract.”

This was when the project was first announced.

The fixed price structure, he argued, was to ensure transparency and keep the cost down, but what has really happened? Even before phase one was completed, the project has moved from \$275 million to \$558 million, almost 100. Could we believe the utterances of the Ministers in this Parliament? Could we believe what the Government is saying to the population at all? Could we believe the Prime Minister’s assurances on this issue of transparency when, in fact, we have situations like this developing?

My understanding is that they have moved from one site to the next site, because they found out subsequently that there was some problem with the geology of the situation. After the decision was made and after it was pointed out here that, perhaps, \$300 million was lost, the man in charge, Mr. Calder Hart, simply said on television that it was a mistake. Mr. Speaker, where are the priorities of expenditure and is the Government accounting to the people for this kind of expenditure?

I also understand that the way in which this project was, in fact, managed, has left a lot of room for accountability. The cost of the construction is now out of control and it is in the order of \$558 million. The stadium was designed by a Texan based architectural firm with no prior experience of designing cricket grounds. I believe that no local or regional architectural firms were asked to

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submit design proposals for the project. The certain firm called Alpha Turner was awarded the contract to project and manage the entire project without any request for proposals from any other project management company in Trinidad and Tobago.

As far as the information available to us goes, and if it is otherwise the Government can tell us, Turner as project manager in turn has set up the project into packages and bid each package throughout the various contractors, both local and foreign. Project managers are normally paid a percentage fee of 4 per cent of the project, if they were fixed. We want to ask: What is the project fee that is based on this particular project? I have no information on what it is, but the intelligence I have tells me that is not so in the case of this project.

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, what is the cost of this project compared to the cost elsewhere in the Caribbean? The Tarouba Stadium has a capacity of 15,000 and it is to be built at the cost of US \$87 million, but let us look at the cost of this project in other parts of the Caribbean. In Guyana, a stadium was built in 2005, completed in 2007, with a capacity of 15,000, and the cost per seat—that is how it is measured—was US \$1,866. In Warner Park, St. Kitts, built in 2006 for a capacity of 7,500 seats, the cost per seat was US \$1,000. In St. Lucia 2003, four years ago, a stadium for 12,000 persons was built and the cost per seat was \$1,083. What has been the cost estimate in Trinidad and Tobago? The cost estimate in Trinidad and Tobago is US \$5,800 per seat.

Mr. Speaker, no differences in cost structures in these countries could explain the fact that the Tarouba is estimated at this point to cost between five to six times more than what has been built in the other Caribbean countries. The question arises: Where is this money going? We cannot account to this country on the basis of cost. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, these figures have been verified by those in the industry.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

We cannot, at this stage, have the Minister of Finance come here to seek permission to proceed with a number of the different taxes and not have to account for the priorities of expenditure, as well as the transparency in the execution of that expenditure. It is a secret matter as indeed so many other things have been built upon and I do not think any Member who is sitting on the other side is even aware of the details of this. They cannot be held accountable because the people who are running the Government are not necessarily sitting on the Front Bench of this Government. We will talk more about that because they, too, as many members of the PNM have begun to realize, never voted for these kinds of things. They never

voted for these tremendous overruns that are taking place, not to mention whether or not these priorities will help to develop the country's transformation.

This situation comes on the heels of a health sector report. I am surprised that the Minister of Health still sits in this Parliament. I would think that if such a condemnation of the management of my portfolio in this Parliament were to take place by a government-sponsored body, I would try to convince the Prime Minister to relieve me of that portfolio. But he is here because he is oblivious to the needs of the health sector, which is now reflected in the weekend newspapers, in the San Fernando hospital, about which, I believe, the Member for Oropouche spoke in more detail. Elsewhere his entire public relations drive for the last six years to hoodwink the population—everyone knows him as the PR Minister—has not worked. It came flat on his face when now the entire San Fernando Hospital has been the last of the institutions in which we cannot allow our conscience in any way to be satisfied by what is taking place because lives and deaths are involved.

This is not only a matter of management; this is a matter of the lives and deaths of people; of children. Then we read on the newspaper of a very well known medical person saying that the health sector should be charged with criminality in politics; criminality in the health sector. I believe it was referred to today or sometime else when a well-known doctor made that statement.

So the Minister sits here under a Cabinet presided over by the Prime Minister presiding over that situation. Where are the priorities of expenditure and focus in this country? Is it on the people's interest or is it on the interest of those few who are running the affairs of the country oblivious of those who sit in government today? Names are coming up more and more and we still await the report regarding the Home Mortgage Bank, which was promised to us some four or five weeks ago, after the transaction was revealed by the Member for Caroni East. I will say more about that.

Let me go back to the Tarouba Stadium. What should we do about it now? Are we going to sit in this Parliament and this Government come here and easily say that the cost has now moved up to \$558 million for Phase I; that there are nine phases to go and that they are going to \$1 billion? I say here today that, in the public interest, we should stop that stadium and put into place, immediately, a Commission of Enquiry to look into those affairs. While we do so, we should design a proper hospital for the San Fernando, Central and South people, so that we can change the priorities of expenditure from the stadium to the hospital that may be required in future. That is the kind of thing that will improve the quality of life of our people.

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My friends, it is a question of priorities of expenditure. There are a lot of demands for different kinds of hospital care. It has been there in the literature, but instead the Minister simply sits back and says that the problem was there before his time and therefore there is nothing he can do about it. Why have him there for six years if he can do nothing about it? My call here today is to change the priorities of expenditure, to stop that project and to introduce a Commission of Enquiry with a forensic investigation because, although I have little to say at this point, information coming to me suggests that there is much to be worried about in the management of that hospital, which was admitted by the man in charge, the head of UDeCOTT, that it was a mistake.

There is a lot at stake here and if this Government is indeed transparent in the conduct of public affairs, particularly with respect to the issue of our money and our country, they must show that transparency in earnest. Transparency is not a public relations gimmick as the Prime Minister is appearing to do. Take the appropriate action, knowing that no results will come, but at least I am cleared from not taking the action. What is important when the Prime Minister takes action is not how he looks, but whether or not the results will be in the public interest. Therefore, this is a classic case of wrong priorities of expenditure that must be addressed and I hope that this country will wake up to the wrong priorities of expenditure.

I need not talk about the others yet. There will be a time when we shall talk about the other tall buildings, but let us leave this at this point because the key issue now is the priorities of expenditure, and I have raised only two examples of it. One is with respect to where the Government is subsidizing in the Chaguaramas Golf Course, but refuses to subsidize the agricultural sector in any way, form or fashion. Instead of building a sugar cane industry in order to create production in this country for so many other things, they are looking to exit their financial commitment from that industry forever, without regard to the country's production or the people's welfare.

So what does the Minister say while handing around some carrots with respect to land? Mr. Speaker, what the people want is income and security for the future, quality of life. Those are the things they want. I will come very specific in terms of the hospital. There is much more to talk about the health report and I hope that this parliamentary agenda will allow us the opportunity to do so, but even if it does not, it will become, as it is, public matters and public concern.

It is in this context, Mr. Speaker, that we have to look fundamentally at restructuring the priorities of expenditure. The time has come when this

expenditure must now be directed from the fancies of those who are running this Government into the interests of the ordinary people of Trinidad and Tobago, which have been listed. These are only two examples in which this has not happened in this \$200 billion expenditure over the last six months.

Beyond that, there are some other issues—and it is time that we get a response—and that has to deal with the Home Mortgage Bank and to the wider issue of transparency in corporate governance in the country. Today, corporate governance includes the private and public sector.

A report done by the Central Bank called *Corporate Governance Guidelines* had this to say, echoing the words:

“The Board also has a duty to ensure transparency by promptly communicating with shareholders any developments that may impact shareholder value, such as:

- 7.4.1 The operations and financial condition of the institution;
- 7.4.2 Significant and material information;
- 7.4.3 Certain proposals for which directors should obtain their approval, such as stock options for directors and changes in the voting rights for classes of shares;
- 7.4.4 All shareholders’ agreements that would influence the investment decisions.”

It goes on, Mr. Speaker. I read that specifically because it contains the particular transaction which was raised in this House.

It is not good enough for the Minister of Finance to say that he has requested reports from a number of the institutions and we still await those reports because we are beginning to wonder whether a cover-up is in the making. We are beginning to wonder because it seems to us that it is a simple transaction that could be properly explained if you put a few people together and 24 hours after come out and explain all the issues at work. If four weeks later you cannot produce that report to this Parliament, you begin to cast doubt as to whether there should be a cover-up.

Further, the Central Bank Governor, now that he has the security of another term, cannot get away by simply giving a report to the Minister of Finance. He owes it to the public of Trinidad and Tobago to issue his own report on this particular matter, in accordance with the guidelines that he has established for corporate governance in the private and public sector as part of his responsibility.

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If we want to maintain the sense of independence of our institutions, he has to do that.

Not only do I call for the report to be placed on this Table right away in order to prevent the charge of cover-up, which may still be there, but also for the governor of the Central Bank to make an independent statement on the issues that took place in the Home Mortgage Bank with respect to the transfer of shares that would appear to me to be contrary to his own guidelines. He has a responsibility to do so in the public interest.

Mr. Speaker, there are other projects that we do not have information on because the big issue now is that this Parliament is not being fed the information itself in order to have very serious discussion on public policy issues. One that has come up recently pertains to Alutrint. To date, we are not aware of the financial arrangements between the Government, the Export/Import Bank of Japan and the Venezuelan company involved. That company, we understand, has an equity shareholding of 40 per cent, but has not put a cent of capital into the project.

What is the arrangement? The Government is taking all the risk because the loan from the Export/Import Bank of Japan is fully supported and guaranteed by the Government itself. That loan is in order of \$400 million.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. W. Dookeran:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Members, but I sense a reluctance to agree.

We have raised that issue in public and asked a number of questions and today, once again, we want to unveil the secrecy of this Government. Our responsibility in Parliament is to open up the information flows to the public, not to close them down, not to do as they are doing with respect to the Freedom of Information Act, where they are now trying to get other bodies that ought to submit to the requirements of that Act to exclude themselves, as you well know.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago has gone to the courts of this land to ask them to agree that they should not comply with that Act. When I listened to the Member for Oropouche today, talking about what he hears is happening there, I get even more concerned. Why is the university afraid of making their affairs

known to the nation? No one should, but certainly not a university and the very public credibility of a university is to have its affairs subject to public security.

Here again, in this particular situation with respect to Alutrint, we have asked a number of questions and I will put them on record. We have asked them before; we have asked them in public; we have had conferences; we have raised it in Parliament, but I want to put it on record because the time would come when this Government will have to account for how these things have been done and what interest is being served by them; whether it is public interest of Trinidad and Tobago or the private interest of those who have captured state power in the name of the people but not using it in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

What guarantee do we have that the toxic material would be disposed of in the USA and what arrangements or movements through the Caribbean have we finalized? What is a source of gas to the power plant? What is the price of gas for the Alutrint deal? What is the price of electricity for the Alutrint deal? How was the IPP selected? Where are the tender documents? What are the marketing arrangements, buyers versus agents? What are the costs of port and other facilities? What are the taxation arrangements in favour of the polluters or are they going to offer relief? Where is the cost benefit analysis? What returns are there to Trinidad and Tobago? What incentives are provided to Alutrint? What is Sural's input to get 40 per cent, a total of US \$540 million.

Of a total of US \$540 million, Trinidad and Tobago is guaranteeing \$400 million. What is the expertise of the company that is building the plant? Euro Alloy was a marketing company established in the United Kingdom. Why was the diligent study on Euro Alloy discontinued? From my understanding, a technical delegation was ready to take the plane to go into New York to do a due diligence on this company which had a major part to play in the disposal of the products worldwide. It was suddenly aborted on the instructions of senior members of the Government who may not be sitting here.

Further, why did the chairman of the Alutrint Company resign at that time? Is the new chairman subject to a conflict of interest at this time? I merely ask. I wait for the Government to respond and then we will either be satisfied or otherwise.

These are some of the questions that remain unanswered in a major other commitment of the Government—\$400 million—so I put the Minister's social policy programme in perspective. I have not been able to get the cost of it and we can talk about whether that is the way to handle it, but I have no doubt that the cost of that would be small in comparison with these kinds of expenditure that the Government is undertaking.

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While he is talking about pension, retired public servants today are faced with the major problem of maintaining the cost of living. I urge them to deal with that issue because I have been advised by many who are affected; those from 58 onwards who have served this country in public duty, and who, today, based on the pension arrangements, cannot meet the cost of living. It has been suggested that we revamp the entire system. We have a plan to develop the entire pension scheme; to have a universal pension scheme to remove all the qualifications they are talking about, which are not to decide who is eligible, but who is not eligible, for political and other purposes.

We need to move into the next generation of ideas on this issue and we cannot, therefore, simply live under a period of secrecy and wrong prescription and come here with the only thing that the Government has at its disposal—money to spend. They do not have the ideas to change the system, nor do they have the will to preserve what is required in a democratic system, which is to provide information forthright to the people on these issues. These are only some of them that have been raised.

It is time, therefore, that we get a full explanation in Parliament, subject to scrutiny. Even the explanations in Parliament we may not believe in light of the explanations that have been given in the past that have not stood the test of accuracy and truth. Even the institution of which we are Members and over which you preside, Mr. Speaker, is now subject to a lack of integrity when we stand here and give answers.

As we said, with respect to the Tarouba Stadium—fixed price contract; as we said with the other projects—fixed price contracts. You say it in Parliament as if it is fait accompli, but you come later and say you made a mistake and it is not so; \$300 million there. This state of affairs cannot continue. We spoke about the procurement policy—I will not speak about that here today. The Prime Minister, said for a long time that they are following a procurement policy based on international standards best practices and, in fact, tabled it in this Parliament.

It was said by the Member for St. Joseph in his contribution, but I think it is worth repeating, that the Prime Minister is now saying that it is difficult to implement the new public procurement regime in its present form. To do so, he explained, could slow down the rate of Government's national development initiatives at a time when the population was clamouring for improved delivery of goods and services. What a lame excuse. Procurement policies that were meant to provide transparency, accountability and value for money are now being delayed in the name of development initiatives. Is that not another way of saying that we



have to hide the expenditure of this Government because the beneficiaries are not necessarily the people of Trinidad and Tobago? It is high time that this Parliament unearths the tomb and sees who are the beneficiaries to all these projects. We take the responsible position. We do not lay the necessary charges. We call for the necessary investigation in order to allay these concerns. This is the responsibility of Parliament.

So often we talk about Parliament playing a watchdog role for good governance, Mr. Speaker. There is an entire set of procedures—the role of Parliament in curbing corruption. This Parliament, it would appear, is not curbing corruption, but is permitting corruption to go unnoticed in Trinidad and Tobago and we have to do something about it. These are the critical issues that must be dealt with when we talk about the Finance Act. We must be able to get proper accountability from the Government. I am saying that they must not get away with these general statements when the facts are definitely working against them.

We have said, and I say it again, in order to strengthen the accountability and the democracy and the independence of this institution called Parliament, the Legislative arm, so that it should not be a tool of the Executive as indeed they are trying to make themselves the tool of the Judiciary. In this Parliament, we must not allow the Executive to make us a tool of their desires. We must have our own accountability to the people.

That is why we called sometime ago for there to be no major contract engaged by this Government without it being tabled in this Parliament for approval or otherwise. That is the only way because we know there are projects and secret deals. They are happening and it is being said all over. We cannot have this kind of public relations approach on the grounds that the people do not care and that this country would forget it the day after.

The price of all that, Mr. Speaker, is that we are not getting the right benefits to our economic fortunes, by virtue of wrong priorities of expenditure, by virtue of not having the right solutions to our social problems and not being able to tackle the problems at their roots. No wonder the Global Peace Index, which is another index to look at the state of peace in countries and that is a wide concept. It was done by the Economics Intelligence Unit, an independent group that has looked at countries from many parts of the world. Peace is not just the absence of war; it is also the absence of violence. It is also the absence of dealing with the country's social problems because it leads and ferments to the situation of social explosion.

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They went on to look at many countries in the world and it is interesting to see, in terms of ranking, a recently published report, which is bringing this together that, once again, as we have seen in the competitive index, as we have seen in the human development index, of which the Minister of Social Development seems oblivious, now we see it again in the Global Peace Index, ranking Trinidad and Tobago below its Caribbean sisters. At this time, the rank is given at 94 out of a total of 171.

So when the Ministers get up and say that the country should be happy that our economic statistics are right, the underlying problems of a deteriorating fiscal situation on our doors; the situation of the lack of accountability by this Government to its own Parliament on its expenditure; the question of having the wrong priorities, so that the people's interests are not being preserved; their tendency to have secret deals and to restrict information from a democratic population or a population that ought to demand it; all these are the evidence of a management of which the hon. Minister should speak about rather than using empty statistics at this stage.

We have no problem with it. We know that the external sector is buoyant and is providing us with revenues that we are using and that we have to use it prudently and in the interest of the country, but we cannot sit here and simply accept that the finance situation is working. It is time that we start to move and end for all time the area of corruption in this country. It is time that we make this Parliament truly accountable and restore the democracy of which this Parliament is a part. It is time that the Government gets their priorities right, but it is no longer real to ask them to do it.

Mr. Manning and his Cabinet cannot change. The country has to change them. That is how I see the situation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, just before we took the tea break, I had indicated to all Members to return to the Chamber promptly at 5.00 p.m. I am warning all Members, particularly the Whips, that on the next occasion, the Standing Orders do provide that when Members are summoned, after 10 minutes, the Speaker can adjourn the House without the question being put, and I intend to do just that.

It is a great discourtesy to this House and to the Chair, to have Members who are told to come back here promptly at 5.00 p.m., and those Members come after 5.00 p.m. I cannot tell you how disappointed I am in those Members who did not see it fit to be here at 5.00 p.m.

It is most obvious that the Opposition Front Bench is totally void of a Member. Well, that is a matter not for me to comment on, other than say that it is a great disappointment for me to see not one single Opposition front-bencher here for the resumption of the sitting after the tea break.

To say to Members that it is a grave discourtesy to this House is to put it mildly. I seem to be lost for words, so I would control my anger at this point in time.

I am warning the Leader of Government Business; in his absence, the Chief Whip and the Acting Whip. When you have time you should inform your Whip that on the next occasion this House will be adjourned if Members are not present.

**The Minister in the Ministry of National Security and Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very warmly, Mr. Speaker. May I—apart from indicating that I was here before the appointed time at 5.00 p.m., for the record, on the part of all Members of this House who have caused such great offense to cause this Speaker to have been lost for words, at least for a moment—render on our behalf, a very humble and sincere apology to you and to this country.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a contribution to support the Minister in the Ministry of Finance in the debate on a Bill to provide for the imposition or variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce other provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters thereto.

This Bill obviously has to do with taxes; the raising of them by the Government. It has to do with income, because taxes are a large part of Government's income. It has to do with expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, I want, before I get into the substance of this, very briefly, to speak to a point raised by the Member for St. Augustine. He was calling for accountability. He said what the country needs is more accountability. I merely want to remind the Member for St. Augustine—a long standing Member of this House, the leader of a political party—that based on current practices, conventions, the Constitution, the laws and the Standing Orders of this House, there is a whole regime of accountability by the Government, for all that it does. If anyone was listening to the Member for

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St. Augustine, without the kind of information that he has, they would have come to the conclusion that there is no opportunity for the Government to account for its stewardship in all matters in this country, and particularly in this place.

Let me just remind the Member and, perhaps, for the benefit of those whom he wilfully attempted to mislead, that the Parliament itself is a forum for accountability and within this Parliament, he knows full well that we have a number of Motions and Private Members' Day, where Members on the other side can raise Motions for debate. We have joint select committees of Parliament; approximately six of them. We have Motions on the Adjournment and requests for leave to move the adjournment on definite matters of urgent public importance.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Would the Member give way?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** We have interventions like the one the acting Whip is attempting to make at this time, for clarification on matters.

Mr. Speaker, I was about to develop that and other points, but for the moment I will give way to my Chief Whip, the Member for Diego Martin Central. Mr. Speaker, I shall take my seat. Much obliged.

Thank you very much.

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the Front Bench Opposition has nothing further to contribute to this debate. As you know, the Government has come to put into effect the promises made in the budget statement of 2007, relating to a number of areas and, obviously, by their absence, they have agreed with these matters.

Simply, I wish to clarify one area with respect to the gaming industry. Amendments have been circulated. You would note that with respect to that industry, we have said that section would come into effect by proclamation, because the Government has agreed to meet with the industry and to put a retraining programme in place. And, therefore, after that is done, then the provision of this Finance Bill will take effect.

Other than that, I wish Members to note the implementation of the promises made by the Government in this Finance Bill that is going to redound to the benefit of all sectors of society, especially our senior citizens.

Therefore, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

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*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.*

*House in committee.*

*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 circulated:

Clause 3 (c)	Delete clause (c) and substitute the following:
	(c) in section 8(1), by deleting the words “one-tenth of the total salary received during his period of service as a legislator” and substituting the words “one-fifth of an amount calculated over his period of service as a legislator at the highest annual rate of basic salary payable at any time to that person”.
Clause 3(d)(i)	Delete the word “subsection” in the second place where it occurs and substitute the word “subsections”; Delete sub-paragraph (c); and Insert after subsection (1) the following new subsection:
	“(1A) Notwithstanding subsection 5, where a legislator dies during the course of duty and leaves a surviving spouse, there shall be paid to the surviving spouse during that person’s lifetime and while unmarried, the allowance that the surviving spouse would have received had the legislator satisfied the requirements of section 5 for the award of a retiring allowance.”
Clause 3(d)(v)	In the newly inserted section (5), by deleting the word “under” and substituting the words “in relation to”.
New clause 3(e)	Insert after clause 3(d) the following new sub-clause:

	<p>“(e) in section 10—</p> <p>(i) in subsection 3, deleting the word ‘widow’ and substituting the word ‘surviving spouse’; and</p> <p>(ii) in subsection (4), by deleting the word ‘widow’ wherever it occurs and substituting in each place where it occurs the words ‘surviving spouse’.”</p>
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*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.*

*Clause 5.*

*Question proposed, That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 3 be amended as circulated:

Clause 5	Renumber clause 5 as clause 5(1) and insert after clause 5(1)(b) as renumbered, the following new sub-clause:
	“(2) This section shall come into force on a date to be fixed by the President by Proclamation.”

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 6 to 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 16.*

*Question proposed, That clause 16 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Chairman, an amendment has been circulated but we want to amend it further:

Clause 16(1)(c)	“In relation to the new section 10(9) of the Income Tax Act, delete the words ‘of Education’ occurring after the words ‘the Ministry’ and substitute the words ‘with responsibility for science technology and tertiary education.’”
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After the words “with responsibility for”, delete the words “science, technology and”.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 16, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 17 to 19 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 20.*

*Question proposed, That clause 20 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 20 be amended as circulated:

Clause 20(d)	Insert after subparagraph (d), the following new subparagraph:
	<p>“(e) in section 246—</p> <p>(i) by deleting the word ‘summarily’ and substituting the words ‘either summarily or in the High Court’;</p> <p>(ii) by inserting after the words ‘Summary Courts Act’ the words ‘or under the Supreme Court of Judicature Act as may be applicable’.”</p>

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 20, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 21.*

*Question proposed, That clause 21 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 21 be amended as circulated:

Clause 21(b)	Delete the new section 32 of the Fiscal Incentives Act and substitute the following section:
Application of Act	<p>“32. The benefits under section 5(1)(a)(i) shall apply only to an approved enterprise which made an application for the grant of the status of an approved enterprise on or before 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2006 and was granted such benefits prior to 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2008.”</p>

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 21, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 22 to 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 25.*

*Question proposed, That clause 25 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 25 be amended as circulated:

Clause 25(2)	Delete the words “4 to 15” occurring in the first column and substitute the words “4, 6 to 15”.
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**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** If I may, Sir. When you amend clause 25, what you are doing now is that you would have changed clause 5. I know what you have done with clause 5, so I am not asking to revisit clause 5. This, in effect, means that the workers in the casino, the slot machines, and so on, will not be ruled illegal. You are going to proclaim this at some later point in time.

Can we have some indication as to when this may be? It states: “on a date to be proclaimed”, but do we have—with the others you have given January 01, 2007 for some provisions. This, you are saying, is on a date to be proclaimed. Can we say when that may be?

**Mr. Valley:** No.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:**—and what that will be.

**Mr. Valley:** Not at this time because we have certain commitments to meet and we do not know how quickly we will be able to do that.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Can I get some idea of what these commitments are?

**Mr. Valley:** As I said in my winding up of the debate when you were not here, I made the point that the Government has a commitment with the industry to provide for some retraining, similar to what we have done with Caroni (1975) Limited and prepare the workers to transit out of the industry. Subsequent to that, we would be proclaiming this.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** We can take that as an undertaking that you will not proclaim until you have dealt with the workers in the industry?

**Mr. Valley:** That is right. That is the undertaking.



**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** You give that undertaking on the *Hansard* record?

**Mr. Valley:** That is right. We are giving that undertaking.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Very well. We got it in black and white.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 25, as amended, 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 do now adjourn to Friday, June 15, 2007, at 1.30 p.m. I want to remind Members that the Government plans, on that day, to debate the Bail Bill.

I beg to move.

**Mr. Speaker:** There are some Motions on the Adjournment but I understand that there is an agreement to defer those matters.

**Hon. Members:** We are ready.

**Mr. Speaker:** One member is here. The Motion on the Adjournment by the Member for Chaguanas is deferred to Friday.

**Mr. Valley:** There is one from the Member for Caroni East and Caroni Central.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 5.26 p.m.*