

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, July 09, 2007*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I, beg to move that the House consider Bill No. 1, the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill on the Order Paper before dealing with the Motion.

*Agreed to.***MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL***Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine):** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, one may wonder why I am here to present this Bill this afternoon, but I am acting as the Minister of Local Government, so it is in my portfolio to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

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

This Bill entitled an Act to amend the Municipal Corporations Act of 1990 is simply asking for an extension of time for the Local Government Authority. It is stated here:

“...Notwithstanding subsection (1D) for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2007, the term of officer of the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors holding office in a Corporation on the 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2007, is hereby extended for a period of one year from the date of expiration of such term.

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

The extension of time for the Local Government Authority at this time is different to what we did on the last occasion. On the last occasion, we had to re-elect

mayors, chairmen, and aldermen. On this occasion, we felt that for continuity, that the mayors, chairmen and aldermen should remain in place as is, so that you would not have the problem of getting rid of your mayor from Chaguanas.

**Mr. Sharma:** Did you consult?

**Hon. J. Narine:** Certainly, this is an extension with a difference. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. J. Narine:** The reason for having this extension is that the Local Government Authority has embarked on an exercise of reforming the Local Government Authority. And the Local Government Authority reform is in the context of Vision 2020, and there is a change towards regional development and sustainable communities with emphasis on decentralization for local government; the system and promotion of greater citizen participation in local government.

For years, way back as 1962, the Sinanan Commission and many others followed in its footsteps to reform local government. As a matter of fact, three governments had asked for extension of time of local government. I was a councillor at the time in St. George East County Council, when we had this situation of a transition team between 1990 and 1991. It worked well because at that time we asked that a team of persons be placed together to reform the local government system and so became Act No. 21 of 1990.

**Mr. Sharma:** Could you give way, please. I see the Minister is here. It is not parliamentary practice to have the real Minister here and to have an acting Minister. The Parliament does not allow that.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Minister started the presentation and he has to continue.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At that time Act No. 21 of 1990 indicated certain areas that local government should try to reform and try in its utmost, to get productivity and efficiency within the local government system. I am very much aware of the delays that reforming the local government system has taken, but it is—

**Mr. Sharma:** Blame the UNC for that.

**Hon. J. Narine:** We are not blaming any political organization, but what you should have done you did not do and we are now about to do it. It will take a little time to have this system in place. The Minister of Local Government had consultation throughout Trinidad, because the Tobago House of Assembly Act, which from time to time will need to be upgraded and amended so as to soothe the system that we are in.

I remember one of the key issues in local government is funding, even in this system where we are trying to get the local government bodies to do the collection of taxes and to collect revenues for houses, land rates and so on, is that this part will be played by the Local Government Authority in order to make sense of the funding. Of course, the funding is in place that Central Government does make those fundings available, and from time to time some of the funding that should go to the local government on time would not have reach.

So, what we did at that time—and I think it was the UNC government who followed up on it—we changed the financial year from January to December to October. The reason for that was that for the first three months of the fiscal year that funding would be there. The planning would take place and as soon as January came around that funding would be made available to those corporations.

The reason for that is that most of the infrastructure that needs to be taken care of by the Local Government Authority will start in the dry season, because we have found doing work in the rainy season or the wet season—as some will call it—always had a problem with infrastructural changes that may take place; in that it cost more money; it takes more time and there are difficult situations in which to work; for instance, if you have to build a bridge or so.

The analysis of the present situation is that a number of persons in the local communities have tried their best to make sure that they have a say in local government. Rightfully so, the Local Government Authority do have discussions with their community groups within their area. Having been a councillor for eight years, I can tell you that, one, in smaller areas local government councillors, aldermen, mayors and chairmen do work. But in keeping with that system that we would like to put in place; to keep consulting with the local communities for their priorities and for their making decisions on behalf of their areas, especially in rural communities, where we would want to have the infrastructure in place to put those people in a situation where they have a say in local government, that is part of the system that we would like to have.

Funding is very important and whether the funding comes from central government or that the corporations are allowed to raise part of that funding for themselves, it means that the reform of local government is very important for that, because without funding you are looking at infrastructure development. You will also look at equipment for local government; you are looking for a system that, like the House of Assembly, will be able to make their own decisions; and decentralizing local government. Decentralizing local government means that each corporation will be able to do so.

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We had a problem on the last occasion when the local government reform was taking place; they had 18 regional corporations in 1991 when we took office. In 1992, we reformed that to 14 regional corporations, and what we found even in that system of 14 regional corporations, some of the geographical areas were not in sync and in keeping with local government reform.

For instance, the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite Regional Corporation is so far and wide that from Couva where the head is—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. J. Narine:** —someone from San Raphael or Brazil or Talparo will have to go to Chaguanas to get something done. Of course, the intention was to have sub offices in these areas, which never materialized, but certainly, Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite is one of those corporations that services a wide area. The population probably may be the same as Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation or the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, but I can tell you where it is that, take for instance, the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, which is a smaller area, with a high population, it is easier for any corporation to work within that area, as against Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite, where you have land mass for miles that are not populated. They are agricultural districts and it is difficult for people to get from one area to another.

Apart from that, we are looking at the political side of it, where it would be equitable or equally distributed, as we have it today. Once you have the distribution of funds and other amenities that will be given to local government, it will be a case of the Local Government Authority working side by side with the Members of Parliament to deliver to the people in those areas.

What we need to look at is the structure of local government, which we have had discussions on; the method of financing, which I have already spoken of and the human resource. We have a situation in local government where, like the health system, the SASC is representing part of the workforce, where the PSA is representing another part and you have the daily paid workers represented by NUGFW. So, you have a situation where we need to regularize that workforce between the SASC and the PSA, because it is situation where the SASC has different regulations and so on than the public service.

We also have to do legislative reform because while we are going to modernize the local government system, and give the local government system more autonomy, then the legislation must come into place. The infrastructure and service delivery; I think that local government has to adjust about 42 different

areas within the corporation. As a matter of fact, from garbage collection to the cemeteries, they have to be in charge of all these areas.

Of course, there is a system that can take place and it will in the future; that you would have a roads authority, so that all roads in Trinidad will fall under that roads authority just like the Water and Sewerage Authority. But in the meantime, we need to find some way where the infrastructure development at local government level can take rapid pace in doing drainage, proper roads and all the other infrastructure that need to be done within those areas.

I have already spoken about the community involvement and citizen participation. We have had numerous exercises between the citizens and local government. As a matter of fact, two years ago we had a large symposium at Macoya, which was run by TTCAN. And coming out of that, the village councils and all the other entities from the villages were represented and they have their way forward. They would like to have representation on the Local Government Authority. And as we are saying, the Local Government Authority must also have some participation in Parliament so that they can bring their problems to Parliament. How we deal with that in the future depends on the draft that we have and how people accept that.

I spoke about the local government boundaries. Unemployment and underemployment in local government; we need to train the workers. We need to retrain them; they need to be effective and productive. There are certain parts of local government that are very difficult to get to and sometimes you have workers who live long distances away. I think we need to restructure that system.

We also have to be very mindful about the environment, in that local government is most suited to take care of the local environment. As a matter of fact, we are deforesting areas in Trinidad and they must monitor these systems. While you have other ministries monitoring this, I think local government representatives are the ones, rightfully so, to help in this situation. Technology, communication and public awareness have been vented for the longest while and the role of the association on local government. The association on local government is a necessary body, where representatives from all 14 regions will get together and try to formulate the plans that you have for local government.

So, Mr. Speaker, this Bill which is simply asking for extension of the municipal corporations—and that is all 14 corporations—for one year is in keeping with our reform for local government.

I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I listened to the hon. Member for Arouca North, who purports to speak on behalf of the hon. Minister of Local Government—he indicated to this House that he is acting, but I see that the Minister is now here, so I guess in his winding up he would grace us with his thoughts on this entire process. But listening to him, there was a sense of déjà vu, because many of the things that the hon. Member for Arouca North told us, were in fact reasons that were pontificated on the last occasion when we came to this honourable House to extend the life of the local government bodies. This Bill, in our view, represents an erosion of the fundamental pillars of representative democracy. It is tied up with issues of representation. It is tied up with the rights of citizens to choose their government representatives. Indeed, it usurps the right of the citizen to recall their representatives.

Mr. Speaker, in recent times there has been a lot of talk about constitution reform as a whole and the right of citizens to have a recall of their Members of Parliament or the local government representatives, when they are not performing as they should. In our legislative framework, we do not have recall options prior to the expiration of the life of a local government body or the life of a Parliament. But what the citizens do have is that right of recall at the end of the life of local government, which is this government body, which is to say for three years.

So, what this Bill does is to further undermine that right of recall of a citizen in a democratic state that operates on representative and participatory democracy. That is the right that is being further eroded today; eroded for the second time within the last two years. Whether it is at the national level or local level, elections are ultimately about the right of citizens to choose who will hold office on their behalf; in whom they will entrust; the governance; whether it be local governance; whether it be national governance. At the national level and equally at the local level, it is at a time in this country when citizens feel betrayed by what is happening when we look at governance in the society as a whole.

So, we have seen over the years, whether it be at the national or local level, the governance pattern; the governance modus operandi of the prevailing government, and that is to say that this Government has continued to put its selfish motives above and beyond the wishes and the needs of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have seen just over this weekend the headline that today's *Guardian* carries for us what has been the pattern since this Government took office. Today, in looking at the governance structure and what we are trying to do is to extend

the life of these local government bodies, we are taking the rights of the citizens to recall representatives. We are doing it in a context when there is a blood bath in the country. I look at the *Guardian* of Monday, July 09, 2007:

"Gunmen go ballistic. Six shot dead in 24-hour period."

This is the context in which we are operating. This is the context in which this Government comes to this House and asks for a rubber stamp in order for their representatives, the UNC representatives and the local government representatives to continue in office for yet another year.

We would come to the reasons that have been advocated so far. The front page of the *Newsday*:

"Murders rock Arima, Belmont, Aranguez. Six gunned down."

This is the context in which we are operating. In the *Express*:

"10 shot in eighteen-hour bloodbath. Six Murders."

in the front page of every newspaper is symbolic of what has been happening under this particular Government. So, we have seen in the six years that this Government has been in office, from 2002 to the present, 1,576 murders have been committed. There have been approximately 70,000 serious crimes committed from 2003 to the present. This year 161 murders, and we are still counting, as we are halfway through the year.

It is in this context that the Government asks for a rubber stamp to continue with its programmes and its policies; to continue with its broken promises, because we come to reason for asking this Parliament to extend the life of local government bodies. You see policies by this Government: determined to build smelters against the wishes of the community; building billion dollar stadiums without justification; shutting down the Members' clubs, dislocating 7,000 people. Thousands of other workers dislocated in BWIA; in TTT. We see eviction of poor people in Bagatelle and in other areas to make way for Government house-padding project or for high rise, high cost construction, with no care for the poor who have been living in these areas from time immemorial. Certainly their families were born there; brought up there; they have grown there and they are being heartlessly evicted. This is the context in which we are looking to extend the life of local government bodies.

So, we see all of these things are being done without any kind of meaningful consultation. We are of the view that this Bill represents an abuse of law; it is an assault on parliamentary democracy; on representative democracy; it demonstrates the

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fact that Government is about the business of depriving the population of its rights; violating the tenets of everything that constitutes good and effective government.

Above all, the Minister came to this House one year ago and begged this House for an extension of the life of the very councils that we are looking at now. And at that time he hid behind the fig leaf of local government reform and today, when I say déjà vu, the hon. Member for Arouca North, in acting for the hon. Minister, comes and gives us the very same reason one year later, when we would have expected the process as being completed, we see in the newspapers and we hear the Minister broadcasting that they are now going to engage in consultation. And I see it here, *Sunday Express*, July 08, 2007, page 33:

"Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ministry of Local Government. Local Government Reform Rolls Into Your Village.

The Ministry of Local Government announces the start of its Nationwide Community Consultations on the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform."

Mr. Speaker, one year later, the reason we were here last year, around the same time, extending the life of the council, was for this reform exercise. One year later, on the eve of the Bill being debated in the Parliament, we are being told that we are now going into roll-on or roll-off consultation, something of the sort. Is it roll-on or roll-off? [*Crosstalk*] Roll-on, roll-off. Roll-out.

**Sen. Dumas:** Roll over.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Roll-over. Well all of it means exactly the same; roll-on, roll-off, roll-over, roll-out; it all means exactly the same thing. They have done absolutely nothing and they are rolling over the same idea of local government reform as the excuse for once again postponing local government elections.

So, when we look at this and we hear the Minister, we are of the view you knew; they knew long before today. They knew that we were not going to be holding these local government elections. They knew that they would need to extend the life of the local government council once again; they knew that. And yet at the 11th hour—today is July 09, these councils expire on July 13—you pull out the Parliament in all its paraphernalia; we come here now to rush this through.

Again, always no planning on the part of the Government. I am sure the hon. Minister knew that he would have to come here and extend the life of these

councils. Why did they railroad you, hon. Minister, through you, at this last moment today? And you know what would happen? The Senate is sitting tomorrow, but this is not on the Order Paper. So that on Wednesday you are going to trot out the Senate, bring out the entire Parliament Chamber once again for the Senate to sit and pass this Bill. Why could you not have done it—we were here last week; we were here several times in the past several weeks. So, we come again on Friday; this is dropped upon on us; say, “eh come out on Monday; this thing is very, very important”; it arises suddenly.

This is not the first time we have seen that; we saw it with the Bail (Amdt.) Bill; always at the last moment. The Government comes at the last moment to say we must do this expeditiously; we must hurry through and do this. And whilst we are doing all of that there are very many important other matters on the Order Paper each time we leapfrog one of these pieces of legislation, because you have not planned properly, other important matters that are on the agenda keep being left behind, and I will give you some examples.

**2.00 p.m.**

You have the Criminal Injuries Compensation Bill, which—you agreed was part of the package, has been in the Senate, they started the debate weeks ago—has not been completed. The Supreme Court of Judicature (Amdt.) Bill, which you brought from, when was it, last year January or this year January—

**Mr. Panday:** Three years it was there.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—and put it on the Order Paper; lapsed, when the Judiciary is crying out that they need more judges, they need more magistrates. There are very vital issues for the administration of justice. There are very vital issues to deal with crime. I mean, look at every single headline today, every single one, every single front page is dealing with the issue of crime.

**Mr. Valley:** Will you give way? Am I lucky today? Thank you very much, Member for Siparia. Mr. Speaker, there are six Bills on this Order Paper.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Apologize and sit.

**Mr. Valley:** There is no Criminal Injuries Compensation Bill on this Order Paper. Mr. Speaker, I would let the Member know also, as a fact, that we have been meeting regularly, sometimes even midweek to try to complete the agenda, because I am aware that Members would want some type of recess, and the sitting on Monday does not interfere with the ordinary agenda; as you know we sit on Fridays—

**Mr. Ramnath:** We do not want to hear you, sit down.

**Mr. Valley:**—so, that it is incorrect for the Member to say that our doing this Bill today is leapfrogging and interfering with other matters on the agenda. *[Interruption]*

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The platitudes do not convince me, with due respect. I am totally unconvinced with your platitudes. Indeed we started debate on the Homes for Older Persons Bill, we postponed it in the wee hours of one morning. Friday into Saturday we were here till 3.00 a.m. We postponed it last week Friday—*[Interruption]* but you just said that today was not interfering with anybody's business.

**Mr. Valley:** No, it is not.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The Homes for Older Persons Bill is on the Order Paper; you have leapfrogged this in front of that, so you are not being honest, hon. Member, you have leapedfrogged this before that; you have leapfrogged it before all the other matters that have been on this Order Paper: an Act to amend the Law Reform Act, an Act to provide for payment of Emoluments for certain Members of the House.

**Mr. Valley:** I shall speak.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Certainly, that is your democratic right. *[Interruption]* That is your right to speak in this Chamber. *[Interruption]*

So, we are here because of the failure of Government, once again to plan its business as it should, because they knew all along that they would have to come here, long ago, from the time the Prime Minister announced to the nation that he could not hold two elections in one year. He made that announcement long before. *[Interruption]* They knew that they would not be doing elections when they could have come here, long before this to get this done, instead of on the brink; it is like brinksmanship always we are operating. Do you remember the Cricket World Cup legislation that we passed; the API (Advanced Passenger Information) legislation. Same thing! Brinksmanship, I think the cricket had actually started when we were in this Parliament dealing with it. Always brinksmanship on the part of the Government.

And so we come, Mr. Speaker, last year local government elections were due 12 months ago. One year ago then, that was 12 months ago, the terms of the persons who were serving as councillors, aldermen, chairmen, mayors, committee chairpersons and so on, their term of office expired one year ago, July 13, 2006.

Those persons had been elected, initially, for three years. They were required to go back to the polls and the public would have a say whether they had performed to the standards that were expected. But Government doing as it was, even as miserably as it was doing then, obviously, was of the view that it would be political suicide to go to the polls at that time. They knew they would be rejected with the general election due and impending, and they did not want to take that rejection by the masses, so they did not call a local election. They postponed it, and so, here we are again. Then they jumped on a platform of local government reform, addressing this House on July 05, 2006 the hon. Minister of Local Government, in piloting that Bill to extend the life had this to say, and I quote:

“The proposals of this legislation speak to the urgency of reform measures and the need to schedule the programmes in the furtherance of the process of local government reform.”

The legislation speaks to the urgency of reform, and the need to schedule the programmes in the furtherance of the process of local government reform. In describing the problems then, that caused local government not to deliver at the desired rate, the Minister said, the reform is urgent, and that word urgent in its ordinary meaning, is that the reform exercise would begin almost immediately. One year later, we all know, nothing has happened. In fact, the Minister in piloting the Bill—and if this is not so, I am prepared to give way and allow you to tell us,—said nothing in terms of what had happened with that reform agenda from when you asked for the time last year July to this year July. [*Interruption*] What steps had been taken? Nothing has been said, and in piloting the Bill I thought that would have been very important, where you were coming to ask the Parliament to extend the time for a further year, that you would say, look, in this year that the Parliament granted, we have done one, two, three, four and five.

**Mr. Narine:** Could the hon. Member give way?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I will give way.

**Mr. Narine:** Thank you very much for giving way, Member for Siparia. In piloting the Bill I did say that we have done a lot of exercises within the community, we have consulted with all the groups and we are still doing that. But the reform has to take place in consultation with the people of Trinidad and Tobago and this is what we are doing. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I thank the hon. Member for elucidating in terms of what has been done so far. Mr. Speaker, without being disrespectful to the hon.

Member, perhaps his Minister might tell us a little more about what has actually happened, but I thank him for trying to tell us what happened. But do you know, if he said he had been meeting groups in the community and they have been talking and so on, then it is passing strange that here it is, we have advertisements for 356 consultations in the period of one month, two months or so.

So all that talk you were doing was just old talk. [*Interruption*] Total old talk, because you did not have any consultative exercise, and I will come to that, because there was an attempt to consult with Members of the Opposition as well, and I will talk about that in a short moment, but I want to go back.

The Minister, then, in piloting that Bill and in winding up, went to a great extent to make it sound that a lot had happened to take the local government reform exercise forward. You remember, this White Paper had been out there for quite some time, the Ministry of Local Government Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform. So this is not new and of course it is not new for this Government, it has been around for a while, the whole issue of reforming the local government process. The Minister then, gave the impression that a lot had been done in the reform exercise, but if you examine the way in which the corporations function, the problems that existed, whether because of poor structure or access and use of resources, today, one year later, with due respect, nothing has changed. [*Interruption*]

One year ago on the same issue, Mr. Speaker, let us find out what the hon. Minister told us had to be done. The Minister pointed out the unsatisfactory features in the operation of local government and I quote: “These were the things the Minister said needed to be fixed urgently:

1. The corporate structure and establishment including the governance structure of the councils;
2. the absence of the required professional and administrative staff;
3. the absence of sufficiently defined parameters for establishing a mutually beneficial partnership relationship between central and local government;
4. service delivery is generally under what the public perceives to be satisfactory;
5. the almost total dependence on central government subventions;
6. the fact that operational performance in terms of value for money expended needs to be improved beyond the current levels;

7. citizens participation, involvement and awareness of local government affairs are not at the desired standards;
8. the current boundary demarcations do not facilitate effective administrative co-ordination between central and local government, effective service delivery and the promotion of regional planning and the growth of sustainable communities; and
9. certain aspects of the current legislation are ambiguous and do not facilitate easy dispute resolution and clarity of policy.”

Nine urgent areas that needed to be looked at and needed to be addressed by way of reform.

Mr. Speaker, today, one year later, of these nine urgent matters, the Minister has not improved in a single area. Not a single area has been dealt with, out of the nine urgent matters that the hon. Minister came to us last year to say, listen, I need one more year, I have all these urgent matters to address, so I am going to extend it for one year. And so, when we look at the absence of professional administrative staff, the total dependence on government for subventions, the current boundary demarcations, all of those have remained the same; it is the same thing that is happening. All that has happened is they have dusted off this White Paper now, and the hon. Member for Arouca North did lift up the White Paper, dust off this White Paper and now they are calling for open consultations.

Nothing has been done to deal with the corporate governance structure. Nothing has been done to get more professional staff into the system to improve the efficiency of local government bodies, and the only distancing that has taken place between central and local government is the alienation of the regional corporations which have been sidelined, under-funded, their roles and responsibilities are being undermined and put in the hands of PNM hacks parading as entrepreneurs.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the Minister deceived this House and the people when he claimed that he was serious about local government reform. In fact, comments were made that created the expectation that the process would have been completed to facilitate the elections within the year of the extension. Citizens were asked to tolerate their current representatives for an additional 12 months and all things being even, that may not have been so bad after all. But when you come again and you have no good reason; no valid reason, except to say that if the election is called now the PNM will lose, then it is an abuse on the public. You have crossed the line, you have overstayed that welcome one year later and you have failed to call those elections. The proof that nothing has happened lies in a discussion with officials of the Ministry of Local Government who visited our

offices, met with myself and other Members of the Opposition to introduce a Jamaican consultant in what they said was an exercise in consultation. Part of the local government reform agenda.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, [*Interruption*] the consultant, Mr. Trevor Hamilton revealed that he got a four-month contract which started in May 2007 and was working towards the end of July for having the necessary legislation drafted. This is to facilitate the reform exercise. So, Mr. Hamilton, when they met with us, said that they got a contract in May 2007. If it is that you were into this reform exercise how come this gentleman was only recruited in May 2007? He was working towards the end of July, we are in the second week of July, we met him in the third week of June for the first time, and then he tells us about where he had worked, what he had done elsewhere, and that the purpose of our meeting was to get our input for their assignment.

Now, we were hearing about him and meeting him for the first time. Neither the ministry nor the consultant forwarded some kind of brief to us to say, look, this is what we are about, we want your input, we want to hear your suggestions; read this, let us know what your comments are, so when we meet, we will have some points in which we can start this very urgent and urgently overdue local government exercise. The ministry and their foreign consultant came to meet with the Opposition to discuss local government reform; they came with their hands swinging. They seemed to be of the view—because time was limited, because they were planning to do all their studies, meetings, et cetera and draft the legislation in two months—that we could have consultations over a half hour period. So they sent no material, they came with their hands swinging, when we asked them what they were doing, we were advised by one of them to go on the Internet and read what Mr. Hamilton has done, elsewhere—

**Mr. Ramnath:** “They rude, boy.”

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—and then they had somewhere else to go, so they could not stay with us to talk.

Mr. Speaker, that is clearly a misunderstanding of what consultation is about in terms of meeting with stakeholders. We had some basic discussions about what Mr. Hamilton is trying to do; we expressed our support for the process. We told him that we have a large volume of research on the matter, we would be willing to share with him in the interest of the country, and if he was genuinely interested in our views, we would be willing to meet with him again, sooner than later, because he was talking about completing this legislation, not this Bill, but draft reform legislation before the end of July, and we would be happy to meet with him again.

He explained that the schedule is a very hectic one; he would be out of the country and so on. He would return in about two weeks and they would see if they could fit us in.

We held discussions through the staff of the Office of the Leader of the Opposition and personnel of the ministry to set up a meeting for last week. I believe that meeting was fixed for Thursday of last week.

**Mr. Sharma:** Wednesday and Thursday.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Initially it was for Wednesday and then it was rescheduled to Thursday. On Wednesday afternoon my staff called to find out if this consultation was on. They could not give us—they said they would check and let us know. They never called us back and it was persistent calls on the part of my office staff that we were told that the meeting would be cancelled.

**Mr. Sharma:** No, rescheduled.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Well, rescheduled; it was cancelled.

**Mr. Sharma:** Rescheduled to Thursday.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No, it was cancelled. The meeting will be cancelled, postponed. But then what, we are at the end of July, his contract said by the end of July he would have draft legislation dealing with local government reform. [*Interruption*] And surely we need to see that legislation, if the Minister is talking about his 353 or 363 consultations and so on. Clearly, the local government practitioners of the UNC and the Opposition Members of Parliament of the UNC are important stakeholders in that exercise.

So, again, that reform exercise to do the draft legislation for the end of July obviously is not going to happen. Another set of promises broken, Mr. Speaker.

And, so, we now see the extensive consultations to get the input of the national community as a whole. This is an important exercise, it requires discussion with the people in the communities, and then Government knows what is best so they can do this in that short time frame.

Mr. Speaker, there is a White Paper, we have talked about, the Minister has it, everybody has this White Paper and the consultants are now gathering information. At the pace at which this Government works, we are a very long way from seeing this reform take place. We keep postponing elections; we are waiting for this reform that may never come. So, to come today to say that I am postponing the local government elections, because I want to do this local government reform, that is no longer a valid

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reason. That can no longer be a valid reason, and indeed, there is absolutely no reason why you need to postpone local government elections in order to do a process of reform, because in effect, what you are doing is continuing what is taking place. You are continuing with the arrangements that are in place, and whenever the reform comes, you will put those reforms in place.

So why do you wait on reforms that are not coming or keep being extended and keep extending? Why are you doing that, denying citizens the right of recall, in terms of voting in their local government elections? Why? One year ago, reform, one year later, reform. Let us face the truth. The truth is obviously you do not want to face local government elections at this point in time because of the state of the country; the crisis in the country, the crime rate, [*Interruption*] the food prices, the disgust [*Interruption*] and the protests that are taking place; you are afraid of calling local government elections.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is right!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Why do you not be honest and tell us that? Everyone in the country knows that, any reasonable person, right-thinking citizen understands that out there in the country. [*Interruption*] With each day when you pick up these newspapers, pick up the *Guardian*, “Six gunned down,” “Gunmen go ballistic, six shot dead in 24 hours,” “Six murders, 10 shot in 18 hour bloodbath”. You do not want an election now. You are burying your heads in the sand and hoping that it would go away; that when you lift it back out of the sand all of this would go away, and you would blow it away with the money out of the Treasury as your vote bait; you vote pad and do everything that you can to buy the votes for the next election.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You cannot make any more deals, you are bowling them out of their bat.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** You want another budget. You want to call another budget. You postpone elections, you want to call another budget so you can fill your pockets and you can go out there to attempt to buy votes. That is not going to work again. Mr. Speaker, that will not work again. [*Interruption*] It may have worked when you bullied your way in 2001 and 2002. The electorate is a more sophisticated electorate, a more educated population who is totally fed up of what this Government has been doing, and so it is not going to work again; postpone it now then; it is not going to work.

Let us look at the real reason then, given by none other than the hon. Prime Minister, himself. So, while the Minister is in this Parliament, both Ministers,

pontificating that we are postponing this because we want to do local government reform and we know nothing about what is taking place, anyhow; the real boss, the hon. Prime Minister gives us this reason why the hon. Minister will not name the date for local government election. The *Newsday* of April 15, 2007 reporting on the statements of the Prime Minister at a small meeting at the Canaan Presbyterian School, carried an article headlined: "Manning: Only one election this year", and I quote from that *Newsday*:

"Declaring that two national elections would confuse the population, Prime Minister Patrick Manning has stated that Government would seek the postponement of the Local Government elections, which is constitutionally due by July, when Parliament is officially reconvened following the determination of the Couva North seat.

Manning said with both Local and General Elections in the air, the population could become 'confused' by the issues surrounding both campaigns saying the ideal option would be to concentrate on only one election.

It would be unwise to hold two elections at the same time and with Local Government elections due by July this year, the Government will have to consider postponing Local Government elections and concentrate on National General Elections, he said.

And so we intend to approach Parliament to treat with this issue and not confuse the electorate with two many issues. He said."

This was April 15, 2007.

So, from then you knew, as I said earlier that you were coming to postpone, the Prime Minister said we must approach Parliament to treat with this issue and not confuse the electorate.

Mr. Speaker, what arrogance this is! What utter disrespect this is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago! The Prime Minister was out of line to make a statement like that. In the same way he makes a public apology, he called people protesting against the smelter, he said they are dotish people, he said people who get murdered and shot are collateral damage. All kinds of statements, you come to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they will get confused if we hold two elections in one year.

**Mr. Ramnath:** And \$9 million for Ispat Iscott.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, that is as good as saying that the people of this country are foolish and dotish. [*Interruption*] They would not know the difference between local government and general elections, but do you know what is even more important? Did the Prime Minister and the Ministers not know, even before we approached this year that there was a possibility of two elections in one year? When they came last year to postpone the local government elections, did you then not know that there was a possibility of two elections in one year? So, you should have called it last year! [*Interruption*] You extended the time, you had all of last year to call it, but you come now with the foolish reason to say, you cannot hold two elections in one year.

We come back to the truth. We come back to the truth of the matter—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Dotish reason.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—is that you are afraid to call the local government elections at this time. [*Interruption*] You are afraid! [*Desk thumping*] You are afraid to call it because that will be the barometer of what will happen in the general elections, and you know what will happen?

**Mr. Sharma:** Blows!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Do you know what is coming? You will lose that election. You will lose that election, you cannot face it, you cannot take that at this time. [*Interruption*] And so, while the Constitution and law give the Prime Minister and the Government powers, that authority must be exercised in a responsible manner. Government must, at all times, respect the people. It must not use its powers to abuse the electorate, to abuse the citizens. The public has been calling for a change of government. They are anxious for the general election, but the Prime Minister is taking the country down to the wire and in the meantime you are licking up local government election in-between.

Mr. Speaker, we are at a time when—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Brilliant speech.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—at this juncture in our parliamentary history, we are in the final year of the life of the Parliament. Of course, the hon. Speaker well knows that could take us into January of next year. So, I hope when the Prime Minister says he cannot hold two elections in one year, he means he will not take the general election down into January, which he can do. He says many things which never come through, so I would not like to say that he is lying, but many things that he says do not happen.

Since April, the Prime Minister stated his intentions to postpone local government elections. This Bill really requires, as you know, Sir, a simple majority. This Bill can be passed, even without your support on the Back Bench or the Front Bench or whatever. You go ahead and pass it. So, when we bring it here at this late 11th hour with the foolish excuses of two elections cannot be held in one year, and yes, we are doing reform and so on, you are really asking this Parliament to rubber stamp what is already your decision.

This House functions today, really, in a ceremonial exercise, where Members can come and speak until they are blue in the face and you all are smiling, let the Opposition have their say, the Government will have its way with its built-in majority; it will judge and it will fight, it will definitely put the vote to give them the rubber stamp that they need. While you are doing that it is interesting—I remember when we launched the Parliament Channel it was only channel 11 and at that launching I had made the comment that that was only for 17 per cent or let us say, 20 per cent of the population. I am very happy to see now that the parliamentary proceedings have been carried on channel 4, which means it is no longer 17 and 20 per cent; it is for every viewing member of public and that is, in fact a great move, so that people can see what is happening in this Parliament. It is interesting when we meet here, that you meet people and the comments that they make, so the eyes of the citizenry, I say, are upon us as parliamentarians, as Member of this honourable House and they are no longer taking the basket that is doled out by Members on the other side. They will see and hear for themselves and be the ultimate arbiters, the ultimate judges when it comes to your time for recall in that general election.

Local government, it is very clear, is not working in the way it was intended to, because Government has never empowered the municipal corporations. They are under-funded, they are sidelined, and they are side-stepped for the sake of political expediency. Something has to be wrong, very wrong, when all the corporations get the same budgetary allocation even though some have a larger population or wider geography to maintain. And the hon. Member for Arouca North mentioned the Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite when he did say it was so widespread; Mayaro is another like that where the geographic spread is so wide, and in fact, the numbers making up the population is even larger. So, whilst it is we do not begrudge, we do not want to take away from corporations getting the allocations that they are getting, it cannot be just and equitable that you give the same allocation to every single council. You must take into account the needs of the council of the corporation area, that certainly must be something that has to be taken into account; population size, the level of development within it, the

geographical spread, and the amount of development. It is very clear that some areas are more built up, more developed than other areas, so how can you then say that it must be the same? The chairman of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation had prepared a note for us to point out, to raise that corporation and so I will spend a few minutes on it; the demographics of this corporation:

“The proposal mentioned is the review boundaries but it does not give any rationale of how it is to be done.”

That was one of the urgent matters that the hon. Minister had said needed to be addressed. It goes on:

“With the present system some corporations have populations of 19,000 people, some have 32,000 people, others have 204,000 people and 162,000 people.”

How can you then say that you are being fair, you are being evenhanded—and you know that word “evenhanded” has now become fixed in the jurisprudence after the 18/18 Sharma vs The Attorney General salary case, Mr. Speaker, where the judges say this may be the strict law, but now, anybody operating in a parliamentary democracy in a democratic system, that to the onlooker the obvious must be that you are operating fair and evenhandedly. How can it be fair and evenhanded when you have a corporation with a population of 19,000 people, you have another one with 204,000 people, and another one for 162,000 people; you give them the same allocation? How can that be fair and evenhanded? You have six and eight electoral districts in some corporations, others have 12 and 13 electoral districts.

In the proposal in the White Paper and the Minister’s statements it does not state whether the number of corporations is going to be increased, reduced or remain the same, and we need to know this, we need to know the rationale for these proposals about changes in boundaries. And we become very concerned anytime the Government starts talking about changing the demarcations, talking about changing boundaries and so on. We become very concerned, because we had the unfortunate experience of visiting the Elections and Boundary Commission very recently, a team of us and we asked them, how do you determine—when you say the population has grown, and in fact this was when they did the last exercise to increase from 36 to 41—what is the rationale, how do you move to change the boundaries? How do you do it? What is the criteria?

We were flabbergasted, Mr. Speaker, when we were told that we start from the top left hand and we move to the right, and then we move down. Mr. Speaker,

there was no objective criteria [*Laughter*] in terms of how you shift the polling divisions to create a constituency, to remove it from one constituency and put into another. It was the most amazing explanation we have ever been given that the entire EBC would sit there—the commissioners, they were all there and they said to us, we take the map and we start from the top left hand and we move to the right. [*Laughter*] I am sorry, I do not mean to laugh; they were so ludicrous, we start from the top left hand and we move to the right and then we move down. In other words you take any which polling division and you put it any which way you can and you want to. [*Interruption*] Any which way you can, [*Interruption*] there is no one, there is no polling division one, be reasonable.

How many times have you, through you, contested an election? There is no polling division one. Every constituency has a polling division one; the country does not have polling division one, nor does it have constituency one, so we start from number one and move to the left or the right. It is like the calypso you are moving to the left and then you are moving to the right, so when it is that you take the polling divisions and you shift them into one constituency and it is not looking good for a particular party, you shift it back to the right. [*Interruption*] So, you move to the left and you move it to the right. That is what is happening. Totally frightening then when this Minister tells us about demarcating boundaries; very fearful, and therefore we need to have further clarification. If you tell me you are going to demarcate boundaries—[*Interruption*] enough elections I have fought through you, Sir. I mean, it is being questioned how many elections I have fought. Enough, Mr. Speaker, to win the next one as well, I will tell you that. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Oh yes, I started my political career as an alderman in the then St. Patrick County Council. So there is no polling division one and the hon. Speaker is well aware of that, regardless of your protestations. So we ask, when you come to talk to us about boundaries and that is an urgent area of reform, to give us some idea of the criteria and rationale your proposal would contain, hon. Minister.

### **2.30 p.m.**

What is the distinct reason for maintaining the distinction between city, borough and region, when all the services to be provided are supposed to be the same? Perhaps the Minister could tell us something about that in his reform exercise, what would be their views. Corporations are at different stages of development with particular reference here to infrastructure. How is the reform going to address these issues so that all citizens enjoy the same facilities?

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Mr. Speaker, it is not about all corporations getting the same money, it is about all citizens being able to enjoy the same facilities. We have pointed out the sizes, the number of electoral districts and now we are talking about levels of underdevelopment of certain corporation areas. All corporations should start from a level playing field, but that is not the case, and therefore, you need to bring those up to that level playing field. Those corporations do not have that level of infrastructure. If the corporations are to be entrusted with more autonomy, who is going to ensure there is equal development taking place? If some corporations are falling behind, who makes the step to call them in? Would it be the Minister of Local Government; would it be the Parliament; would it be the Cabinet, who would then take that step?

Now, the proposals in the White Paper, again, talked a lot about finance and whilst those reform measures talk about corporations being responsible for collecting taxes, this is nothing new. It is not stated whether industrial estates would fall under the ambit of the corporation, for example, Point Lisas; if it does not, then it makes collection of corporate taxes a sham because that is a large area of property with a lot of income. Corporations would still be dependent on subventions from local government.

There is no mechanism to ensure equitable distributions of resources; no system is proposed to ensure that the present and inequities were not obtained. For example, last year, all corporations received an equal sum of \$5 million for a Drainage Irrigation Programme. However, Point Fortin has a population of 19,000 persons; they occupy a land space of 24 square kilometres. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo has a population of 162,000 persons, has a land area of 719 kilometres square. Look at that, 24 kilometres square, with 19,000 persons—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Mr. Speaker, I would like to invoke Standing Order 39, to put the question to the House now.

**Mr. Speaker:** Standing Order?

**Dr. Khan:** Standing Order 39, so you could put the question to the House about this Bill. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** You have raised it, but you have to sit down now.

**Hon. Members:** Mr. Speaker, it is not the first time he is trying that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, it is not the first time. Standing Order 39, obviously, the Member is seeing your numbers depleted. But listen, I am paying attention to the Leader of the Opposition, she is sounding very good. [*Crosstalk*] No, no, no, I am ruling it out of order. Please continue.

**Dr. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, you are supposed to put it to the House.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, you are supposed to sit down if I ruled it out of order. Take your seat, please.

**Dr. Khan:** Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Speaker:** Take your seat!

**Dr. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, you are supposed to put it to the House now.

**Mr. Speaker:** Continue, hon. Member.

**Dr. Khan:** That is the rule. That is the rule of the Standing Order. I have the minority.

**Mr. Breaux:** You are not the minority.

**Dr. Khan:** I am the minority and you are going against [*Inaudible*] the minority.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, on the issue of finance—  
[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Khan:** You all would lose the Bill. If you do not put it now you all would be at a loss.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—and the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan has asked to put the question to put it to the House—

**Mr. Speaker:** I am ruling that you—have you finished your contribution?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No.

**Mr. Speaker:** Well, continue.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, on the issue of finance. I was making the point of the disparity when it is that the Minister could boast rightfully so because that is the truth that you are giving equal amounts of money to each corporation, but when you look at what is necessary; when you look at the land area; when you look at the population size, then obviously that cannot be fair and just and even-handed. And so, Point Fortin we are saying 19,000 persons, land space of 24 square kilometres, whereas, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo has a population of 162,000 persons with a land area of 719 sq kilometres.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, looking at the issue of funding, unless the reform proposals comprehensively address the issue of equity financial allocations to corporations, then on that question, the so-called proposed autonomy will be meaningless. So to voice it, to speak it, to say that the reform process is autonomy, if you leave the distribution of funding as is and you say we are giving an equal sum, that would not be equitable distribution, in fact, it would be what Trinis call mamaguy, to say you have an autonomy, but you do not have the money.

If the corporations are supposed to be given more autonomy, and it only rates its spending, then what really would be given is responsibility and accountability but no authority. And so, when we come to other proposals, the Minister said he wanted to look at in terms of his reform exercise, they are all the human resource proposals. That proposal does not address the issue of human resource in any meaningful way. The corporations would not have the power to determine its needs, to recruit and select, to take disciplinary action, negotiate terms and conditions, and therefore, how can you really have true human resource management when all the functions or that key in managing your human resources is not within your own hands.

Indeed this was something we dealt with in the Parliament fairly recently when we were saying that the police service as a whole was being mismanaged because you did not have a direct line of authority to carry out your human resource management functions. That is to say, hiring and firing and disciplining, promoting, and recruiting; all those things were not being handled by the Police Commissioner himself, and therefore, he was toothless.

We came to this Parliament, we changed that. We are waiting to see what becomes of that in the very near future, hopefully, but it is the same thing with local government bodies. If you are saying you are going to have a reform process, that reform process must include, giving responsibility and authority to those bodies to be able to carry out the human resource management functions. And what are those? As I said recruited, promoting, firing, disciplining, all the human resource functions must be also localized, they cannot be centralized. That system is just not working, the centralizing of funding, centralizing of human resource management, it is not working.

I see from my own council in the Penal/Debe Corporation where that place is totally—it is contrary to law, where those workers are working now and they have taken the step to put it into protest action. The Minister said that they would give them a new building, they are working on it. I would ask that this happen very quickly to relocate them. The conditions are substandard, in breach of the OSHA and I would ask through you, that the hon. Minister take urgent steps to relocate those workers in the meantime as they are waiting on the new structure which have been in the works for so long. Those workers cannot continue to work there. We cannot ask that they be subjected to those inhumane conditions at the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation and I ask the Minister in his winding up to kindly address that issue.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at all the corporations, basically, we can go back at the history of local government in Trinidad and Tobago and you would recall that our local government system started up—it is a very ancient institution. We were very fortunate in that regard, we started off with the Cabildo. I know there is a building over the road which is called the Cabildo, but the Cabildo was the original Local Government Council created in Spain by the Crown and that was founded here in Trinidad and Tobago in 1592. So, from the very beginning, we had this concept of local government and introduced through the Cabildo.

Thereafter, we moved from under the British; we changed those up; the Cabildo had very wide range in powers of governance; then their powers were limited, later by the Spanish, by the British and under the jurisdiction of the British, especially which was a model way we had to follow thereafter. The Cabildo was restructured, it became more like a British town council with 12 elected Members as equivalent of municipal councillors.

Mr. Speaker, from then, right down to now, the tensions and the frictions between central and local governments were evident from since the beginning of the system. There was always this friction and tension with the central government wanting to control everything, whilst on the one hand saying, you have local government and the local government bodies being understaffed, underfunded and basically, choked. And from 1592 to now, with due respect, when you study the history of the local government bodies, you will trace the history and the problems remain the same today.

I had the distinct pleasure of preparing a thesis when I was doing my MBA and it was in fact on Modern Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago in the context of reform agenda for further decentralization and the challenges of development

management. I take this opportunity when I talk about—I looked at the White Paper, indeed I have all my comments on the White Paper, I would not belabour you with this, so the point is—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Dumas:** So, you could share the credit for the MBA.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**— the point is—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rafeeq:** You could give her a consultancy.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Certainly, certainly, you could give me a consultancy as you gave to the Jamaican; I would help you with the decentralization process and development. Mr. Speaker, I make reference to this because I did go in-depth into looking at the history of the local government bodies here, and as I said, the problems encountered from the very beginning throughout the 20th Century continue with us into the 21st Century, that is to say, underfunding, choking of the local government bodies. It is because there is that tension, maybe it is a human nature very difficult to devolve, it is very difficult to give away, but when you hold power, it is very difficult to give it away and that tension has been there from the very beginning.

But what is interesting, in looking at the international perspective on local government reform, it is very clear that worldwide, it is the trend for modernization of local government. But in that trend, in that thrust of modernizing of local government, is the strong, strong support that is given for the concept of local government in its true meaning, that is the participation at local level. So, all the documents—and I am sure that the hon. Minister is very well aware of it—that you see internationally on local government reform, point to that devolving, not just decentralizing, but that devolution of power unto the local government bodies.

So, when you come to the United Nations bodies: the Istanbul Declaration in 1996, the Habitat Agenda of the United Nations, since 1996 they talked about a new social contract towards improving human settlements conditions in the world's cities, towns and villages. That Habitat Agenda of 1996, not only reflects on the technical aspects of human settlements, but also on the ways to make that sustainable.

After that Habitat Agenda in 1996, there was a perspective from Habitat again, in a 2001 report, the UNHCF 2001 Report which says that it expects local government to not only become more efficient when taking on a broad range of responsibilities, but also to become effective in carrying out programmes to tackle the main challenges of equitable and sustainable development. The report acknowledges that achieving this objective would require the ability to analyze social environmental

and economic situations across sectoral boundaries, as well as the ability to develop creative solutions with partners and to communicate effectively with decision-makers.

Mr. Speaker, basically, what I have been saying in specific examples that I mentioned before when I shared with this honourable House: the issues of funding, the difficulty with funding; the difficulties with management of human resources. And so, when we come to this reform exercise, we are not reinventing the wheel. You have all these United Nations reports, so that reform exercise should not have taken us a year, from last year to now and we are still nowhere near to having it complete. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. You have the Habitat Agenda, and thereafter, they went into the drafting of a world charter of local self-government and we were part of that. Trinidad and Tobago was part of that agenda.

The formal commitments by Government reflected in the Istanbul Declaration of 1996, the Habitat Agenda, 1996. This brought about another policy decision to take steps to draw up a worldwide charter of local self-government as an internationally agreed, adaptable framework for the practice of local autonomy and decentralization in partnership with the representative associations of local authority. And so, there was successful experience in the European Charter of Local Self Government that encouraged the formation of a proposal for a global charter that was subsequently submitted to the Habitat conference.

So by 2004, the UNDP was defining local governance in this modern context as follows and I quote:

“A set of the institutions, mechanisms and processes through which citizens and their groups can articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations at the local level.”

And to go into decentralization:

“To restructure authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at a central level, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity.”

We have gone nowhere near this, Mr. Speaker, and that charter—world charter—we are signatories to that and we have all of their recommendations since 2004. Those recommendations should guide our reform process, and so, I ask the hon. Minister to tell us, now you have come back for a further year to give us a time frame—this is one year, when is it now; it is gong to be next year now because you do not want to have two in this year. So, I do not know if it is next

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year July once more again; I do not know, therefore, if local government election are being postponed for two years? You put one year, but within that year, whether it would be called. What is the time frame for the reform agenda? I would be happy if you would share that with us.

I said to you Sir, hon. Speaker, that the major challenge for the corporation has to do with funding. I want to take the Chaguanas Borough Corporation as an example and my colleagues would speak on some of the other corporations. The Member for Princes Town is here and he can talk about what is happening in the Princes Town Regional Corporation, others can speak on Couva and so on. I want to look at Chaguanas because the Mayor of Chaguanas has provided us with a comprehensive document setting out the difficulties that they are experiencing in Chaguanas. I want to thank His Worship the Mayor of Chaguanas, Dr. Rambachan, as I thanked the Chairman for the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation for the issues that I raised earlier in this honourable Chamber, Mr. Ramjit Ramnarine who provided us with that information.

First of all, there over 600 employees so the corporation is in charge of the productivity of over 600 employees in Chaguanas. I would list here the areas that fall under their jurisdiction:

- Maintenance and development of 36 recreation grounds;
- Preparation of these recreational facilities for cricket, school sports;
- Maintenance and development of six cemeteries and a cremation site and facilities;
- Ensuring efficient and effective use of a fleet of 30 vehicles;
- Management of three markets;
- Movement of the abattoir;
- Managing the municipal police;
- Collection of rates and taxes;
- Ensuring all the development in land and building developers;
- Ensuring safe eating places;
- Protecting the environment and ensuring healthy communities;
- Working with the traffic authority to ensure a free flow of traffic;

- Beautifying the borough;
- Promoting healthy life types;
- Promoting partnership for schools and other organizations;
- Building of roads, drains, pavements and all roads except main roads;
- Collection of garbage;
- Maintenance of roads and drains;
- Erection of street signs;
- Representation for street lights, water mains and telephones and paying for the electricity for the street lights.

The corporation is responsible for that.

- Celebration of national festivals;
- Regulating street vending;
- Hosting groups from various places attending;
- Indeed from July 14 to July 18, I think it is 3,000 scouts would converge for a major scout jamboree in Chaguanas;
- Attending to the social and welfare needs of the public;
- Liaising with all public utilities and other social agencies;
- Attending to numerous problems in schools;
- Disaster preparedness;
- Looking after health concerns;
- Honouring citizens; and so on.

The hon. Member for Arouca South said that there were 43 areas of responsibility. These are some of them not just by this borough, but these are the broad areas of responsibility. And when you look at the funding allocated for all of this, the Chaguanas Borough Corporation obtained the following recurrent sums for the last three years:

2005 — \$44.5 million;

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2006 — \$52 million;

2007 — \$54 million.

Mr. Speaker, it is impossible to maintain the same quality of service and as well to serve a larger population with that sum allocated. Added to this, of course, there is the whole inflation rate of 67 per cent, these increases failed to consider that the Chaguanas Borough is the fastest growing borough in the country. The number of houses projected by the HDC, the number of new developments being created, as well as the number of housing lots that would be offered to both ex-Caroni workers and the public, show that there would be great difficulty for the corporation to meet the needs of burgesses in the area because you have this extra development taking place.

So, corporations are being asked to do more with less. If we take these calculations and we look at what is happening in other areas, we need to say that Chaguanas Borough Corporation when they did the analysis there in terms of what is needed, for some paltry, for some adequately services the needs of the burgesses of the area. In addition, the Chaguanas Borough Corporation did an analysis of the needs of municipal police and determined there was a need for 51 officers. At that time, there were 14, when they did the needs analysis, 51 and there were only 14.

Mr. Speaker, I am told today that there are only five municipal police officers. I am told that the Port of Spain, Sangre Grande and so on have gotten their officers, why not Chaguanas? Why is this corporation not ready? The Minister said it is not true, I would be happy for him to enlighten me, this is the information that I got. When he is winding up, I would be happy.

Mr. Speaker, I am told that in August 2005, two motor bikes were bought for the Chaguanas Municipal Police, the corporations expected to get two riders for these police bikes. I am told up today, more than a year and a half later, the bikes are sitting, dry rotting and no one are riding these bikes at all. So, would the Minister tell us whether we have riders for these bikes? And so this pattern is the same in all corporations. In the rural corporations especially, I am told it is the same pattern and I hope my colleagues would expand on the other corporation areas.

I want speak just shortly on Penal/Debe because my constituency falls squarely into the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation and a small bit of it falls into Siparia and I would also speak on Siparia. The Member for Fyzabad is also stranded in Siparia and Penal/Debe, so he would speak on that. The Penal/Debe

Corporation is responsible for 246 square kilometers of space. It is bounded by Princes Town east and north; San Fernando on then-west; Siparia, proper in the town on the West; Columbus Channel on the South. The allocation for all six or seven development programmes was a meagre \$3.2 million and the recurrent expenditure is \$41 million, that includes wages and salaries. So by far, the bulk of the money which is the same that happened in the national budget to a large extent goes in paying wages and salaries.

Releases as at June 30, 2007 for the development programme—\$1.2 million with a request for another \$2 million, and so we would ask the hon. Minister whether he can tell us what is happening with the further request. The expenditures for the development programme are as follows:

Drainage, 250 kilometres — 360,000 received;

Mr. Speaker, every year the constituencies of Oropouche and Siparia which fall in the Penal/Debe Corporation, there is flooding, and repeatedly we have made requests for moneys for dealing with the drainage—\$360,000 received for drainage.

- 36 recreation grounds, only \$500,000 received;
- Markets and abattoirs — \$510,000 at the tender board for awards;
- \$250 per market for construction;
- 315 kilometers of road;
- 85 bridges in that area; only \$400,000 received.

So, the money is allocated, but what is the actual receipt, is another point.

Mr. Speaker, these small allocations—it is no wonder that the infrastructure is so substandard. Forty per cent of residents use pit latrines and many counties are still to get pipe-borne water, so there is an additional pressure on the corporations. In the dry season many communities still have to get their pipe-borne water; the corporations have to truck the water in the dry season. And then in the wet season because we have not dealt with the drainage problem, there is water everywhere, through the flooding that is not adequately dealt with.

So, that corporation in addition to underfunding, as I mentioned, it is also with respect to the actual physical space in which the workers are now sitting, that something has to be done and has to be done urgently. Through you, I ask the hon. Minister to please tell us what is happening in terms of housing the workers in the Penal/Debe Corporation, who as we speak are protesting every day; I believe it is because they refused to work in such conditions. I would be glad for your comment on that.

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Mr. Speaker, as I close, I would ask that we really work very carefully now that the Minister is coming for a year later. The rubber stamp is going through any way, whether we like it or not, it is going through because your votes would be sufficient. Even though the Member for Baratara/San Juan invoked the Standing Order which meant that their numbers were not on their bench, the vote might have gone elsewhere. They are going to get the vote; they have the majority. So, let us see when we look at what local government is, as Government being exercised through representative bodies established by law to exercise specific powers within defined geographic areas to complement the activities of central government.

We must know that local government is not supposed to compete with central government and vice versa, it must be the same. Local government must complement central government, but central government should also complement local government. But what we are seeing now is a circumventing of that process where the Government is practising, in essence, discrimination; we are seeing a circumventing of that process. That is why there are so many special purpose companies set up to do the very thing that local government bodies are supposed to do, just to disenfranchise it would seem, citizens, electors in Opposition areas.

So what is happening? All these special purpose companies are set up and individuals within those corporations that are controlled by the Opposition, they would write to the Minister and they would write to the various Ministers under these special purpose companies and get additional funding to carry out projects in their own areas. Whereas the council, itself, the corporation is being starved not given the funding. For example, I think there is a road, one called IRID which is—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Contracts for paying a price.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—contracts were given out. These things came from Central Government; contracts were given out by Central Government, doing the work that should have been done by Local Government bodies. So you would really circumvent in the whole local government body. You are disenfranchising the persons who voted for those people sitting in those councils because they have no say in terms of what would happen, when it would happen and where it would happen. That is a very serious thing for these special purpose companies. It is true and if the Minister says it is not, show me the statistics, give us the numbers, stand up and tell us how much you gave to Penal/Debe, under every one of those special funds; tell us—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Dumas:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—well you would a little while, I think others want to speak—for the other corporations, how much has been given. Our information is that the councils are starved; it is being done up above; contracts are given from the top; the projects have been chosen at the top with friends within the PNM.

**Mr. Bereaux:** And Dhanraj Singh did it?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** And so we ask—whether Dhanraj Singh did it or not, is not relevant in my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, because two wrongs do not make a right. If that was wrong then, it cannot make it right now, to do it again. So to justify by saying that Dhanraj Singh did it, the same way you are doing it, I think you are looking to end up in a Courthouse. You would be looking to end up in a courthouse if you are saying you are doing the same thing. So, do not tell me what was wrong and when you say you do it, I am not saying it was wrong I do not know. The courts will decide that; I hold no brief for him.

The courts will decide what is right and wrong, but if you are saying what he did was wrong and you are doing the same thing—everybody, every little Standard One child knows two wrongs cannot make a right, so you cannot continue to do the same, with the greatest of respect, Member for La Brea through the Speaker. Two wrongs cannot make a right.

**3.00 p.m.**

So what we need now, we must to stop treating local government like a bastard child; we must give local government the respect that is due; we must give it the funding that is necessary, and if your reform exercise is to achieve anything, Mr. Speaker, through you, I say to the hon. Minister, let your legacy be one in which you truly, truly, in this reform exercise—you would not be able to implement it because when we form the next government we will implement the reform exercise. [*Desk thumping*] But at least put the groundwork into place; put the challenges in there and deal with them.

I want to just make one last point—I think I have two minutes, if I am not mistaken. It is not only the people of Penal, Barrackpore and the Opposition constituencies who are complaining; it is a whole issue of rural neglect by this Government. So whether it is PNM councils or UNC councils, the whole of rural Trinidad and Tobago is in dire need of help. In the *Guardian* today there is an article headlined: “North coast villagers cry neglect.” The neglect they have suffered at the hands of this Government. They have lost hope and confidence. The article reads and I quote:

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“Angered that villagers along the north coast have been neglected for years, president of the Blanchisseuse Community Council Owen Charles is calling on the Government to bring some measure of relief to their forgotten community before the 2007 general election date is announced.

During an interview last week, Charles said if the Government failed to address some of the villagers’ concerns, it could lead to a poor voter turnout at the polls.”

The problems listed are, and I quote:

- “deplorable roads
- lack of public transport
- inadequate policing
- power outages
- limited supply of pipe-borne water.

However, Charles said, with the Government’s lack of action over the years, some villagers were vowing to steer clear of exercising their franchise.”

So it is throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Tobago is also crying out for help. I know the Member for Tobago East does not like us to speak for her, but we represent all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we say Tobago, as well, is not given their just due. But when we think of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo with 162,000 persons, then you understand the extent of the problem.

So they will postpone this election, as they will, but I want to tell them very clearly, as I close, the general election date will be upon us very soon and they could run but they cannot hide. The UNC will win that election.

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

**The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas):** Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity. I would like to start by assuring the Member for Siparia that there were two issues that she raised. One is, that the Government is in contact with Mr. Charles and when Mr. Charles speaks about the responses that he expects, it is because Mr. Charles would have already been assured that the issues he is raising will be addressed. The issues the Member for Siparia is raising in terms of Penal/Debe and the housing of the workers, I want to give here the assurance that the contract for new accommodation for those workers has already been assigned.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** When will they move in?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** That may depend on the efficiency or lack of, of the chairman that you have put in place.

**Mr. Panday:** What? You are a guest in this House, you know.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I am sure that nothing I said could have indicated an insult or behaviour less than becoming a guest in the House of Parliament.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Hon. Minister, would you be kind enough to give way?

**Mr. Valley:** Already?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Just on that point he just made. He is a guest; I will treat him as a guest. I thank you for dealing with the workers at the Penal/Debe Corporation, that the contract, you say, has been granted. Would you be kind enough to tell us where this new location would be and how soon it would be actually ready for occupation?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** That building that was proposed by the chairman—and he insisted upon, for whatever reasons that he might have had—has been accepted by communication with the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, the section that treats with that in terms of buildings, because, as you know, there is a full procedure with a specified group of public officers. That matter has been treated with and agreed on as, I am sure, an interim measure, and the long-term would await the appropriate mechanisms for getting it in place. As to when it will be occupied, as I have suggested before, the corporation—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** When would it be ready to be occupied?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, in line with the new model of local government that we have already begun to put in place, the significant piece of the responsibility for housing the staff of the corporation and for effecting all activity relevant to the corporation resides in the council that forms the corporation as well as the administration that is managed by the council. It does not require anyone from Port of Spain to fix Penal/Debe in terms of getting the building that would have been rented for them that would accommodate the staff in the best way. It is a decision for them.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you. We shall work on it.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** You know, I was going to skip it, but the last comment just reminds me about why the corporations that are managed by the UNC could not fully participate in the process, because despite what is being said about this Administration's management of local government, the corporations that are managed by the UNC are not managed, in fact, by the councillors but are, in fact, managed by the Members of this Parliament who happen to be the MPs in the areas which the councillors represent. But enough of that.

**Mrs. Persad-Bisessar:** That is not true. In fact, they control me, with due respect. I do not have that privilege.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** The question was raised as to whether the postponement of the local government election has anything to do with reform. I would like to suggest that the fact that the Prime Minister made a statement that he will not call two elections in one year, it is not a matter that makes it mutually exclusive; that it is not also correct that the reform process needs to be completed before we go to election. I want to assure this House that the reform process is 95 per cent complete. As the Member for Siparia pointed out, her own fact-gathering process demonstrated to her that the culmination of that process which she expects to end in the drafting of legislation and in the bringing of legislation to Parliament, is already well on its way. She herself tells us that she met with the consultant who was hired in May and who expects to hand in his findings and draft of the legislation at the end of July.

In other words, the Member, by her own careful attention and attendance in that consultative process, has the information that tells us where the process is. Certainly, if you have come through a process in which you have met the various communities; met the major stakeholders; come to Parliament in the form of a Green Paper; come to Parliament in the form of a White Paper, and you are at the point of drafting legislation; and even before you have drafted that legislation you are in the process of consulting with every political party in the country and most of the major stakeholders, I would suggest that it would demonstrate you are just about the end of that process. The draft is in process and we can stand and know that that drafting process will lead to the next step, which is this Parliament sitting and adjudicating on the matter.

But I think what creates the possibility of confusion is the fact that validation of the suggestions that were made; the embodiment of the White Paper, is ongoing, in that, those communities that we expect to participate in that way in which the last speaker raised, in which the people's participation in the reform process must be assured and must bring validation to the expressions in the White

Paper, that process continues. We have chosen to call it a roll-out because that is going into the community. It is a demonstration and a popularization of that process.

That process is real. The Opposition knows that that process was launched with the full participation of the Chaguanas Regional Corporation on Friday. It was launched again in Sangre Grande and every single corporation has participated in selecting people, in the selection of accommodation, in equipping those offices and in facilitating those meetings in the communities. Therefore, the query that suggests that this consultative process—the local government reform process—is either invalid or non-going and is some kind of hoax, I want to suggest that everyone in this House knows differently.

There is one issue that I want to address and it treats with this change of the argument. You see, the Opposition so wants to continue to argue discrimination and to send that word out across the airwaves that it finds a new way to talk about discrimination. No longer are the questions of equality and the award of funding in equal tranches, satisfactory for the issue of discrimination. Now we have a new twist. I just want to assure you that the conception that there shall be an allocation formula for the funding of local government bodies—and this is part of the reform agenda—in which the considerations of area and population would be taken into account in that process, has, in fact, been noted in the White Paper; has, in fact, been noted in discussions with Members of the Opposition who attended, and, of course, has informed the discussions at all the levels at which these discussions took place. Therefore, when the Member stands up and makes these proposals, I just want to suggest that they are already embodied in the White Paper.

Sometimes it bears to bring history to a matter. History tells us that between the years 1998 and 2001, we had a Road Improvement Fund. That Fund went on from 2002 to 2005. In that scenario, we can point to the behaviour of people who were in government and now in the Parliament, in which the allocations under the Fund read like this: Port of Spain, 1998, no dollars; Port of Spain, 1999, no dollars, 2000, zero; 2001, zero; 2002, \$1.8 million; [*Interruption*] Well, of course, the change has occurred: Arima, no dollars in 1998; no dollars in 1999 and similarly for San Fernando, Point Fortin, Diego Martin, San Juan/Laventille, Mayaro/Rio Claro. Of course, they were PNM-controlled corporations.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** And who was in government?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** I believe that some of the people who are now sitting here were in government.

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It now changes: In Port of Spain, 2002, \$1.8 million; Arima, \$1.5 million; San Fernando, \$1.8 million; Point Fortin, \$1.6 million; Chaguanas, \$1.6 million; Diego Martin, \$1.7 million; Sangre Grande, \$1.7 million; Couva/Tabaquite, \$1.8 million; Mayaro/Rio Claro, \$1.9; Siparia, \$1.5 million; Penal/Debe, \$2.2 million; Princes Town, \$1.4 million. In other words, the fact that Penal/Debe has a certain configuration in terms of population and area, was, in fact, taken into account. A similar distribution is in evidence from 2002 to 2005. Therefore, the conception of discrimination against these rural corporations—and some of them held by the UNC—are, in fact, not true. That is why I sought to protest a while ago when that matter came up.

The question of the Infrastructure Renewal Improvement and Development Programme in which the assumption was made—a statement was made that cannot be validated—it demonstrates that allocations were made equally and equitably across the municipalities. Whether it is Port of Spain or Princes Town, the situation was the allocations were, in fact, made.

I want to go one further, because sometimes again, things must be corrected. The mechanism for selecting each project in each municipality is one in which the councillor for a particular area is expected to select the project in the area which he represents and it is required that all councillors be able to select their projects. The experience we had was that in some of the UNC-held areas in which the PNM people were in the minority, the Minister had to intervene because those corporations sought to identify the projects in the areas they were held by the PNM people and in particular in Chaguanas, no allocation was made to the PNM people until the Minister intervened. Therefore, when we stand and talk about discrimination, I want to suggest if I have found experience of discrimination in local government, I have found it in the areas in which the UNC was in charge and I had to act to ensure that the situation was equitably treated with. [*Desk thumping*]

I am quite gratified to hear the Member for Siparia and the leader of the UNC agree that this process is relevant and that this process is real. Then, you know, I looked outside—and you know we have this habit of waving these newspapers. In the *Newsday* today and I saw the headline: “Panday stresses need for local Govt reforms.” Below there is a picture of Basdeo Panday and it states:

“Basdeo Panday...leader of the UNC, is collecting a Special Award from...the Couva Corporation.”

It was an award given to him by a corporation, paid for, I am sure, by funds allocated from the central government. I am sure that that selection for Mr. Panday for an

award was an autonomous decision of that corporation. They did not depend on asking us to make that decision. Therefore, it demonstrates two things: One, that there is a leader of the UNC—I do not know if they share the same opinion as the leader in the House; and that the local government reform is critical and must continue in this period even as we seek to amend and change this law. The second thing is, it strikes me as passing strange that the corporations can make decisions about expenditure of moneys to make awards to people; in other words, expending public funds on awards.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Let me finish my statement. The corporation can authorize and make expenditure on awards, but when it comes to helping the citizens in the area who may be under some stress, somehow the words that come out are that they are being discriminated against; they have no funding and they have to wait for a decision from central government and from Kent House.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Thank you, Minister, for giving way. My question is: What is the role of the CEO in these corporations? Is it that the politician could just spend money without the permission of the CEO?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, a legitimate decision of the council must be executed by the CEO. So long as the Council is acting lawfully, it is a lawful decision. Therefore, it strengthens the argument I was making that if the council is acting in the interest of the burgesses, then the CEO has the authority to spend the money. Therefore, if that can be applied to awards, then it certainly can be applied to water, to rice, to when you have a flood, or to fixing the accommodation for staff and for members of the council. In other words, the restraints on the expenditure are very small.

Then there is another argument. Month after month variations, virements, on the ways in which the funds of the corporations can be used, come to me. So long as the council has taken the decision—and it is, again, a lawful decision—if they decide that they do not want to do two roads but they want to do three roads and they want to close down the quarters in which they live, then certainly that activity would be supported. They do not find resistance except if it violates some rule or the law. So long as the allocations are made—and I think when the hon. Member read out the allocations that were received by Chaguanas, I think she neglected to tell us certain things. She neglected to tell us that there is a substantial allocation for a new police station for the corporation; I think she

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neglected to tell us that there is an agreed expenditure of \$34 million for a corporation headquarters for Chaguanas.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Five years now.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** That is an allocation that was in this year's budget for which we turned the sod a few months ago and for which the Mayor of that corporation was so ecstatic, I should say. He was so sure that was the avenue by which he would be nominated to be the MP for the UNC in that area, that he wanted to make sure that that allocation came out and the building was built.

**Dr. Khan:** Could I ask the Minister a question?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** You sure?

**Dr. Khan:** Yes. Is that the same thing you are doing in Tobago East?  
[*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** The Minister of Local Government spends no money in Tobago East.

The fact is that the corporations have the capacity to treat with the matters they give urgency. The question of the right to recall comes in. You know, there is no such right. The Constitution makes it very clear in section 53 that this Parliament, recognizing that the peace, order and good governance are the conditions that govern legislation. And if the central government is of the opinion that in the interest of pursuing the local government process and in the interest of ensuring that the population comes to the best evaluation of the proposals for local government; the continuance of the local government process is desirable, then in my view, the Parliament is well within order to make such a determination.

It is in that context that the change in the legislation was brought. The governance we talk about is not selfish; the governance that we are putting on the table by the introduction of this law, aims at ensuring the best long-run benefit to the country. I really have to raise this, you know, Mr. Speaker. I hope a joke is allowed. I hope that the Member for Siparia would share with all of us who worked at the reform, that MBA that she got from the thesis, because that thesis seems to have been very well-informed by the proposals in the White Paper. The proposals in the White Paper and the development of the history—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** She copied it?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** I am not suggesting any such thing; I am just hoping, and I am sure that having heard her this afternoon, that it all lends to better governance, because in her role as legislator, the information, the proposals,

that would have been the result of the research that was done and the embodiment of that into legislation, given her experience, would only lead to the long-run benefit of the local government reform process. So in that case, I congratulate the Member on that thesis. I hope she shares it with us so that we could, in turn, critique it.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** It is in the library at the University.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** I hope with the appropriate acknowledgements.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I have 24 pages of acknowledgments.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I think there is one misconception that we need to correct. This is significant. The Member for Siparia listed a number of issues that must be addressed in the White Paper and in the local government reform process and, therefore, in the legislation. In examination of the legislation we have found that the legislation is cumbersome; it attempts to cover too many things; there is too much detail and, therefore, needs to be stripped of a lot of things that were put into it. But critical to it is that the whole local government system must be treated holistically.

Therefore, to run off the eight or nine things that we would have considered critical and urgent and suggest that you have not done anything on this or that, is to ignore the fact that the mechanisms for fixing and adjusting those matters must be embodied in the new legislation and therefore they cannot be done by themselves. There are some things, of course, which we could have done, and those things would include the infusion of professional capacity into the corporations. If the research was appropriate, we would know that we have encouraged, agreed and recruited at least four professionals in each corporation.

In the first phase we sent in the planning officers; in the next phase you had the engineers and the lawyers to act as the secretaries. In some corporations, because of the fact that they are rural and they would have difficulty in finding people willing to go into those corporations, you had a slower rate of recruitment, which has now been fixed, and I assure you that those areas where gaps exist, that is being addressed by the recruitment process at this time.

I would like to reiterate before I take my seat: One, that the concept of equitable and sustainable development informs the process; that we re-assert the critical nature of the local government reform process as being required; that we agree that the effort is in place and the schedule as identified by the Member for Siparia that we will have the legislation by the end of July, is in place. *[Interruption]* This July we will have the draft legislation. It is up to you to decide whether you will give us an agreement with it.

The argument that is shifted to the proposed allocation formula, I want to suggest again, as the Member would acknowledge, that the proposal that we have in the White Paper for allocation, takes into account the area, the nature of development in the area and the population.

The Member raised the question of the HR functions and the assignment and responsibility. I have heard the arguments of the Opposition on this matter and I have heard Members of the Opposition suggesting that to hand the authority to the corporations that they could hire or select and fire or dismiss people, is not a mechanism they would like to hand to members of the central government who manage Ministries. I am wondering what is the rationale that could create the shift from withholding that authority at the central government level, but being willing to hand the power to hire and fire public officers to corporations. I am just wondering about that suggestion and how it could work. I assure you, there is no friction between central government and local government.

**3.30 p.m.**

I assure the Member for Siparia that when she is not sitting before the members whom she has put to manage those corporations, the most genuine and cordial relationship exists between the Minister and all heads of corporations. They are facilitated and assisted where assistance is required and they exercise their authority without restraint. Every third Wednesday of every month, we have those conversations. The decisions are by consensus. This Minister does not impose his will. It is the will of the leaders.

I suggest that some of the issues that were raised are in fact fig leaves. If there is a problem in Chaguanas with the mayor getting his motorbikes moving to get his outriders all he has to do is wait a little.

Any reading of the estimates, allocation or releases to local governments will demonstrate that there is at least a fourfold increase over the five years in which this administration has managed local government. Any examination will also show that the most forward looking policies for local government reform have emerged. Any reading will demonstrate that his administration is serious and committed to the local government reform process.

Thank you.

**Mr. Winston Dookeran** (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, I will make a brief contribution to this Bill in order to establish our position on the matter. I start by indicating that in matters of election, our view is that elections should be held whenever they are due. We believe that that is a very fundamental principle in the

preservation of our democratic institutions and prerogative to change that, while obviously, it is within the powers of Parliament. It must be done only if there are compelling reasons to make that change.

The fact that the Prime Minister had indicated that the compelling reason which he identified was that he did not want to confuse the electorate. If there could not have been a more contemptuous statement, it is that statement with respect to local government elections. To suggest that our electorate would be confused is indeed to admit, that there is a level of understanding in our country as to what elections are all about. To be confused because there is the prospect of having two elections in one year is to admit that our population is not ready to understand the demands of our parliamentary system.

I thought that it was most unfortunate that he had used that as his main argument in seeking an extension. It is no doubt that today in our country, the population is way ahead of the politician and the politics of the day. I have no doubt and I have complete faith that the people will never be confused as to whether or not there is one or two elections in one year. That is the most feeble reason that could have been proposed for this amendment today. Given the position that we believe that elections should be held at the time when they are due, we are not in a position to support this amendment before us.

I will take the opportunity to make a few comments with regard to the issues surrounding this matter, one of which has already enticed a very interesting debate between the Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. That will continue when the Member for Chaguanas makes his contribution on the operations of local government performance. I point out that the local government reform exercise predicated on the right premises for deepening our democracy is wrong.

You will recollect that the Prime Minister had indicated sometime ago that his version of local government reform was to provide local government with the necessary powers of implementation and to retain for central government, the policy prescriptions that will be necessary. In other words, it appeared to me that his view based on his utterances and reflected by the measures outlined in that White Paper is assuming, that the decision making process could remain at the level of central government and that local government must have greater capacity to implement. To do that some measures were proposed.

The source of the problem is not necessarily at the level of implementation, but at the level of the decision making process, where the communities at large no longer feel that they are part of the democratic decision making process of our democratic institutions. The first solution must be in widening the frame in which

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the community would be involved in the decision making process, in a manner which will encourage accountability and encourage the institution to deliver the public goods that are required. The very premise upon which the local government reform exercise is being conducted is already at fault. To suggest that that will take place is almost to repeat the various attempts at local government reform, since 1983 which failed to understand that that problem is at the level of community governance.

We do not need local government reform in the very narrow sense in which it has been defined, but a system of community governance which would engage the society in decision making and holding public officials accountable for delivering what is required. There must be a wider frame in handling local government reform. The introduction of a system of community governance is what we have been working on, in order to address this fundamental and deep issue. Already, we are seeing a major variation from what the Government is proposing.

In the context of community governance, every day we see evidence in which there is no respect for that notion as exercised by the discharge of Government's responsibility to various communities. Within recent times, we have seen the community in uproar with respect to developments that are proposed in Bagatelle, Wallerfield, Macoya and prior to that in Chatham and Port of Spain East. The communities do not have to be obligated to the Government. They must have a democratic right of their own to see that their concerns are in fact incorporated in whatever developments are taking place.

It is no longer the prerogative of the Government and its Ministers to say that they will consult, since we know that consultation has not been done in a manner that would build consensus. It is our view that in the programme of community governance, which is a bedrock of the democratic institutions we intend to rebuild in this country, is the notion of community rights. That is not something at the discretion of any government now or in the future. Community rights should be enshrined in our constitutional structures with respect to our community governance.

I make this point to clarify that even the current approach in which the Prime Minister spoke about the devolution of powers at the level of implementation is on the wrong premise. In light of our entire history of local government reform which has never happened, this has no other prospect because the premise on which it is based is now wrong. Beyond that, we must look at the philosophy that underlines the relationship between our communities and the central government. If that philosophy is based on the wrong assessment of the historical forces, we would always end up with a wrong prescription.

Recently, when I visited Tobago and had a close view as to what their concerns are with respect to the relationship between our two islands, it was very clear to me that the source of that problem lay in a lack of appreciation of the different histories. I found out that at the time of union with Trinidad and Tobago, Tobago had greater legislative powers and institutions than existed in Trinidad. I found out that Tobago had a functioning treasury in 1889 at the time of the union. When we became independent many years ago, that particular historical reality was never appreciated by the new people who became the government of the country. They adopted what was then the new relationship that was put in place in the colonial period in which Tobago became a ward of Trinidad as indeed, there were so many other wards. That mindset remained fundamentally the philosophical underpinnings of the relationship. That is the source of the beginning of the disaffection.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I want to clarify for the hon. Member. I am the representative for Tobago East but you did not consult with me. [*Desk thumping*] Maybe, the very people with whom you spoke were the ones who sat down and developed the Act as it is now. It was done in consultation with the Tobagonians who were there in 1996 under the UNC. This Act was developed under the UNC. As a matter of fact, the PNM had proposed an Act that was totally different from the one that exists presently.

**Mr. W. Dookeran:** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy for the intervention of the Member for Tobago East. First of all, I welcome a dialogue on this issue. Secondly, I genuinely welcome such a dialogue.

If there was an Act that was superior to the Act that exists today and it was not implemented by the UNC at the time, it is now six years since the Government is in office, why did they not implement it? It is a simple answer. There was time and opportunity to put into place a superior Act. I have been arguing that we must misunderstand the historical differences that led to the fact that the mindset of those who control the Government in Port of Spain do not understand that the ward relationship that existed between Tobago and Trinidad, which they adopted in the mindset at Independence, were not relevant to an island that had a unique and peculiar history and confidence in its governance.

**Hon. Dumas:** Would the hon. Member give way? I would like to inform the Member for St. Augustine that we are quite away from Independence and the hallmark of the PNM's relationship between Trinidad and Tobago is one of full respect for the autonomy of Tobago; full management of that relationship with that mutuality. The ward concept has been long discarded. Nobody in Tobago will

walk behind you or anybody else with any understanding that there is a ward mentality running in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. W. Dookeran:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister opened the debate. I am saying that the mindset remains the same. Since Independence, we have had three different motions in this House with respect to the issue of autonomy for Tobago. That was in 1975 and 1995. When you look at the underlying proposals and the operations of the relationship between Port of Spain and Scarborough, you see the maintenance of that ward concept. The autonomy that was granted was not supported by the institutions that would make that autonomy real. Right now in the current structures there is no institution to support the little autonomy that was granted by these amendments. In Tobago, there are many who have argued that that autonomy the Minister speaks about is a charade. It is not a real autonomy. You have a relationship between Trinidad and Tobago where those in control of Tobago in Scarborough will come to Trinidad to find how much money they can get, without changing the decision making process for accountability in Tobago. The autonomy which you speak about, there is no institution to support it.

Let us look at it closely. In the agricultural sector it is clearly there because some of the institutions have been abandoned. I raise this if only to expose the facade that there is an autonomy in Tobago that is perpetuated by the new arrangements with any of the Acts. That is not what I heard when I went there and when I spoke to people. They gave specific instances in which the Tobago House of Assembly is not utilizing the autonomy that is enshrined in the relationship today.

I raised that as my second issue because the first issue deals with the entitlement of communities in community governance which is a fundamental principle upon which we must embark on this programme. The second principle with respect to Tobago is to ensure that there is a side by side relationship that must not be taken away by those who have power. At all times they must be assured of it and the way we act must protect it. We will have more to say on this as we move on.

I raise this in the context of the legislation before us because it is important for us to outline a perspective that is quite different to the perspective that this administration is following slavishly and blindly because they have never understood the historical or democratic requirements of the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago. A new side by side relationship would give genuine autonomy in a unitary structure is what we must search for.

The recent expressions in Tobago for secessionist tendencies were a result of people who wanted to manage their affairs, in accordance with the historical

record and because they believe that there would be permanence in the dependent relationship. As long as that Cabinet and government—not necessarily the PNM, because there is a big difference between the PNM, the Cabinet and the Prime Minister. As long as the Prime Minister and the Cabinet remain there would not be any change in that relationship. It would always be one of dependency. To start with, autonomy must change on the philosophy. I do not think that the hon. Ministers recognize that they are on a track that has to be fundamentally and radically changed in order to provide that sense of comfort.

At the heart of it is the whole issue of community governance. We have never had community governance in our country. This has reflected itself in how we manage schools; public utilities and amenities whether it is squatting or abattoirs. It is a matter of central government providing funds and having someone who would implement something. The Prime Minister is fundamentally wrong in his premise on this issue. When you bring the particular reform we would go further, but we know that time is now against you so we would have to go beyond this Parliament to get our views across.

I raise that not only in the context of the need for serious reform in the governance that brings the people by enshrining community rights and do not leave it to the wishes of the Ministers alone. Those community rights must now be agreed upon between the community and whoever is in charge. Unless there is such agreement, there will be a legal recourse available to the community. Gone are the days when we could go and make empty promises to those communities that would be fundamentally affected in their lives. That is a fundamental requirement in this society that has moved way beyond our politicians, institutions and the performance of our public duty.

I thought that I should bring that if only to establish that this Bill is one in which the principle of electoral reform must be put in place. The principle should be no opportunity to postpone an election beyond the time in which it is due. In that sense the excuse that was put forth was not extraordinary; an emergency or based on any situation that cannot allow an election to take place for one reason or the other. It is based on a very feeble excuse predicated on the fact that the people would be confused. I think the electoral reform exercise which we must inevitably implement, a serious electoral reform exercise, we must also ensure that there are fixed dates for holding elections in Trinidad and Tobago. Whether local or general elections we should consider seriously establishing fixed dates as part of that process of electoral reform. In that sense the philosophy remains that the power of the democracy lies in the hands of the people and not in the hands of those who would govern the people.

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This playing around with this back pocket thing for so long has now become a sorry joke. I never saw that as a real prerogative to have that power in your back pocket or front pocket. Let us enshrine that power where it belongs, in the governance of the people as reflected in the electoral laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

The time has come—when a serious attack on electoral reform—for us to look at this question of terms for the Prime Minister. It has been on the agenda on many occasions, but it has never found itself in the electoral arrangements. I make the position very clear because we have said it on more than one occasion that we support proposals to change our electoral arrangements to ensure that no prime minister shall hold office for more than two terms. These are the fundamental issues that we have to put in place to protect the people of this country so that our democracy can be protected by our institutions and laws. I thought that this might be the right opportunity to place this on the parliamentary agenda so that we could look in earnest at these issues of community governance and electoral reform. In light of the Government's position to seek without proper reason a postponement of this election, if we adopt this principle of holding the people as the custodian of a democracy, we cannot accept and support this amendment.

Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member for Fyzabad. [*Interruption*] Take your seat please. You must get up.

The hon. Member for Tobago West.

**The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stanford Callender):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a brief contribution to this debate. I could not sit and listen to the Member for St. Augustine who sought to use this Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill which extends the life of this present local government for one year, to build his platform for the support of the Congress of the People in Tobago. I am now hearing from the Member for St. Augustine that they had consultation with the people of Tobago. Who are the people of Tobago? I attempted to monitor their presence and they had a meeting in Market Square. My intelligence told me that there were about 12 persons in the meeting, including eight who came from his executive.

**4.00 p.m.**

They also attempted to have a coming together of what is called in Tobago now, the 'opposition forces', whose meeting did not last very long, because they had to reach the point as to who would lead such a grouping.

Mr. Speaker, what is interesting—

**Mr. Dookeran:** I want the hon. Member for Tobago West to know that his intelligence has wrongly advised him.

**Hon. S. Callender:** Mr. Speaker, time will tell. It is amazing that the Member of the COP has learnt nothing from his former leader who came to Tobago and appeared to be “uncle”, and brought goodies for the people of Tobago and there was a shocking lesson. The Member for St. Augustine should learn.

I looked at the *Newsday* and I gleaned on page 9 that the former Member for Couva North, while making the point about the need to reform local government, his only reference in that story was to talk about the allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly and he attempted to compare it with Chaguanas and Couva.

I want to place on the record of this House if it has not been done before, that Tobago, like the Member for St. Augustine, is not a ward of Trinidad. It is not a county. Tobago is one-half of this unitary state which is called Trinidad and Tobago. We are an island surrounded by water and, therefore, it is important that we understand that in that context. And when the Member for St. Augustine talks about meeting secessionists in Tobago, I want to inform him when I entered politics in 1977 through local government, it was based on the same group of secessionists. This year I celebrate 30 years in politics, local government. I started in the local government and because of that same small group of secessionists, the same people, the PNM was able to retain after 1976, the Tobago County Council. And I sat in the Assembly during its first four-year term. So I understand the struggles, the desire of the people of Tobago and, therefore, Act No. 37 of 1980 which was amended by the UNC, is an evolution process and I place on record that no one in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago dictates the progress, the programme and the development for the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is done solely by the people of Tobago given the authority and the role and responsibility under the Tobago House of Assembly Act. I will never say it is a perfect situation.

Last year the Tobago House of Assembly appointed a Committee of the House to review the Tobago House of Assembly Act, because as you get into the administration of the island, you would recognize that there continues to be challenges, and those challenges we are going to meet. So we do not need the support or the guidance of the COP.

Mr. Speaker, when you listen to the Opposition, both Front and Back Benches, you would believe that they just arrived. I want to place on record on that side, that

there are no virgins in this politics. They have all been tried and tested, and when the Member for St. Augustine talks, I ask myself where was the Member all these years. There has been an evolution and a revolution in the administration of Tobago, and it has been demonstrated by recent elections and would be demonstrated again in this one.

Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, there is one voice in Tobago that is attached to the COP, and all of us know. The Member for Tobago East knows. The Minister of local government knows. He is a man who left his job in TSTT and went to greener pastures and when hard times caught up with him he came back and is now the chief spokesperson for the COP. He has no respect in Tobago, none whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine—and there are Members on the Front Bench who do it from time to time, professing to be chief spokesperson for the people of Tobago. I want to place on record that Tobago has two representatives, Tobago East and Tobago West, who are capable of representing the interests and the needs of the people of Tobago, bearing in mind, that we also recognize and understand that institution that it is called the Tobago House of Assembly. We recognize its role and functions and, therefore, we do not try to get into conflict with them, but support the activities and the decisions of the Tobago House of Assembly for they speak for the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, I want to advise my friends on the other side, Front Bench Opposition and Back Bench Opposition, I repeat, Tobago is not a ward, it is not a county and, therefore, I found it strange that Tobago found itself in this Bill. I was hoping that no mention would have been made. It is disrespect to the people of Tobago. For Tobago to find itself in this amendment to extend the life of local government; Tobago is not a local government.

The term of the Members of the Tobago House of Assembly is four years and it is a fixed four-year term. So the next election in Tobago is 2009, and you will be welcome to come again.

Mr. Speaker, I support this extension because I see it as necessary. As a Member of the Government, and as a Member of Parliament, I support this legislation because it is necessary. [*Desk thumping*] But I want to advise him to leave Tobago out of your “kahn kahn tang”.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a White Paper out since 2004, on local Government and I would have thought that the Member for St. Augustine might have made some reference to that Paper, but he made none.

Clearly, his vision and his mission are to see how he can attempt to articulate a Tobago concern in this Bill. I want to say that—[*Interruption*] because these are

exciting times, and I am only warming up to face the challenges over the next few months because I know there are challenges. I will have to come to support my colleagues in the 39 constituencies in Trinidad.

I just wanted to put those issues to rest because as I indicated, there is in Tobago a Tobago House of Assembly charged with the responsibility for the governance of the people of Tobago. The people of Tobago have demonstrated over the past two elections that the PNM is the party of choice to govern them and, therefore, the people of Tobago are very comfortable with the Tobago House of Assembly, led by the PNM, led by our Chief Secretary, Orville London. The issue of the general election will be another issue and, therefore, we can deal with that at another time.

Mr. Speaker, I just felt it was important to erase the myth from the minds of people. Thank you.

**Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me first congratulate the hon. Member for Tobago West for making his “virgin” speech in this Parliament. I am a bit surprised that he recognizes no virgins here and most of the virgins on that side.

Mr. Speaker, what we are debating today is really a shame. You had the Member for Arouca North, the former Minister of Local Government speaking on this important Bill for eight and a half minutes. He was then followed by the hon. Minister who spoke for 14 minutes and they said absolutely nothing and then followed by the “virgin” contribution of the Member for Tobago West for three and a half minutes. This is what this Parliament has been reduced to. The Member for Tobago East asks what is wrong with that. Here we are speaking of local government which is the most important and impacts on the people both of Trinidad and Tobago, and Ministers of Government have nothing to say.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with an issue very early before I forget. It is on page 9 of the *Newsday*. I am sorry the Minister has left the Chamber because I would like him to know I am making this point.

He made reference to an award presented by the Couva/Tabaquite/ Talparo Regional Corporation at its award function on Saturday night, an award made to a former Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and a Member of Parliament who was illegally removed from this Parliament and rightfully done so by the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

Over the years, every regional corporation holds similar awards, and Ministers and Members of Parliament on that side receive those including the hon. Prime Minister, not a word is spoken.

This Minister hosted last November in Tobago, a conference for black mayors, a black caucus costing the State \$1.5 million. No benefit to Trinidad and Tobago, \$500,000. It was rum, scotch, food to tote and entertainment. The country saw no benefit for it—\$1.5 million and he is making noise over a \$40 award. What a shame! But this is a Government of PR.

Last Friday an answer was circulated in this Parliament. A Member asked how much money was paid to the Market Opinion and Research International (MORI), from England. For the last few years this Government has been spending millions and millions of dollars. Let me tell you what it said.

The findings of this survey suggested that citizens are clearly unhappy with key services provided by the regional corporations. It said in a nutshell that local government under this PNM administration is at its worst; it serves no one. Imagine that, and you appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the MORI polls will try to be favourable to the Government to continue to earn its keep because they are obtaining millions and millions of taxpayers' money.

Among the services noted as areas needing improvement are environmental issues which is at the top of the list. Actually, one in four and one in five mentioned poor drainage, and flooding, 31 per cent as their primary concern, 21 per cent stated poor road conditions and 24 per cent, street lighting. I am sure the Member for Arima would have corrected the street lighting. The lack of recreational facilities for young people and children so that local government has been non-productive. It is a cash cow for PNM party groups.

Mr. Speaker, this postponement of the elections has nothing to do with reform. It is about campaigning because the PNM is in serious trouble.

The Minister indicated a full page advertisement. I do not know what is the purpose of putting the Minister's photograph; \$18,000 of taxpayers' money in every newspaper, three four times per day.

The Minister of Local Government is talking about 350 consultations. The question is 350 consultations. Let me tell you what it is going to cost the State.

The last time they did the crime consultations, they did seven and it cost \$2.1 million, in excess of that, so it cost approximately \$300,000 plus for consultation, with 350 at the same dollar value. It is plenty rum and roti, free ride, CEPEP and URP workers have to come out with T-shirts provided, at \$300,000 for 350 consultations, and one is looking at in excess of \$100 million and that is for campaign purposes.

That is all the PNM is doing, for campaign purposes. Mr. Speaker, why is it 350 consultations, and there are approximately 130 electoral districts? Why 350?

In Port of Spain there are councillors representing 2,000 persons. In the rural communities, there are 10,000. This 350, it is campaign. This is how the PNM intends to spend the taxpayers' money. It has nothing about reform. For the last year, there was not a single thing about reform. All this nonsense they have been speaking about. But we will come to that in more detail in a while.

The Minister talked about funding. Mr. Speaker, there is a high level of frustration among our citizens and when a Minister comes to the Parliament and speaks untruth, the lay person in Fyzabad and Oropouche does not know he is speaking untruth. He knows he is lying. But I cannot say that in the Parliament. I am not saying that. I am saying what my constituent said. He said that Minister lied and lied through his teeth but I told him he cannot say that.

**Mr. Speaker:** You cannot use unparliamentary words by putting them into somebody else's mouth. I have said that before, so please do not go there.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, I will not put anything in anybody's mouth. We want to look at the question of funding because they keep hiding in this Parliament about funding and to say that the regional corporations do not ask for money. That is not true. In fact, they communicate to the regional corporations and they would say you are going to 10 per cent more than you got last year, if you notice the pattern. I want to tell the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, he should read the editorial of today's *Guardian*. He is embarrassing the country. He is embarrassing the young people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at what funding is being made available to the regional corporations. The Member for Siparia identified some bit of it, but I want to visit a few of them and to put on the public record that this Government is using and abusing local government at the same time. Let us look at buildings.

At the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation employees were unable to work because of the condition of buildings. They are making \$500,000 available for buildings maintenance, which is \$3.05 per person per year. Are you not ashamed? That is less than one cent per day.

The local health authority, \$4.5 million; per year, 88 cents per person. Are they not ashamed? That is less than a cent per day. Local Health Authority, the concern of local health, \$4.5 million. This is what the PNM has brought us to, and they want to take us to 2020 vision.

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Maintenance of state roads, traces and so forth, \$1.5, \$31 per house. Great is the PNM, it shall prevail. This is how it is suffering the people, but I will come to another point in a while.

Delivery of goods and services: What a shame! It is so shameful, \$74 per person per year. Divide that by 365 days and what do you get? This is the level of the PNM administration in this country. So this thing about reform has no relevance. It has no reform. How can you be giving the committees these kinds of money? But, I will tell you what they do. One will quickly say maybe, the PNM corporations are getting similar moneys. I will deal with that as well. The Minister sits on a cash cow in his office in Port of Spain and can determine in any corporation which roads are going to be paved as they do. In fact, in Endeavour Road and I hope the Member for Chaguanas will raise that. One side of the road is controlled by the PNM and the other side is UNC controlled. They clean only the PNM side. The drainage is only on the PNM side. What a shame!

As a Member of Parliament who has to face the international community because of technology, is this what a Government—and they expect the Opposition to just lend support? And we raise these concerns every so often. It is not the first time we are raising this.

Mr. Speaker, development programmes. In the Penal/Debe Corporation, the allocation is \$3.2 million. What do they expect to get with \$3.2 million? The development programme, \$1.2 million. The request was made for a higher sum and on not a single occasion has any corporation received the sums of money requested under this PNM.

In fact, it is far less. I heard the Member for Tobago West who does not think. He is talking about Tobago. We are not against Tobago receiving the moneys they have asked for, \$3.2 billion, whatever sums of money. We encourage it. In fact, it was under the UNC administration they started to get large sums of money. It proved differently. The highest amount of money ever obtained was under the UNC administration, and that was when oil was \$9.00 per barrel. Today, it is \$75.00. They are floating in money but the point is they are making \$3.2 billion as an island as the Minister argues for 40,000 persons, but in another place you are making 25 cents available per day. You cannot do that. Do they not have the same needs? And do they not have to provide similar services?

Mr. Speaker, Development Programmes—Drainage, \$360,000.

The rural community of Penal/Debe is agricultural to a large extent. That community gets nothing under the PNM. That is \$4 per person per year. How much for a pound of baigan? [*Crosstalk*] Oh, you buy melongene. They sell baigan \$4. That is

more than the cost of a pound of melongene. This is what the PNM is doing. One cannot escape that this PNM is about spite, about punishment, and I will be failing if I did not talk about discrimination. The evidence is here. And, the evidence is from the regional corporations which I will show from PNM controlled and from UNC controlled.

Mr. Speaker, recreation grounds. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West always comes and talks about healthcare, the worst the country has ever seen. The first consideration of a UNC government or any intelligent government will be to minimize people going for healthcare and encouraging them to live healthy lifestyles. For a recreation ground it is \$9,000. And they have produced West Indian cricketers. But the Minister—because he knew I was going to raise that point that is why he ran and hid—spent \$1.5 million for the black caucus of mayors, \$500,000 per day and \$9,000 for a ground.

The country benefited nothing. Mr. Speaker, I know a question that will be in your mind is: How much per person is this, at \$9,000? Five dollars and fifty-five cents per year. A Malta is \$6. You cannot even by a Malta. What a shame! So hiding in this Parliament to talk about reform; there is no reform.

Mr. Speaker, they are spending in the market, and it is a calculated effort of this Government to frustrate the farmers. They destroyed Caroni (1975) Limited because it represents large constituencies that they are of the opinion that do not support them, and rightfully so. One hundred thousand persons affected and now they are destroying the rural communities making sure they are not doing the drainage roads, they are not giving funding and they are making sure at the market, \$250,000 per market. And the Prime Minister's residence is \$115 million; a 10 per cent maintenance per year is \$15 million and the market is getting \$250,000.

Mr. Speaker, local roads. Under the Ministry of Agriculture—and we have argued that to hand that money to the local government—the least number of access roads where the country has its most money is under the present Member for Arouca North. Absolutely nothing is happening to promote agriculture, but hear what they are giving the local government body—\$400,000, which is \$4.44 per person. What a shame!

Mr. Speaker, buildings. Dollar value \$4.44. Every Minister opposite me drives up and down in Government vehicles; some in private vehicles paid for by the State. Do you know what they make available for the regional corporations? One dollar and eleven cents.

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Mr. Speaker, goods and services. What do we understand by goods and services at the regional corporations? For any corporation to be functional there must be goods and services because that is what you are delivering to people. Let me tell you the dollar value of that.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I think Standing Order 43(3), the Member is irrelevant. This Bill is to extend the life of the municipal corporations. It is not a Bill dealing with funding of local government.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please! No, no, hon. Member. Order! Hon. Member for Couva South, you have used an expression—

*[Remark withdrawn]*

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that goods and services—you see, you cannot come to this Parliament like virgins and want to extend local government. I am a representative of the people. I am a former minister of local government. I have a duty to make sure that the views of the people are expressed in this Parliament and for goods and services you are making 72 cents available and that is why you do not want me to speak about it. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine that? So, they do not want people to know that. So while they are feting all over the country and going to have 350 consultations for \$100 million, they are making 72 cents available at the Penal/Debe Corporation for goods and services. I say whether it is 45 minutes or 75 minutes, the truth shall be spoken always without fear or favour. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, let me tell this national community through this House what obtains. I want to reflect on the Tunapuna Regional Corporation because I did spend a few minutes on the Debe/Penal Regional Corporation which is controlled by the UNC, and a PNM Member is there. And I now go to the Tunapuna Regional Corporation which has both PNM and UNC, to show the mix. There is no planning unit at the corporation under this PNM which means the Minister controls it from Port of Spain.

A question was asked whether there was an allocation for disaster preparedness. The answer is no allocation has been made for disaster preparedness, and I have been arguing that there is need for a constituency fund because you saw a few days ago in Rousillac a number of roofs were blown off. The Member for La Brea is willing to help. He is on his way out but no resources. On Saturday night a house was destroyed by fire in Fyzabad and they called the Member of Parliament late in the night. The Member was there. No resources again because the PNM wants to control everything.

Mr. Speaker, \$50,000 was recently allocated to the corporation for this cause. So, here it is, the expert on this side of the Parliament, the Member for Tabaquite will tell you that we are expecting 16 or 18 hurricanes this year and you are making \$50,000 available.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the budgetary allocation of the Tunapuna Regional Corporation, I will tell you how they are undermining the local government. Fifty-seven million—Service, Garbage Collection, \$26 million. That is the highest bill. So the PNM's garbage they paid the most money to remove them but for development programme, \$2.2 million and that is for 162,000 people.

**Mr. Speaker:** It is an extremely good time to be refreshed with tea. The sitting of the House is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

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

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

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was making the point that \$2.2 million was allocated for development programmes in the Tunapuna Regional Corporation. The Government has to indicate clearly that if it is going to obtain an extension, it must level with the national community. In the case of Tunapuna, that boils down to \$2.2 million for 275,000 persons, which is \$8 per year per person. When you further divide that by 365 days, it comes to 2 cents that the Government is spending from a budget of \$40 billion. How in God's name do they expect to provide goods and services?

There is a concerted effort by the Government to destroy every institution in the country. Local government is a good example and they are obtaining some degree of success. That will change during the next election whether local election comes first or general election comes first. The Tunapuna Regional Corporation, at one time, had a staff of close to 2,000 persons. Today, the PNM has reduced it to 900. Why? Simply to frustrate the work of the corporation; and this is a PNM-controlled corporation. They do not care whom they have to destroy in the process. Once they are on the path of destruction, all falls down.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has introduced a number of make-work programmes, all with the intention of destroying local government. In the case of the Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), the corporation functions as the local government representative and must undertake cleaning and so on. CEPEP has assisted, but there is a lot of duplication because

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there is no working in concert. The same goes for the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP). It is invited to hand in its work programme at meetings of the regional corporations, but there is no working together because the Minister wants control. They are a government of control. They understand that very well. Over the years, the Government has practised this. It is the PNM that has made rum and roti politics popular in this country. That has not changed. Today roti is wrapped up and the rum has gone to Scotch.

When we look at all programmes, the multipurpose companies that the Government has established, unlimited funding and staffing is available, but in the regional corporations, which are constituted, do not obtain the same benefits.

The question has been asked in many corporations, why the lack of performance in terms of the delivery of goods and services. In Tunapuna, the corporation is faced with a lot of problems with supplies, the largest being funding. This, of course, hinders progress on projects. There is a requirement when a project is undertaken to be done in a particular time period and in almost all corporations you do not see this. Why? Simply because that is how the Government controls.

The Minister talked about consultation in communities and with NGOs. That does not exist. There is consultation with party groups, which almost always turns out to be a celebration of some kind. The village councils, despite their original intention, all became party groups. At the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, all the workers became Party Group No. 5. Every state-sponsored organization is the same. When we look at employment practices, Petrotrin is king. You walk out an aircraft at Piarco and walk into a job.

I recall a guy who was at the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, in a low-keyed job, who today is earning \$55,000 a month. The question is when you pay \$55,000, you starve the corporation of funds. When you buy a seven series BMW, you starve the corporation of a vehicle to do its work; and the PNM is proud it is destroying the country. [*Interruption*] I understand you have a series of vehicles carrying different people to different parts of the country. We will deal with that at another time.

When you look at cemetery upkeep in all the corporations, what does reform have to do with that? Absolutely nothing! Clean and maintain the cemeteries are all you need to do. You do not need a rocket scientist to tell you how to clean a cemetery or fence it. Again, the PNM is about spite, punishment and taking advantage of people.

When you look at employment practices, how do they take place at the corporations? The majority of persons employed at all the corporations in the last two or three years have come from PNM party groups. There is no process. If you ask the Minister to tell this House how they employ people, he does not know—

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, just to answer the request, there is a schedule for employment kept in each regional corporation that identifies the people who walk in to apply or send in an application. On the basis of that schedule, people are called to work. After some period and instances of employment, that person can be identified as a regular or a permanent worker, after they have accumulated a certain number of days. That is as per the agreement with the union and the CPO.

Other mechanisms for employment that the Member may be speaking about may be those processes and methods that are used in quite a number of corporations managed by the UNC. On the third Wednesday of last month, I asked that these processes be revealed. I will tell you that we have found violations in Princes Town and Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo. *[Interruption]* To suggest that the Minister does not know is not correct. In fact, I drew those instances of violation of the principles under which people were employed to the attention of each chairman and CEO involved.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting when you ask a question and you get more than you bargained for. The Minister has said that he found violation at two corporations. What he is doing is stretching the truth. He does not tell the House that the majority of persons were employed based on PNM recommendations. In every corporation, at the Siparia Regional Corporation, the majority of persons who have been employed come from PNM party groups, based on recommendations. I will show this in a few minutes.

More than that, the Minister does not tell this House, at the Tunapuna Regional Corporation, that whilst there are persons who would register there, there are some who did not register but who are employed. I thought he would have told the House that. The Minister is being very economical with the truth. Is the Minister not aware that in every single corporation there are persons who are not registered and who have gotten contracts courtesy the PNM party groups? Why is the Minister denying this? He cannot fool the nation. Everybody knows that. I have sent people to register and they do not get employment. I see others who are employed, so there is no follow-up. The PNM is about taking care of friends and family and building party groups and they use local government.

I come back to the point of the 350 consultations. In 2004, there was a Green Paper and when there should have been consultations, it was zero. Now there is a

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White Paper, an election is to be called and there are 350 consultations at the cost of \$100 million.

Mr. Speaker, one cannot escape how this Government treats people. I want to take you on a little journey to the Mayaro Regional Corporation to make that point. I am sure you appreciate the deep research on the many corporations. Under goods and services, in the Mayaro Regional Corporation, to tell you how important this is, \$445 per house, per year—Minister, are you aware of that—\$1.50 per day, to provide 28 services. Everything is politics. Water distribution is a good example. Water is intended to be distributed from January 01 to June each year. The first four months, January to April, there is very little. When the rains begin to come in May and June, there is endless water being delivered, simply because that is when the deals are made.

The PNM over the years—and it is very clear in this example—have used contractors to fund their programmes.

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, the process of contracting in the corporations, including the Mayaro Regional Corporation, has no PNM member on the tenders committee. They are all made up of the councillors and friends of the councillors in Mayaro. They certainly would not put a PNM member on their tender's committee.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, this is a very good Minister. I thought he could have been a very good candidate for Tobago East, but he has failed. The Minister controls it from Port of Spain. There are areas being paved in the Siparia Regional Corporation that the Minister determines; it does not go through the Siparia Regional Corporation. The Minister determines who is employed and where they are going to do projects in all the corporations. Mr. Speaker, he is spending \$445.50 to deliver 28 services. What does he expect to get from that? What is the intention of the Government? What does reform have to do with that?

Repairs to roads, box drains and bridges—\$2 million. This was when materials went up by 40 per cent. In the Mayaro area, there are 21 recreational grounds, 19 pavilions, four turf wickets. Do you know what they get for that? \$550,000. How else can one describe this Government's actions? The Ministry has all the expertise in Port of Spain. Why do they require a corporation to indicate its funding requirement? You are spending hundreds of millions of dollars. The Minister sits on a cash cow? He walks with millions of dollars in a brief bag, cash, so that he can distribute any time he wants. Why can he not say—

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I want the Member for Fyzabad to demonstrate where he saw that or withdraw that statement.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, I will explain. There is a report in the newspaper that \$1 million was found in the Minister's office and there has been no denial of it.

**Hon. Dumas:** You have to come better than that. I do not accept this.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I, too, do not accept that. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Hon. Member for Fyzabad, I think you have demonstrated to a great degree in terms of the dollars per person per year and perhaps you need to move on now. Move on!

**Hon. Dumas:** To the extent that you seek to abuse my name, I tell you, I will take my own steps.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, let it be placed on the public record, in the *Hansard* of this Parliament, that the Minister has threatened me by saying that he would take his own steps. I see that as a threat and I am calling on the Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security for immediate police protection. I do not care what steps he takes. He must take forward steps, not backward steps. He must run the Ministry as a paid servant; not as his private enterprise. He must demonstrate—

**Mr. Speaker:** Just talk. You have much more to say and time is running out.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** The Member just said that he would use his own steps. Here is a Member of Parliament delivering his duty.

**Mr. Speaker:** I will protect you! Do not worry about him! Continue!

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I was using the Mayaro Regional Corporation to make this point. Based on the CSO report, the Mayaro Regional Corporation is the poorest in Trinidad and Tobago—45 per cent. The Mayaro Regional Corporation is the largest area in Trinidad and Tobago without electricity. Whilst the national average is over 80 per cent, Mayaro has the least.

Mr. Speaker, less than half of that community has pipe-borne water. So when I raised the question of truck-borne water, you see the context. Funding is not made available. When the Minister comes for an extension, we have to be certain that when we lend our support or lack of it, we must make sure we bring this to the attention of the Parliament, so that we would be doing our duty to the national community by raising these issues. If the Government fails, as it will, to deliver on these, we would have done our duty. We get numerous reports from all the corporation saying what is happening.

I made the point that in all the corporations, both the UNC and the PMM-controlled ones, there is a shortage of manpower. The Minister does not need reform to correct that. The Government failed to implement Act No. 21 of 1990. They do not need reform for that. That is something to which three governments had agreed—the PNM, the UNC and the NAR. It was the first piece of literature available in terms of local government.

Despite these setbacks in many of the corporations, I congratulate the management, that is, the chairmen, mayors, councillors and staff for making sure that the work goes on as limited as they are with resources from the Government. What are lacking in many corporations are the measures and the safety for occupational health to obtain. Under the watch of this saintly Minister, who threatened me—

**Sen. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I never threatened the Member. I made it very clear that I would take steps to protect myself. It is not a threat to anybody.

**Mr. Speaker:** He knows that you are not threatening him, you know.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** What the Minister causes to happen is that the tenders are made at the regional corporations but treated with at his office in Port of Spain, which is illegal. The tenders are submitted in the boxes at the regional corporations and the Minister opens them in Port of Spain, whether directly or he causes it to be opened, and so they select the contractors.

There is no openness or transparency and I have made the point over and over that you cannot spend the taxpayers' money like this. At the Mayaro Regional Corporation, based on the monies given by this Government, it boils down to \$141.66 per year per citizen of that community. Again, I make the point that the corporations are not getting the support of the Ministry. I want to make some recommendations. What are some of the major issues in the reform?

Three persons of the Government have spoken and they have not indicated what will happen. As a responsible Opposition, I would like to suggest a few areas. The Government must identify the structure that will be put in place considering how they treat with it now. Very critical is the question of financing. We want to know the method of financing. We do not want, when the regional corporations apply for money, that they are at the mercy of the Minister of Local Government and the Minister of Finance, who say that they can only get \$5 million when they require \$6 million. Like Tobago, the THA, which called for approximately \$2 billion, when a corporation calls for \$100 million or \$300 million, in the same light, make it available.

In many of the corporations—it has nothing to do with reform—it is a question of human resources. We would like the Government to give a commitment to make available the number of persons in the different skills, administrative and otherwise, to manage the corporation's wealth, so that the services can be delivered. This will improve the productivity level.

Mr. Speaker, legislative reform in the Corporations across the board is very important. Some of the corporations must have access to legal fees. Government spent millions of dollars to lock up a former Prime Minister, a Chief Justice, a world famous surgeon, a former minister of government, but at the regional corporations they do not make the same things available.

In terms of infrastructure and service delivery, why does the Government continue, after six years, not to make available the monies and the resources? The Minister spoke about community involvement and citizen participation, which is a UNC idea. We are saying make it across the board. The Minister has not told this House how they have arrived at the people who will do the 350 consultations. A set of party group members will be hired; \$100 million will be made available and their main purpose will be to campaign.

Mr. Speaker, one of the Members opposite spoke about local government boundaries. Up to this point in time they have not indicated how. I want to make sure that they do not go where they have support and decide those will be the boundaries. That is how they include areas to come under the corporations. We have heard in Port of Spain, for instance, that 13 or 14 councillors, representing 2,000 persons per average are getting more money than Tunapuna, which has 262,000 persons and a larger boundary.

On the question of unemployment, the highest unemployment obtains in both the Mayaro and Siparia Regional Corporations. Again, there must be transparency in the process of employing people. The Minister cannot mislead this House, as he has done today, by saying there is a process. It has come to our attention that there are a number of people employed who do not go through any process. We do not need reform for the local government to be given the power, authority, funding and the resources to protect the environment. We do not need reform for that.

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

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

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

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*Question put.*

The House divided:      Ayes            10            Noes            12

NOES

Valley, Hon. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Narine, Hon. J.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Rahael, Hon. J.

Bereaux, H.

James, Hon. E.

Hart, Hon. E.

Calendar, Hon. S.

Seukeran, Hon. D.

Hinds, Hon. F.

AYES

Rafeeq, Dr. H.

Persad-Bissessar, K.

Ramnath, K.

Sharma, C.

Partap, H.

Nanan, Dr. A.

Panday, S.

Ramsaran, M.

Lucky, G.

Khan, Dr. F.

*Question negatived.*

**Dr. Fuad Khan** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Mr. Speaker, I understand we have a disaster outside, a storm watch, et cetera, so I will be brief.

I had prepared a small dissertation, but I believe that the Government, basically, by extending the life of the local government council is doing the Opposition a favour. By not calling the elections now, basically they are giving up their chance to win more seats in the local government council. The Government is extending the life of the council by this Bill, but on the other hand one has to understand that, for some strange reason, there are more unelected members doing most of the service and calling most of the shots in the local government council. There are mayors, aldermen, et cetera, who are unelected and being given senior positions and it is unfortunate that the hon. Minister of Local Government, an unelected person, was appointed to the Senate and is running the Ministry.

I make the point because when somebody is elected it is different from someone who is not elected. The Members for Tobago West, Tobago East, Tunapuna, San Fernando West, et cetera, down the ranks are all Ministers of State. Ministers of State have absolutely no say in the running of the Ministry. In the local government council, there are the majors, the aldermen, et cetera who are responsible for heading the council and doing a lot less than we expect them to do.

When I read this report of the Princes Town Regional Corporation and looked at the role of the council, which is that of policy and decision making, while the administration implements the decision of the council et cetera, there is a part that says that the council acts through the Chief Executive Officer of the corporation to undertake the following functions:

**5.30 p.m.**

- the forming and laying out or repairing of drains, cleaning and lighting the streets, footways squares and other public places vested in the corporation.

Mr. Speaker, I would read it again:

- repairing the draining, cleaning and lighting of the streets.
- the maintenance and management of markets, slaughter houses, et cetera.

If you run down this list of 10 such functions, one asks the question: What is the function of those who are employed in the councils, versus those who are employed in CEPEP? CEPEP has been taking over most of the functions that are elucidated in the report. It continues:

“by means of direct labour and contracted services, the recurrent capital work programmes of the corporations are carried out.”

Local government, in this country, should be disbanded entirely and all the systems contracted out, because when you look at the amount of money being spent on CEPEP, which is, to date \$1.5 billion to \$1.8 billion, it is contracted services to do exactly what local government is paying the daily-paid workers to do. Coming to the House to extend the life of the corporations is basically doing the Opposition a favour, to get their act together. Right now, if the Government calls an election, and with the two fractions on this side, the three fractions—*[Interruption]* I am a minority fraction here. I am trying to get the message across, but due to the disaster outside—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** I notice you said three fractions, are you sure you do not mean two and one-half?

**Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I never realized that you are a urologist too—well, two and a little piece.

In all seriousness, I have heard the Member for Siparia, my good friend and I have heard the Member for St. Augustine, and it sounds very, very nice to say call election now. I want to send a simple message to my colleagues, if the PNM calls local government election now and not wait this year, then they have the opportunity, no offence, to wipe out the local government representatives who belong to either side and that is a fact. At the end of the day, for what it is worth, I thank the Government for giving us the extension this year, but there is only one problem, it is extending the life of the mayors. Some of them are on radio every morning. It is extending the life of unelected people on the corporations. Because, correct me if I am wrong, I am trying to figure out one Mayor who has been elected by the people. I cannot think of any.

At the end of the day there are many people who are putting them up for elections and not obtaining the senior position to run the corporation in a manner that it should be run for the people who have put them. At the end of the day, these elected members have to listen to unelected people. I say this in the same vein that my colleagues from Tunapuna, Tobago West, Tobago East, San Fernando East, Laventille East/Morvant, Ortoire/Mayaro, Point Fortin and Port of Spain South are subjected to the same type of electoral abuse, because they are elected Members who are serving in their Ministry as junior Ministers and they are under unelected people who belong to the Senate.

I think we have our hierarchy upside down. It is a hierarchy that does not make any sense anymore. It started in the good old days with Dr. Williams when

he brought unelected people—he said that the majority of the PNM were millstones and “crapauds”—into the Senate in ministerial positions.

It continued with the UNC, NAR and each successive Opposition. They made noise. Extending the life of the local government council is extending the life of a bunch of unelected people, making senior decisions for constituents who have put elected Members in place, who have to beg for handouts to do certain jobs in the area.

El Socorro is one part of it. There is a guy called Ross who has not been elected. You can go down the line. That is the reason the Member for San Fernando East realized the “WOTs” that are there—waste of times—and he had to put a programme in place to deal with the incompetence of the local government people, because that is what brought on CEPEP. CEPEP was a formulated brainchild to do the cleaning of the environment, et cetera, because the local government daily-paid people were putting in one or two hours without any sort of performance appraisal.

We are here today, in the middle of a thunderstorm and we are debating whether we should extend the life of the local government for another year, which they have had already. One has to understand that Dr. Eric Williams held back local government election for nine years. At the end of the day, we are not doing anything that is different.

I would like to make an appeal to the Member for Diego Martin Central, who is the Leader of Government Business in the House, to ask the Member for San Fernando East if he could reform the local government in such a manner that they do not exist. Get rid of them and let a different system take precedent; something like what the Member for Tobago West spoke about. There is no local government in Tobago. There is a different system, where that area is like a system where it is on its own. They get their money, basically, as they apply to the senior partner, which is Trinidad. We need that type of system here and let the people who are elected run that local government constituency.

Then we would not have cemeteries and the disrespect for the dead and the families who go there to mourn in the cemeteries in the dilapidated areas.

The Caroni cremation site is one of the worst examples of how not to treat the mourners and dead people. I had the unfortunate task to go there recently. The horror stories of that area, I realized, were so true. There were approximately three or four different pyres and people were coming in. There is no entry and exit. There is no proper parking or lines, toilets, seats, lighting or anything. If this

is the level of disrespect that is being shown to the people who go to the Caroni cremation site by the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, one shudders to think—if this is how you are treating people who are in a state of mourning, crying, apathy and all the different negative things there are in human existence—you cannot give them a nice physical environment to sit in; a temple for them to pray, borders around the area and something that is reasonable to sit on while the fire is burning? It shows a certain lack of consideration on our part and the local government's part.

I am certain that the local government representative in that area, who has won the election, understands that. Maybe they go towards the council which is run by an unelected person and maybe they are told that is unnecessary.

We have to realize that although we have come here to extend the life of a local government moment, we tend to play politics with a lot of things and we do not really look at the basis of what is going on. When you have the job of a local government system to perform and do a proper movement on the Caroni cremation site and they are not doing it—the Member for Siparia indicated that you have to recall them—how do we recall people for lack of performance?

At the end of the day, the legislation is going to be passed. We would have people running a council for the next two or three years, or how long it is seen fit by the Member for San Fernando East and the system would perpetuate itself continuously with the lack of performance. Successive governments and oppositions will come here and deal with a problem in such a manner. We will say the same thing, if you go back in the *Hansard*, but nothing will be done. We talk about local government reform. What are we reforming it for? Are we reforming it to get control, holding or for performance-based type of governance?

The San Juan Market is in the same position and state that it was when we were in government with Dhanraj Singh. I heard his name mentioned. We were able to do part of the market and the people of San Juan were beneficiaries of a so-called part of a market and there were plans to increase it. Up to this day, it is just “ol' talk”, rhetoric, et cetera. At the end of the day, they have not performed where the market is concerned.

Secondly, I brought the Minister previously to discuss the roads in El Socorro South and the dilapidated industrial area that is starting is up in El Socorro South. Up to now, they have gotten worse in the last six months. Nothing is done and we talk about the lack of funding. It is a PNM-run corporation so you cannot say that it is a UNC area, although it has a UNC representative.

Why am I here fighting, in the middle of a thunderstorm, to increase their existence? I think we should sit here tonight like big people—the Member for Diego Martin Central should move a Motion that we disband the local government people. We should get rid of them and find a new system, rather than sit in the thunderstorm. I believe if something is not working, get rid of it.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Do you get rid of everything that is not working? You are a surgeon, boy?

**Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, now that I have seen you laugh, I cannot understand why they have not gotten rid of the Minister of Local Government as yet. I am going through the motions saying the right things and he is still there and he is trying his best to take the seat from my friend from Tobago East. I might not be in this House, come the next election—

**Mr. Ramnath:** We sure of that.

**Dr. F. Khan:**—but I know for a fact that I want my friend from Tobago East to be here and not be displaced by the Member—when I am looking at the television in the next five years, if I have to look at “Stretch” versus the Member for Tobago East, I prefer to look at the Member for Tobago East.

I would not be too long. The take-home message in this is, if we are here as big people trying to extend something because it is the law and legislation, let us for once in our life look at something that is different. We have done the Breathalyzer and Equal Opportunity Bills. We are looking at progressive movements in our country. Let us see how best we could either get rid of local government or change the system and for Heaven's sake, when persons put themselves up for the election and wins, let them be given their just due. [*Interruption*] Once again the Member for Laventille East/Morvant has uttered “ass—ide”. [*Interruption*] I said “aaside”

**Mr. Hinds:** Disrespectful.

**Dr. F. Khan:** I said aside. He does not know that his time is limited here too. He is leaving at the end of this term like myself. We are both leaving from what the stars have said. At the end of the day, all jokes aside, we have to decide that instead of coming to this honourable House to extend a time, basically, you could take a message I would tell the Member for San Fernando East, if he could pull it out of his back pocket and call the local government elections. Maybe, if he calls the local government elections soon, as my colleagues want: the Front Bench colleagues and Back Bench colleagues, and they get a rude awakening, they may decide to think differently, for a general election will come after.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Mrs. Job-Davis allows Mr. Panday to speak before her]

**Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town*): I want to thank that most beautiful lady from Tobago East, because we know that she has graced this Parliament with dignity for the last five years and we hope that she returns.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** Thank you.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, on that note, since the Member who belongs to the half of the grouping on the Back Bench made a statement, I think I want to respond to him at this time, because I know that the population is looking on the television, not because of me or you, but because of the weather. I agree with him, if there is unity of the Front and the Back Benches, all sorts of people may fool us and tell us: “You are stronger than this one and the polls are in your favour”. If that arrogance and that false information swells your head, and you decide to go in a particular way, at the end of the day, all of us will get a rude awakening.

That happened in 1991. In 1991, the ONR was there and they got 81,000 votes and did not get a single seat. Further to that, to my colleagues on the Front Bench, their base shrank because the marginal seats had gone. I think they got 10 seats. History is before us here today.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That appears to be a personal attack on me.

**Mr. S. Panday:** History is before us today. We have the benefit of history and past experiences. I want to let all our colleagues know that if this opportunity passes us straight this time, not only would we have to give account to your fellow brothers and sisters in the community, our children, but to our grandchildren and generations to come. Petty differences must be put aside. Past hatreds and past antagonisms must be put aside. That is why—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Valley:** “Yuh begging?”

**Mr. S. Panday:** Of course, I am begging; to get rid of the PNM. That is why I am begging.

Once we come together we could—the prophetess say so. I want to send that message to all and sundry. We must be strong enough and learn from our history and do not allow our financial backers to dictate the pace of our thinking. We must think of the future of the people.

That is why, if you observe my performance in the Parliament, I have never attacked one single person in this Parliament, because I have a vision and my vision is 4040.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is not true. You attacked me.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, may I take this opportunity to apologize to my friend for all the pain, agony and suffering I have put her through.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** “Nah”, it was not that bad.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I want to put that position and to again call upon all those who are responsible for bringing this nation together, to take that mantle and move forward. I say no more on that.

The other point that my friend from Barataria/San Juan made was the point about the cremation site at Caroni. I had the misfortune of visiting that site. You would be ashamed to look at how people dispose of their loved ones.

At times, when the river comes up, the pyres are at the same level with the river. When the water comes up, the pyres are wet and the bodies are not properly burnt. The people were shocked to see that; they wanted to send their loved ones in the proper way and the bodies were not properly dealt with. Something must be done.

At the same time, let me take the opportunity to boast to my brothers in North that in South we have something called “The Shore of Peace”. People from Port of Spain go to The Shore of Peace because it is a clean, beautiful place.

We must ask ourselves—most of the people who are cremated are Hindus—instead of complaining like that, why do you not look at your organization to put a case for you? They were given a radio station. Instead of using the radio station for politics, why not use the radio station for the propagation of your religion? Your role and function first of all should be religious and they must make sure that they protect their flock. That area at the Caroni cremation site is in a disgraceful state. We call upon those who have their following at heart, to take immediate action and we shall support you. So far for that.

We come now to this. I want to congratulate the Member for Tobago West for such a powerful contribution. Somebody said it was his virgin intervention. We want to congratulate him.

This legislation before us today—comes at a time when we should not have been here at this ungodly hour—is a waste of legislative time. We should have been using our time in this Parliament to bring new legislation, the Supreme Court of Judicature Act and all those pieces of legislation that are very progressive and for the benefit of the society. This Government has been stuck in a mode. It has been doing—I am certain that you are disgusted with them—this, in that every

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year they come back bringing the same piece of legislation to the Parliament for us to debate. We have the Customs Act, the Insurance Act and the Law Reform Act. These are the things we should be working on. Instead, what we are working on today is really rehashing arguments.

I am certain, last year on July 05, when this legislation was brought to the Parliament, you would have heard most of these arguments and asked: What are they coming back with this nonsense for? I myself really—I am not annoyed—am disturbed that the Government is wasting legislative time. For a moment, did you think that the Government, when they came on the last occasion, did not have the foresight to see how long the reform exercise would have taken? They could have seen that it might take one year or two years. If we know and work it out that it could take two years, why do we have to come back every year with the same nonsense? I humbly submit that this is an indication that they are just spinning and dancing on one spot.

This is an example of PNM's incompetence. This is an example of PNM's lethargy. This is an example that they do not know what they are doing. They have so much money that they are spending all their time spending money. They spend all their time wasting money and no time to run this Government. All they do is spend all their time trying to win the next election. They are trying to hold on to office, but they are not really seeking office for the purpose of ruling and having good governance. I see the Member for La Brea is shaking his head in approval.

Mr. Speaker, I would show you the con-man job and how this Government is playing with the Parliament and the people. On the last occasion when they came to the Parliament—if I may quote from the contribution of the last Minister on the last amendment to the Municipal Corporations Act:

“Notwithstanding section 11(4) and 4(A) and sections 12(5) and 15(1), for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2000, the term of office of each Councillor shall continue for twelve months from the date of expiry from the existing term.”

[*Interruption*] Cut short? Mr. Speaker, the Whip has inflicted violence on me and has told me—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rafeeq:** Make your major points.

**Mr. S. Panday:** How we reach major points?

“the term of each Councillor shall continue for 12 months from the date of expiry from the existing term of office as though each Councillor has been elected for an additional period of one year.

The term of office of each Mayor, Chairman or Alderman shall expire at the end of the existing terms.

The Councillor shall elect a new Alderman for a term of twelve months in accordance with section 13.

The Councillor and Aldermen shall elect a Mayor or Chairman of the Council for a term of twelve months in accordance with section 14.”

On the last occasion, what they did was that they brought the life of the council to an end and brought the life of the aldermen and chairmen of the various corporations—What they did on the last occasion was that they created a scenario in which an exercise took place, which should have taken place only after the elections. They undermined the democracy. That is the important point.

What happened to them? They were trying to get an additional regional corporation under their belt. Under the guise of local government reform, they had this clandestine motive of huffing, taking, stealing or scrambling a local government.

The situation in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation is three UNC and three PNM. The UNC, by lot, had gotten the chairman and the aldermen, twice. They wanted to take the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. The PNM benefited in the increase in the number of local government representatives in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, without an election. That is why we have no confidence in you all. That is why we say when you bring this legislation and give the impression that this legislation is because of local government reform, you wanted to steal Mayaro/Rio Claro. As God had it, they won a seat by lot but the chairmanship—by chance—you did not get it. Why the change in the legislation? The reason for it is the change in the legislation, because you all realized that even God is against you and the prophetess cannot help you this time. Maybe the prophetess told you that you cannot win it. They did not want to lose the advantage. They are afraid that they may lose the aldermen they have. They decided to allow the status quo to remain. [*Interruption*] You got one of ours.

Why the change in the legislation? Why is this change in the nature of legislation? They come before us today in this Parliament and merely bring the legislation without giving any rationale or any analysis. Why did you do what you did? Why did you change the format of the amendment? These are the questions we are asking and these are questions the population is asking and they have no answers.

As I said, I am not going to take my full time because of the weather conditions, but I will give them thunder if they want. The point is that we have local government reform. We feel that this reform is a joke, it is not far-reaching enough and this PNM Government has no respect for local government. I will show you how. They come here before the Parliament and say that they would decentralize and have wider decentralization and as they have wider decentralization, more powers would be bestowed upon local government. We have at this time, in our laws, functions that the local government authorities have the power to carry out in law:

- provision and maintenance of corporation buildings;
- maintenance of homes, drains, water courses, roads;
- construction maintenance of all drains and watercourses, except main watercourses and highway watercourses; and
- the provision, maintenance and control of such parks, recreation grounds, beaches and other public spaces as the President may, from time to time, by order prescribe;
- promotion of development within the municipality, in accordance with plans approved by the Minister with responsibility for planning.

What do you find? While in law, the local government bodies have certain functions, in an effort to undermine local government, they are forming these special purpose companies. These special purpose companies, as the Member for Siparia indicated, are given unlimited funds and they are performing the functions which local government has in law, the duty to perform. In those circumstances, this reform is really a charade and mamaguy. After the local government reform, what will you do with those special—[*Interruption*] Would the Government tell us here today—we are accusing the Government of nepotism.

**Mr. Rahael:** The storm is hitting in one hour.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Okay, I will talk for two so the storm will pass.

The point I am making is local government has some functions which are enshrined in the law and the Government is undermining local government, with the special purpose companies. They are undermining the democracy, because in the local government bodies, those people are elected to perform the functions, according to the law. What did the Government do? In an election year, they formed these various companies to perform the function of local government.

Why are you undermining local government? How will that undermining of local government fit in the local government reform? If you continue to undermine local government, as it stands now, what guarantees do we have in the future, that when we have local government reform, you will not continue to undermine local government, therefore making it irrelevant?

Another thing is that these special purpose companies are stacked with political appointees. These political appointees are taking directions from the Ministers. The Prime Minister came before this House and said that these special purposes companies should not be political. They will not speak to Members of Parliament. People who voted for us—we cannot talk to those companies. Let the community speak to those companies. At the end of the day, those companies are under the direct control of the Minister. How could you tell us that these companies are apolitical, when in truth and in fact, they are under the direct control of the Minister? When these special purpose companies are under the control of the Minister then, of course, the Minister would be taking care of her own. I want you to tell me. If you want me to stop now I would, if you answer one question. That question is—I cannot trust you.

**Mr. Valley:** Why you cannot trust me?

**Mr. S. Panday:** You said that the Equal Opportunity Bill would go to a select committee and come back in time before election, because you do not want to give us anything. The way it is going, it is pronounced dead on arrival.

**Mr. Valley:** I am giving you my word that we would deal with equal opportunity before the Parliament is prorogued.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, like the weather affecting you too. What would be the status of the special purpose company, on the passing of the legislation on local government reform? Answer the question.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I will answer his question. The whole purpose of local government reform is to put in place a system, so that local government can do what it is supposed to do. It is owing to the breakdown of the local government system, in part, that the Government found it advisable to have these special purpose companies to do what local government should be doing. With the reform of local government, where you would give them more autonomy and more powers, most of these functions will return to local government.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Therefore, all the special purpose companies will be disbanded.

**Mr. Valley:** I am not saying that. There are some special purpose companies, which will remain. There are some which are doing what local government is doing and they will most likely go.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Not most likely. We are saying that all the special purpose companies which are performing the functions of local government, will be disbanded.

**Mr. Valley:** No, no, no. Subhas, you know I am here longer than you have been, “ent”?

**Mr. S. Panday:** We started together in 1991.

**Mr. Valley:** I do not think so. I was here from 1987. You cannot put me in a box—

**Mr. S. Panday:** I want to put you in a coffin. That is the box I want to put you in.

**Mr. Valley:** That is what you want to do to me?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Political.

**Mr. Valley:** I thought I was your friend. I rest.

**Mr. S. Panday:** The point about it is, after local government reform, all the companies which are performing the functions of local government will not be in competition with local government and they will be abandoned.

**Hon. Member:** He never said that.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I want him to answer.

**Mr. Valley:** There will be a rationalization.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I will talk for 15 minutes again. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much, because of the weather. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West beg enough. We will be following you. We would be paying close attention and we will hold you to your word. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas):** Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. “Yuh know again, ah nearly geh set up”. We come to this Parliament at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, to pass this piece of legislation; an important piece of legislation in my mind and I am sure everybody's mind in Trinidad and Tobago, about postponing an election for one year, yet we want to hurry through the Parliament talking about storm. At the same time the people's business must be dealt with.

When we look at the performance of local government today in Trinidad and Tobago, we see that performance is well below par and maybe the population would like to see new local government representatives. Maybe they want to change their councillors to have better representation. We are in this Parliament, because we have the majority to pass a simple Bill and we want to bulldoze it through. I want to ask a question. [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member for Arouca North, I am hearing you and it is not your turn to speak.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I am very concerned, not only about this Bill before us, but indeed, the attitude of the Government as we deal with the people's business out there. If the Leader of Government Business is scared of a storm, he has the authority to adjourn the House to a next date and we would come back here. The problem is that they are rushing the legislation. We were told on Friday evening that we should come here. I remember getting up very early this morning and trying to prepare for this afternoon's debate. When we come here we are also hustled. The people out there might be looking to hear what is being said by the Opposition or the Government. Why are we postponing the election? Another question that comes to mind is why the change. My friend from Princes Town asked the question.

I remember when I debated this Bill on the last occasion, I told the Government: "Must we come to Parliament to fire Ian Atherly?" Why have you come back, one year later, and go back to the original intention that happened years before?

**Mr. Valley:** I simply want to let the Member know that we took his advice. Last year he suggested to us that we should extend the life of the whole council and, therefore, on this occasion, we have decided to take his advice.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I would not fall for that. I have the *Hansard* of last year. I did not ask that it be done like that. I could read my entire contribution. I never asked for it to be done that way. I asked, why—as I am doing this afternoon—are we changing and going back to that time? Are we taking the country for fools? You come one year and do something and come back another year and do something else. Why not the consistency?

I accused you last year of wanting to fire certain mayors and aldermen. I said that there was a collusion between the Front Bench and the Government to fire certain aldermen who did not toe the line. Names I remember are Naidoo Powder, Ken Emrit and others. During that time, they were fired as aldermen. I asked the question then and I ask again, if you are passing legislation, please do it.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, on page 683:

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

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I said the same thing a while ago. I accused you of doing that.

**Mr. Valley:** You said clearly:

“I would like to see the continuation of councils, mayors, aldermen, and councillors.”

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** What is in the statute now is that we change it because of the simple majority. You changed it and come back now. Why did you not take my advice then?

**Mr. Valley:** Oh God, we get brighter.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** “Yuh get brighter?” Why did you not withdraw it then? I know the Member for Diego Martin Central, according to his colleague from San Fernando, is playing smart by half. We are dealing with legislation today and we have to look at that. Again, I would ask questions. If you want to do the reverse, continue what happened last year and put it in the *Hansard*. We want the people to understand what is happening.

The elections must be called when they are due. It is not good. If you have poor representation, as we are having in certain parts of the constituency of Chaguanas, for example—we heard the boast this afternoon by the Member for Siparia that the Mayor of Chaguanas did certain things. That is what they are supposed to do.

I looked at the 1983 recommendations and everything else. I want to put one on the record. My friend from Arima will attest to it. I wrote the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment pointing out every lamp post in the Chaguanas constituency which I believe should be lighted. Her response was: “Yes, that

would be done.” Today we hear other people claiming it. I want to put that on record. It is not really good for all of us.

When you look at the White Paper, this is an area I want to touch a bit because people are talking about coming to Parliament and not doing your work and research. I want to go back to 1983, where there was a Draft Policy on Community Development and Local Government. I want to quote to let the country see what is happening. For me, there have been many papers: white, green, and blue. I would read what happened in February 1983, when the former Prime Minister, the late Mr. George Chambers was speaking. He said:

“Consequently, there is an obligation on Government to explain to citizens its policies and programmes at both central and local government levels and to inculcate an acute sense of responsiveness at both these levels to citizens’ needs and grievances.

It is against this background that the creation of two new Ministries must be viewed. They are the Ministry of Community Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Information. In fusing community development and local government, we have set out to institute a new structure for involvement of the citizen in the business of government, particularly at local and community levels, as a commitment, it would be necessary to press ahead with local government reform to make those authorities capable of directly discharging the responsibilities to citizens and to prepare community organizations to play their part in this challenging relationship between government and citizens.”

This was 1983. If you go to the White Paper before us and you read, it is about the very same thing. This is what bothers. We have come 20 years later and talked about the White Paper and local government reform. In other words, I do not have confidence in what is happening.

I will continue reading what this document said in 1983:

“In outlining the perspectives for the new society in 1970, in this document known as the *Chaguaramas Declaration*, the late Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams outlined the following strategy in the period before the introduction of our Republican Constitution. Politically, the independence of this country must be maintained and the people, on the basis of constitution reform, changes in a system of local government and the introduction and strengthening of a consultative mechanism which must be allowed to participate more fully in political process...”

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I brought back two Prime Ministers of the past and they spoke about local government reform. How can I, as a relatively new Member of this Parliament, come and accept another White Paper without commenting on it? This is what is happening in this country. We come to this Parliament from time to time and make certain noises, as they were, and try to convince the people.

**Mr. Valley:** I think I really need to say something here because I am not speaking. The Member correctly quoted 1983. But if the Member would recall, that government went out of office during the period 1986—1991. When we got back in office in 1992, as the Member stated on the last occasion, we started that local government reform. If one were to look at the 1991 manifesto. It is clear there. We started. I was Minister of Local Government and we started putting the structures in place. Again, as fate would have it, that was continued after I left local government, by my colleague, the Minister of Works and Transport. As fate would have it, again, we went out of office in 1995. Again, there was that hiatus and it has come full circle to the Government of the People's National Movement once more in 2002 to restart the process. It appears long, but there is a continuation, in terms of PNM policy.

**Mr. R. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, he took up the time I would have spent on reading. I want to thank the Member for trying to educate the nation. We know what is happening because it is here in the White Paper.

I want to put on the record what you said and more. To blame administrations, to me, is not fair. On page 3 of the White Paper, it states:

“The newly elected National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) was also victorious at the 1987 Local Government Election. Two years later, the NAR proposed what appeared to be revolutionary changes in a draft policy paper—*The Decentralization Process, Regional Administration and Regional Development-Proposals for Reform 1989 to 1990...*”

I want to put on record that the government of the day amended the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 within two years. It continues:

“were anticipated with the return of the PNM to national government in 1991. The PNM had indicated...”

I am trying to follow what you said.

“upon its return to national office it would reduce the number of regional corporations. The PNM in record won the 1992 Local Government elections...One of the first things the PNM administration did was to reduce

the number of regions from 13 to 9 by Act 8 of 1992. In general, the reform policies did not differ fundamentally from those of the NAR. However, a great deal of emphasis was placed on accountability and the achievement of value for money expended.

In 1995, the United National Congress (UNC)...in coalition arrangement with the NAR, ousted the PNM from office. Essentially, there were no differences between the two coalition partners on Local Government Reform except perhaps, on the emphasis placed on policy areas. The coalition government wisely..."

This is a *Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform*. When you read the line I am going to read, I want you to understand why people outside must lose confidence in a government; not the PNM, UNC or NAR, but government, when this could be put on a *White Paper*, which is, to me, not a PNM document, but a government document. Listen to this line:

"The coalition government wisely continued some of the policies of its PNM predecessor. However, there was no significant advancement of the Local Government system."

You understand why people who are opposed to the PNM will see this as a party document and not a national document.

We will continue, because if you are talking about serving 14 corporations, you can do that. You cannot come and put that on the table and expect people to fall for it.

The next question I want to talk about is the emasculation of local government. It was said before, but I want to put on record some of the things that disturb me when I come to the Parliament and try to appreciate why this is happening.

If you look at the Social Sector Investment Programme of 2006/2007—I will put on record the quantum of money that is being spent on these other programmes which, I believe, if the Government was serious about local government—I am convinced they are not. They have come here today and are quickly trying to pass this Bill and put off elections without explaining to the nation. The Members on that side who spoke did not, up to this time, tell us why the elections are being postponed. They have come and made the announcement. Clearly, this local government is being—I am not talking about it politically—the country must understand why.

When we look at NEDCO, \$82 million has been spent. When you look at the question of local government in the PSIP for the years, it is just over \$100 million. That is what 14 corporations must use to do their programmes. I am sure

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the hon. Minister will agree with me that this is not fair to all 14 corporations. That is just over \$100 million.

**Hon. Dumas:** I want to advise that the same book he has in his hand would inform him of all the other funding for all the other programmes and activities, including the Chaguanas Regional Corporation Centre. That would cost \$48 million but it is not in the Chaguanas budget.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** This is becoming more and more interesting. That is the point I really wanted to hear the Minister make. This is what I am talking about. There are people who are elected. There were campaigns. People voted for them in office, but there are people coming from outside, so to speak, and trying to do things in the corporations. When you look at all the programmes, I have the figures before me, you would see all those things that should have been done. If you go back in history, and read what the late Prime Ministers were talking about in empowering local government, you would see that all these things are put in there. Here we are in 2007 trying to defend what we are doing. That is not the spirit of local government. We are not empowering local government. We are only talking about it.

Conservation Corps, \$28 million. The point I am making is that it should have strengthened local government. It should make them relevant.

Of course, we have YTEPP and On-the-Job Training. If we talk about empowering local government—I want to congratulate the Member for Tobago West—we cannot compare a regional corporation here with Tobago. The reality is, person to person, per capita, the local governments in Trinidad cannot serve their constituencies. It is impossible. There is NEDCO, URP and CEPEP, which add up to billions of dollars and they are handled by somebody else. The Minister is trying to remind me of the question of the Chaguanas Regional Complex and Administrative Centre.

Again, this is a problem that I have as a Member of Parliament. There are drains and other amenities that the people need in Chaguanas but we are building an administrative centre for \$48 million. It does not add up. [*Interruption*] Comfort of the workers? It is not the workers. I never heard the Chaguanas workers—as you talk about workers, I heard you talk about hiring people. Have you investigated the hiring practices in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, for example? You are the Minister.

**Hon. Dumas:** You are talking about it.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, this is splitting hairs. Let me put it on the record, as I am being asked. If you examine the names—I have said it here already, the Speaker might ask that I not repeat it but I want to repeat it—of the

people hired in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, you would see that they resemble those of councillors. I know for a fact that there are sons, daughters, sisters and brothers of the present councillors. This is what is taking place. Nepotism is all over. I want to stop it, everywhere. [*Interruption*] Not my councillor. This thing must be stopped whoever councillors they are. It must be stopped.

Recently, I asked a question in the Parliament—I am trying to hustle because I do not want to be responsible for Members of Parliament being trapped in any storm:

“Could the Minister provide the House of Representatives with the following:

A list of projects undertaken by the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago from October 01 to December 31, 2006 and the names of the contractors hired for each project and the cost of each project?”

This is to strengthen my point of the wanton waste in Trinidad and Tobago and moneys not being spent by the local government body or the Ministry of Works and Transport.

I have been speaking to some engineers recently from both ministries and they shivered when they heard the cost of the projects. Before I go to the cost of the projects I want to put on record—when we look at the PSIP, the same book—you have to look—there is a fund for the community development in the Ministry of Planning and Development with a fund of \$116 million to deal with community development, which is what the Fathers of the Nation, former Prime Ministers Chambers and Williams talked about; linking community development with local government.

Here is \$116 million under the Ministry of Planning and Development. In all my life, the Ministry of Planning and Development has been planning projects and initiating policies that the Ministries of Works and Transport and Local Government would follow through. This Ministry has \$116 million. I am sure if that money was given to the Ministry of Works and Transport first, maybe—with the kind of people working in the Ministry of Local Government, I really cannot recommend that—we would have seen work across the country that would have benefitted us. There is \$116 million hidden in the Ministry of Planning and Development. I would say hidden because we have to search for it.

Let us go back to the question. Take out your calculators because this one is very, very interesting. I would stick to what happened in the constituency of Chaguanas, because there are other constituencies. Drainage works on both sides of Church Street, 100 metres from the Southern Main Road to its intersection—when I read this, I could not believe—125 metres of road cost \$1.057 million.

**6.30 p.m.**

When I calculated this—they divided \$1.057 million by 125 metres—it works out to \$4,000 a metre for a box drain. Mr. Speaker, then, my box drain in front of my house is more valuable than my house. I have about 50 metres of box drain that I built for less than \$1,000, a few years ago, and now the Government contractors are coming in at \$4,000 per metre. When one talks about wanton wastage; this is what it is.

If one continues to examine the PSIP in the various ministries, one is going to understand what I am talking about. Moneys are hidden there to be used—forgive me for using the word—corruptly. There is no watch.

I remember calling officials from the Ministry of Works and Transport and officials from the Ministry of Local Government to find out who was the contractor building a box drain in Cunupia, and there was no answer. In the end, it was so badly done—they were ashamed to say who did it—but, finally, I think it went to the Rural Development Company. So, do you see what is happening?

When I investigated the whole scenario, I called for a national drainage company or a commission or whatever, to deal with drainage in the country. These projects are being hidden in different ministries just to create the confusion of corruption. When one looks at the cost—this was laid in the Parliament and I want you to study it. If you are really interested about corruption, you can go here.

Mr. Speaker, drainage works on Endeavour Road, contract broken into four. This was not to bring it under \$100,000. Hear what the cost is! Mr. Speaker, \$1.983 million. Mr. Speaker, you know where Endeavour Road is. My colleague talked about it this evening. Endeavour Road is a small road. Let me read it again: Endeavour Road, \$1.983 million; Endeavour Road, \$1.78 million; Endeavour Road \$1.152 million. If the people from Endeavour Road are listening, they would want to know what is happening.

In Felicity, drainage works in a little street cost \$807,000. This is what is happening in this country. Why do we have elected members of councils? When one looks at what is happening sometimes, we are really scared to give them more power. If things are being done properly, then we could see what is taking place.

When I read these things I get angry. People pay their taxes and they want services. When moneys are being spent like this by various other institutions, I am worried. I would definitely ask a question about this.

This morning, when I was doing my preparation and going through all these things, I was amazed. There are billions of dollars being spent in other ministries other than the Ministry of Works and Transport and other than the Ministry of Local Government to do drainage; not to do something that is high on the agenda for the development of the people and so forth, but to do drains. When you talk to the officials from the Ministry of Works and Transport and officials from the Ministry of Local Government they say that they do not have the funding to do the work. I am not talking about the politicians; I am talking about the technical staff. They would like to do projects that were sent to the Minister, but funding is late and so forth.

The Rural Development Company got \$110 million for the year 2007. Last year, it was about \$60-something million. So, money is just flying all over the shop to deal with these things. When you add all the works here that could have been done by the Ministry of Local Government and it is not being done, I wonder, like my colleague, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, what is the reason for local government. We spend millions of dollars campaigning; we spend millions of dollars on hosting the election, but yet they are being emasculated. If you want to be serious—White Paper or no White Paper.

Mr. Speaker, what hindrance would the elected councillors and members of the corporations create to stop the White Paper Report? The point I want to make is that it was not necessary to postpone elections for two years in a row to deal with this matter.

If I remember the Prime Minister's speech last year—maybe the Member for Diego Martin Central brought these things out to trap us but, you see, I am consistent with one thing. I am a Member of the Opposition, and I would ask questions and make recommendations. Hear the Prime Minister on Friday, May 26, 2006:

“The Government, therefore, proposes to bring legislation to Parliament to extend the present term of local government bodies for a period of one year. We shall now publish our draft White Paper on Local Government Reform, which is being laid today on the Table of this honourable House. We are, therefore, now in a position to embark on the process of facilitating comprehensive public discussion on this pivotal matter of national concern.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that we had time. The Prime Minister knows the election date. Maybe the Member for Diego Martin Central does not know it. He has it in his back pocket. He has his candidates in his right back pocket. He knows what is happening. As the leader of the Government, he knows fully well that the election will not be within two years, but why postpone local government election for two years? Not one year, but two years”.

Mr. Speaker, I had reason to write the hon. Minister. This is something that I did not want to do, but when I see there were no services coming from some of the councillors, especially the ones that deal with cremation sites, I wrote the hon. Minister. I have a copy of the letter here. I told the Minister because of what is happening in the country, I would like him to assist, or should I write him directly and maybe he could speak with his CEOs to get certain things done in constituencies which were of concern to citizens like flooding and so forth. The Minister replied saying that I should apply to my councillor. I mean, that was the most embarrassing event for me in my history as a politician. If the Minister believes that I am just creating mischief, if I point him to Act No. 21 of 1990, on page 228—this is just for him to understand that when I wrote him it was not just pie in the sky. It says:

“The Minister may give general or specific directions to any Council in relationship to Government policy touching or concerning any matter; and it shall be the duty of the Council to govern its actions in accordance with any such directions.

Where a Council wilfully neglects or, refuses to carry out its responsibilities in relation to a particular matter, the President may by Order transfer responsibility for that matter to the Minister.

The Minister may investigate any matter concerning the affairs of any Corporation and it shall be the duty of all holders of corporate office and officers and employees of the Corporation to provide their willing assistance in any such investigation.”

Mr. Speaker, just to finish that point, I wrote the Minister telling him of the peculiar position that we were in—telling him what was happening in the corporation and so forth but, suddenly, anything that I asked for, because of the pettiness of politicians, did not happen. That is why sometimes when I get things done by the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, people would say that we are bribing the Minister. I do not know what that means. The fact is that we get things done, and I am happy about it.

Mr. Speaker, when you write the councillor—I want to tell the Minister that I took his advice. I have all the documents here. *[Interruption]* I said people accused me; I did not say that I did it. You must check the *Hansard* in case you are now waking up. I have all the letters here where I wrote the councillor. I copied these letters to the Minister. I have all the documents here. I wanted to read them all these letters into the record, but I am sparing them this evening, but I am going to do it sometime. It is important, because as a Member of the Government, you are supposed to treat with your colleagues in a particular way.

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I think a short explanation is required. I received the letter from the Member for Chaguanas, and on enquiry, seeking to assist the council informed me that there was no previous communication between the Member and the councillor. I advised them to assist as much as they could, and I advised the Member to communicate with the councillor. In my view, I would have closed the circle of communication among the Minister, the council and the Member.

**Mr. Panday:** A complete circle.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I wrote the Minister a letter—I have the records here—on November 17 and I requested roads to be fixed. For your information, none was fixed. I also addressed letters to him that were written before. You know, anybody could find themselves in that position. The Member wants to be an MP now, and you would not like the THA to be working against you. Think about it!

The Minister replied to me and it was a strongly written letter. It said that I have problems with my party and so on. I do not want to read that into the record. He said:

“I assure you that my Government and I are committed to upholding the principles of representative government at both local and government levels.”

Mr. Minister, let me inform you that nothing has happened. *[Interruption]* You said that you respect the independence of elected Members, but the fact is that nothing has happened. I have a list of letters. *[Interruption]* If you had taken your telephone and called me and invited me to your office—Mr. Speaker, I know that we are carrying on a personal thing here.

Mr. Speaker, this will be my last point. I have so many things to say about my own concerns about local government, but I must put something on the record.

The Member for Fyzabad made the point that only one side of Endeavour Road is cleaned. The Member for Tobago East was asking me across the floor, if one side of Endeavour Road is cleaned. I want to tell her that both sides of Endeavour Road were cleaned with the responsibility of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. So, if one side was cleaned, that is not my problem. I would like to see both sides clean.

To briefly defend the Maha Sabha, I want to tell you that I have made recommendations for the cremation site to be cleared and so forth, and the Minister is responsible for it and not the Maha Sabha. I would like to let my colleague, the Member for Princes Town know that I will also take the message to the Maha Sabha as I heard it this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I have made it my business to go downstairs in the library—

**Mr. Beraux:** May I ask a question?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** You want to ask me a question that would put me in trouble.

**Mr. Beraux:** I want to know if the Member for Princes Town does not speak to the Maha Sabha.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** He did speak to them from the Parliament this evening.

**Mr. Panday:** For your information, I was at the Indian Arrival Day function at the Craignish Mandir speaking on radio—

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** That does not mean that he spoke with the Maha Sabha. Mr. Speaker, I went downstairs to look at the financial statements of the regional corporations. Minister, I would like you to take this matter seriously. The latest reports we have from the corporations are 2000 and, maybe, 2001 and 2002. *[Interruption]* I went downstairs during the tea break.

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I am suggesting that if there are reports outstanding, then I stand corrected. I think that the records are clear up to 2003, 2004 and 2005.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I had a concern when I read the 2003 report. I asked for something later to allay my fears; I was told that they are quite back. So, you could check it for me. Mr. Speaker, this is Chaguanas Borough Corporation. I heard the Member for Siparia paying glowing tribute to the Mayor of Chaguanas, but I want to put on record something a little different. This is the financial statement of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ending September 30, 2003. It says that the list of unrepresented cheques at September 30, 2003 included 455

stale-dated cheques totalling \$337,000. Some of these cheques were dated back to 1997. Positive action should be taken by the corporation in respect of these cheques.

It says that the figure of \$19,000 represents a balance due by councillors in respect of amounts met by the corporation for charges for the use of cellular phones in excess of the telephone facility allowance. Are you aware of that? What has been done?

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I hope I do not have to engage in this any further, but the requirements for treating with accounting issues—I am sure the Auditor General would have certified those documents and, therefore, a request would have been made, and that request to the corporation would have been further strengthened by us. The Permanent Secretary in the ministry would have drawn the attention of those records to the CEO for onward transmission to the council, and the council is expected to respond in the context of the question asked by the Auditor General.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Thank you. I mean that is procedure. That is why I asked the question earlier on. Is that the CEO responsible for disbursement of finance as approved by the council? I understand that there is a dictator—and you know that—in Chaguanas.

Mr. Speaker, the figure of \$19,000 represents the balance due by councillors in respect of amounts met by the corporation for charges for the use of cellular phones in excess of the telephone facility allowance.

We in the Opposition do not get cellular phones. I could read all, but there are just a few that I must put on the record. It went on to say that included in the figure of \$347,000 is the amount of \$310,000 relating to rental of facilities for use as a car park. A signed agreement for this arrangement was not produced for audit.

Mr. Speaker, this is not one cent; this is \$310,000 for the rental of a car park. This is what is happening in Chaguanas Borough Corporation, which my goodly friend from Siparia boasted about. I must put this on the record.

It went on to say that it was noted in some instances—Mr. Speaker, this one is serious. All are serious, but pay particular attention to this one—cheques in respect of national insurance contributions were paid over to the NIS after due dates in contravention of the National Insurance Act. The records of the corporation show that at December 31, 2003, the corporation was indebted to the National Insurance Board in the sum of \$1,179,885. Member for Diego Martin Central, do you want me to

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repeat that for you? I know you are an expert in local government. So, what are we doing about this? Are you just going to allow this to happen and just close your eyes on it? This is the Auditor General's report. [*Interruption*] It was there already.

It further stated that a liability of 2003—so this matter is not reflected in these financial statements. Mr. Speaker, this is what is happening. I want to point this out to the national community. Evidence was seen that an amount of \$12,000 was paid to the Institute of Business of the University of the West Indies for a project management course, but details such as the names of the participants and the dates and duration of the course were not determined.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** What corporation is that?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** It is Chaguanas. I deal with my business first. I do not hide my business. Mr. Speaker, this is another big one and it says. You know, I understand that this one for the project management course, it was a county councillor who took the people money and went to IOB, and did a course in project management and there was no approval. And we are talking about governance. As the Minister, the buck stops with you.

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, the route in governmental matters is quite clear. The Auditor General, having done the books and having found discrepancies, they would have brought it to the attention of the corporation. If the corporation fails to respond within a certain time, and they believe that there is private liability, the Auditor General has the responsibility to take that to the DPP. With all due respect, it is not the Government, the Minister to lay charges on that matter. As long as we get a response from the Auditor General saying what should happen, then we would act according to that, but once it gets in the Auditor General's hands, it is not for me as the Minister to intervene in that context. That is all.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I beg to differ. That is why I asked the question about the CEO's role. I think something should be done about that. Mr. Speaker, it was noted that during the period, 21 contracts totalling \$513,000 were awarded by the CEO to the same company for security services. Also six contracts totalling \$143,000 were by the CEO to another company for security services. The limit for the award of a contract by the CEO is \$25,000.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and read about two more before I take my seat. Expenditure on commitments exceeds amounts released and revenue allocated by \$2,744,411 on three sub-heads: personal expenditure, goods and services and minor equipment. This is contrary to paragraph 67 of the financial regulations. An

accounting officer shall ensure at all times votes are sufficient to meet all commitments.

So, do you see what is happening in Chaguanas? It says that separate accounts and financial statements of the Mayor's fund as required by section 110 of the Municipal Corporations Act 1990 were not produced for audit.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I know you want to harass me. Go ahead.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I just want to ask the hon. Member if his discourse today has to do really with the Minister of Local Government or with the Mayor of Chaguanas. [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. Seukeran:** Good point.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Could you repeat what you said? I did not hear it.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** I am sorry. I said, through Mr. Speaker, whether your discourse today has much to do with the Minister of Local Government or, in fact, with the Mayor of Chaguanas.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** I talk to my colleagues in the Parliament. I want to tell you that you must practise that. Do not go and talk to people outside the Parliament; talk to your colleagues, because you have to raise things in this Parliament with your parliamentary colleagues, and you cannot go and talk with people who are below your status. You might get the wrong answers.

Before I take my seat, I know today the weather prediction is a stormy day, but my problem is with ODPM. Mr. Speaker, \$15 million was given to ODPM. Again, this money should have been channelled through the Ministry of Local Government. I believe they may not have interfered with this one, and now we have problems in our communities like Fyzabad and, recently, Roussillac to be more direct. This office is not yet ready to deal with these issues. Today, may God help us so that we would not have any damages, because I have no confidence in the ODPM.

I want to ask the Cabinet of the country to look at this matter carefully and see how—I know we do not like the local government bodies, and maybe I do not like them now myself, but the fact is that they are the ones closer to the ground and closer to the communities.

**Hon. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot allow this one to pass. The situation is that a local government body is authorized to spend, at least, one-tenth of its

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allocation when a matter of emergency comes up. The fact that the people who run the UNC corporations do not do that is a matter of choice. I want to go on further. Roussillac had problems, and the Siparia Regional Corporation went down there and treated with that matter between Thursday and Friday, and there was no problem.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Thank you for that information. So, I am glad to hear that you could spend one-tenth of the \$150 million.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to tell you this one and not the Minister. When you read the newspaper, there are certain safe houses that are announced. As a Member of Parliament, I am interested in what is taking place in my constituency, and I attempted to visit these centres. When I went there the guard at the gate did not know that building was a release centre and the place was locked. It was during the school vacation. I visited three or four different sites and the people did not know that these buildings were centres. I am sure that every Member of Parliament here would agree with me. This is a PR campaign by the local government authorities. This is published and signed. The CEO would have signed this in Chaguaramas, and when I went looking for it there was none.

I am very concerned that the local government authorities—when the White Paper talks about misspending of funds and corruption and so on, I think, that maybe we take it for granted. We have to tighten the local government authorities. We have to ensure that the goods and services that they have could be made available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to see that, and when this report comes to the Public Accounts Committee it will be dealt with in a particular way and somebody should be held accountable.

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

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine):** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I think I need to thank everyone for their contributions today. I need to indicate that, basically, we are all for local government reform regardless of how it is done. I will assure you that once PNM is in office, local government reform will be done.

I would also like to point out to my colleagues on the other side that if we had allowed this legislation to lapse only mayors and chairmen would have remained in office, and the Minister would have run the local government authorities until such time when we called local government election.

So, it is not a matter of us rushing legislation here, or that we were doing something that was not in accordance with the Local Government Act. We are

within the legal part of it. As a matter of fact, this year we did it quite differently in that everybody remained and we probably created further problems with the Opposition—we caused them to remain stable until the election.

On the last occasion, I recall some aldermen got thrown out and so forth; not on the PNM side but on that side.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Atherly.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Atherly went. [*Interruption*] The PNM is not afraid of any election. [*Desk thumping*] May I remind my colleagues on the other side that in the last local government election, the PNM won 83 seats and the UNC won 43 seats I am certain that if we had election on this occasion, we would win more than 83 seats out of the 126, or in the reform of 131. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this privilege and I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

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

*House in committee.*

*Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

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

*House resumed.*

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

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, as I rise to move the adjournment of the House this evening, I wish to inform Members that the intention is to have Friday as the last day of sitting before we take the normal recess. Mr. Speaker, because of that, we want to meet at 10.00 a.m. on Friday morning. I am sure that proper arrangements will be put in place for Friday.

In the circumstances, therefore, I beg to move that this House be now adjourned to Friday, July 13, 2007 at 10.00 a.m. I want to inform my colleagues that the Government intends to do Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper, followed by Bills Nos. 3 and 4.

*Adjournment*  
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Mr. Speaker, we are going to start with the Homes for Older Persons Bill. At an appropriate time we will do the Senate amendments to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Ordinance, and we will end the day by doing some committee business on the Order Paper. We will have a long day, but I am sure it will be an enjoyable day.

I have been assured by the Chief Whip that he would limit—

**Dr. Rafeeq:** I want to put on the record that there is no such commitment.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.02 p.m.*