

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

*IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON DECEMBER 17, 2007*

SESSION 2007—2008

VOLUME 5

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 19, 2008

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from sittings of this House. They are: hon. Gary Hunt, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, for the period September 15—September 19; Mr. Kelvin Ramnath, Member for Couva South, for the period September 19—September 26; Dr. Roodal Moonilal, Member for Oropouche West, from today's sitting of the House, and Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC, Member for Tabaquite, from sittings of the House for the period September 19—September 22.

The leave which these Members seek is granted.

PAPER LAID

The Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation (Vesting) (Amendment to the First Schedule) Order, 2008. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(PRESENTATION)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the Third Report (2007/2008) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on proposals for the supplementation of the 2008 appropriation.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, the Government is in a position to answer questions today: Nos. 160, 181 and 183. We ask for a deferral of two weeks on the other questions.

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw your attention to the footnote on pages 1, 2 and 3 of the Order Paper; you would see that they are even larger than the questions being asked. Again, I appeal to Ministers to make sure that on the next occasion we can, at least, get rid of almost all the questions on the Order Paper.

Dr. Gopeesingh: There are also some questions for written answers as well.

Mr. Speaker: When I talk about questions, they are both oral and written as well.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Brian Lara Sporting Complex
(Cost and Completion of)**

- 48.** With regard to the Brian Lara Sporting Complex in Tarouba, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) the projected cost;
 - (b) how much money has been expended on the project so far; and
 - (c) the expected date of completion of the entire project? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Financial Support for Needy Students
(Details of Selection)**

- 60.** Could the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education state:
- (a) how much money was spent in 2007 to support needy students seeking tertiary training abroad;
 - (b) how these students were selected for financial support;
 - (c) whether there was any advertisement with respect to the availability of this fund for assistance to local students studying abroad; and
 - (d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state the dates and the specific media in which these advertisements were placed? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Ex-Caroni (1975) Limited
(Leases for Residential Lands)**

- 75.** Could the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources state:
- (a) how many leases for residential lands have been given out to and executed by ex-Caroni (1975) Limited VSEP-availed workers as at February 29, 2008; and
 - (b) where the lands in (a) are located? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Major Landslips
(Repair of)**

- 89.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government state when would the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation repair the major landslips in Cumuto at:
- (a) Harkoo Trace; and
 - b) Sookoo Trace? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**National Commission for Self Help
(Mayaro/Rio Claro)**

- 134.** With respect to the National Commission for Self-Help, could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs state:
- (a) the numbers and types of projects funded and undertaken, within the region of Mayaro/Rio Claro for the period January 2006—February 2008; and
 - (b) the cost of each project undertaken, the location and the status/outcome of these activities? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Mayaro/Rio Claro Region
(New Community Centres)**

- 135.** With respect to the Community Centres Programme, could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs state:
- (a) whether new community centres will be built within the Mayaro/Rio Claro region during the period 2008—2010;
 - (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, at what locations and what is the proposed cost of each;
 - (c) whether refurbishment/repairs will be undertaken to the existing community centres within the Mayaro/Rio Claro region; and
 - (d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, which centres are earmarked for development, what is the budget for these works and what are the proposed dates for commencement? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Projects Undertaken and Cost)**

- 137.** With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago (SPORTT), could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) the total expenditure incurred to date by this special purpose company, all projects undertaken and completed for inspection from the inception of this entity to March 2008;
 - (b) the individual cost for each project identified and the names of the various contractors; and
 - (c) all ongoing projects, its estimated cost thus far, location and proposed completion dates? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Housing Construction in Edinburgh 500
(Details of)**

- 148.** Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state:
- With respect to the high-rise housing complexes being constructed in the Edinburgh 500 area in Chaguanas:
- (a) whether the necessary approvals were obtained from the Chaguanas Borough Corporation;
 - (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, what were the dates of such approvals;
 - (c) what is the cost of construction of the housing units; and
 - (d) at what price will these units be sold or rented? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Performing Arts Centre
(Details of Approval for 60-Room Hotel)**

- 184.** With respect to the Performing Arts Centre, could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state:
- (a) did the Public Health Inspectorate give approval for the construction of the 60-room hotel as forming part of the centre, and if so on what date; and
 - (b) did his Worship the Mayor of Port-of-Spain give approval for the 60-room hotel, and if so, on what date? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Performing Arts Centre
(Original Estimated Cost for)**

185. With respect to the Performing Arts Centre, could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state:

- (a) what was the original estimated cost for the construction and furnishing of the centre;
- (b) is there any anticipated cost overrun given the present state of the construction of the centre; and
- (c) were there any tendering procedures followed for this project? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Moneys Disbursed)**

189. With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:

- (a) how much money was given by the company to the fourteen (14) national sports organizations for the period October 2007 to July 2008;
- (b) the disaggregate sums used from the company's Funding Service Level Agreement; and
- (c) how much money was provided directly to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation, during the period October 2007 and July 2008 and the purposes for which these sums were provided? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Trinidad and Tobago Youth Cup
(Provisions of Funds for)**

190. A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state how much money the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs provided for the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Cup in 2007 and in 2008, including the waiving of the fees for the use of the stadium?

- B. Was the sum granted by the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs the full sum requested for the hosting of the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Cup? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sporting Facilities
(Details of Work Suspension)**

- 191.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state the number of sporting facilities in which the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago has suspended work, the reasons for the suspension and the cost of same, inclusive of monies spent thus far?
- B. Could the Minister state what will be the cost to complete the work that was suspended in each facility? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Victims of Crime
(Compensation for)**

- 216.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Social Development state whether the Government intends to compensate victims of crimes who, because of the non-implementation of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act of 1999, were not able to access and receive the benefits to which they were entitled under the Act?
- B. If the answer is negative, could the Minister state the reasons why not?
- C. If the answer is in the affirmative, could the Minister give the particulars of such compensation? [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

**Existing Noise Law
(Contravention of)**

- 217.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state whether she is aware that persons who play very loud music, above the prescribed decibel levels, in their homes as well as in their motor vehicles are contravening the existing law?
- B. If she is aware, could she state what machinery is in place to prevent this from taking place? [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

**Land Acts
(Implementation of)**

- 218.** A. Could the hon. Attorney General state whether the Government intends to implement the Land Adjudication Act (No. 14 of 2000), the Land Tribunal Act (No. 15 of 2000) and the Registration of Titles to Land Act (No. 16 of 2000)?

- B. If so, could the Attorney General inform the House of its planned date of implementation?
- C. If it does not intend to implement the Acts, could the Attorney General give reasons for its non-implementation? [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

**Acquisition of Buses
(Tendering Procedures for)**

- 220.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state the tendering procedures, if any, that were followed in the acquisition of 151 buses between 2002 to 2007?
- B. Could the Minister state whether the Government did the acquisition through any agent, giving the name(s) where relevant? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Criminal Gangs
(Details of)**

- 221.** Could the hon. Minister of National Security state:
- (a) how many criminal gangs are in existence in Trinidad and Tobago;
 - (b) the number of members in each gang;
 - (c) the average age of members of each gang; and
 - (d) what steps have the Ministry and/or the protective services taken to deal with these gangs? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Immigrants in Trinidad
(Number of)**

- 222.** Could the hon. Minister of National Security state:
- (a) how many Chinese, Korean, Ghanaian, Nigerian and Cameroonian immigrants are in Trinidad;
 - (b) how many have entered and remained in the country illegally? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

Fishing Pond Turtle Patrol

160. Mr. Harry Partap (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

With regard to the Fishing Pond Turtle Patrol, could the hon. Minister state:

- (a) why employees on the patrol gang have been forced to pay \$30 from their wages to meet the salary of the patrol supervisor; and
- (b) what steps would be taken to stop this practice and refund money deducted to affected employees?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, this question is probably directed to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, who is unavoidably absent. I will answer on his behalf.

Investigations within the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources have revealed that employees on the turtle patrol gang at Fishing Pond have never been forced to pay \$30 from their wages to meet the salary of the patrol supervisor or any other person.

Since it has been reported that no payment was ever made by the employees to the patrol supervisor or any other person, the issue of stopping this practice and of a refund does not arise.

Street Lighting Implementation Unit (Details of Projects)

181. Mr. Winston Peters (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

With respect to the Street Lighting Implementation Unit, could the hon. Minister state:

- (a) how much moneys have been spent on this programme to date in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region;
- (b) the areas in which new street lights and poles were fitted;
- (c) whether additional areas in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region have been identified for this street lighting project; and
- (d) If the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, what areas are earmarked, the estimated costs to undertake these works and the proposed period for commencement?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Mr. Speaker, the National Street Lighting Implementation Unit was established in T&TEC in August 2006 to implement the National Street Lighting Programme. This unit was also utilized to implement the Rural Electrification Programme in 2007.

For the period 2006 to present, the National Street Lighting Implementation Unit spent \$15,744,502 for street lights and poles under the National Street Lighting Programme and the Rural Electrification Programmes in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region. This figure does not include the cost of conductors, guys, transformers and other accessories required for the supply of electricity.

The cost is broken down by programme, as follows. Under the National Street Lighting Programme, \$14,641,728; under the Rural Electrification Programme, \$1,102,774.

Street lights and poles were fitted in the following 24 areas in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region: Biche, Charuma, Cushe, Navet, Plum Mitan, Cunapo Southern Main Road from Biche Village to Rio Claro proper, Ecclesville, Libertville, Boos Settlement, Enid Village, Clear Water, Deep Ravine, Poole, Naparima/Mayaro Road from Poole Lazarre to Pleasant, Watts Trace, Bristol Village, Union Village, Double Bridge, Radix, Roble Grove, Mayaro, Manzanilla and Guayaguayare.

Future work to be implemented under the National Street Lighting Programme is currently under review for all of Trinidad and Tobago, including the Rio Claro/Mayaro region. In light of that information, which is the answer to part c of the question, part d is not applicable.

Thank you.

**Performing Arts Centre
(Details of Approval and Construction of)**

183. Mr. Jack Warner (Chaguanas West) asked the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment:

With respect to the Performing Arts Centre, could the Minister state:

- (a) on what date did the EMA and/or Town and Country Planning give approval for the construction of the centre;
- (b) when did construction of the centre commence; and
- (c) did the approval obtained from the EMA and/or Town and Country include the construction of a 60-room hotel?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment, I have the answer, and I will answer on her behalf.

The Town and Country Planning Division granted outline permission for the construction of the National Academy for the Performing Arts on October 11, 2005, [*Interruption*] and full permission on May 05, 2008. The Environmental Management Authority granted the certificate of environmental clearance for the project on August 11, 2005. The construction of the Academy commenced on April 07, 2007.

Approval from the Town and Country Planning Division and the Environmental Management Authority for the National Academy for the Performing Arts included the construction of hotel facilities.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to part (a), although my notes give a particular date for the outline permission and another date for final, it appears to me there may be some typographical error with respect to the outline permission date. I am just telling the Member for Chaguanas West that, and I will ensure that these dates are clarified and he would be suitably notified.

Mr. Warner : My apologies; could I get the answer again for part (c)?

Hon. C. Imbert: Approval from the Town and Country Planning Division and the Environmental Management Authority for the National Academy for Performing Arts included the construction of hotel facilities.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

Bill to provide for the supplementary Appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2008 of the sum of the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2008. [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]

Question put and agreed to.

BAIL (AMDT.) BILL

Senate Amendment

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert). Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendment to the Bail (Amdt.) Bill, 2008, listed in Appendix I, be considered.

Bail (Amdt.) Bill

Friday, September 19, 2008

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 7.

Senate amendment read as follows:

“The Act is amended by inserting after clause 6 the following new clause.

‘Duration 7. This Act shall continue in force for a period of five years from the date of its commencement.’”

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker, the clause simply seeks to put a time limit on the application of the Bail (Amdt.) Bill. It is what is commonly referred to as a sunset clause.

When the Bill was passed in this House, on a previous occasion, it sought to permanently enact into law certain provisions as they related to bail. When the Bill went to the other place, the Senate decided that it would limit the application of the Bill for a period of five years from the date of its commencement.

We on this side have decided to go along with the Senate amendment to this Bill. We ask hon. Members on the other side to accept and agree with the amendment made in the Senate which, as I said, is simply putting a time frame for the application of the Bail (Amdt.) Bill, so rather than being a permanent feature of our legislative landscape, the Act would continue in force for a period of five years. There will be a review of the working of the Act and a review of the situation with respect to bail over that five-year period. At the expiry of that five-year period, the Government would either return with the Bill in its current form or make appropriate amendments.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, it is very disgusting and disheartening that this Government would bring an amendment to this House, late in the Parliament today, for debate immediately, without any previous notification, half an hour ago. That is the incompetence of this Government that is attempting to pass draconian legislation which affects the fundamental rights of the citizens.

I am not going into the rights at this time, but I merely want to indicate to the population how incompetent and arrogant this Government is to merely come to

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, September 19, 2008

this House and say— First of all, the Attorney General who is supposed to pilot the Bill—where is the Attorney General? We have another Minister piloting the Bill, and all he could say was, “Mr. Speaker, the Bill simply seeks to put a time limit or sunset clause on the legislation, and that sunset clause is five years.”

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what contempt is that, not only for the Members of this honourable House, but for the people of Trinidad and Tobago? It may be simple for them because it fits into their incompetence, but Mr. Speaker, this is far-reaching legislation.

This was in the other place just the night before and one would have thought that they would have given this honourable House notice so that we could prepare for such an important debate. What do you expect us to debate having given us little or no notice?

Mr. Speaker, the House tends to tell us to stick to the amendment, but we have not been given the time to do the research for this type of legislation. And I think they should be roundly condemned for this. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you have been here for sometime like all of us, and we have known the history of this legislation. The Bail Act, Act No. 18 of 1994 or 1996 was passed, and subsequently there were amendments commencing 2005. Those amendments were as a result of the negotiations between Members of this side of the House and Members of the other side, that is the Government, where they had agreed on the introduction of a package of legislative measures in order to deal with the galloping crime situation which was encouraged and nurtured by the PNM and when it became so powerful, it could not deal with it we, as Members of the Opposition, decided to assist as a responsible and a loyal Opposition to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in dealing with crime.

But Mr. Speaker, we know this Government, we know that this was draconian legislation, and having regard to the fact that it was draconian legislation which had the intent of interfering with Chap. 1 of the Constitution: The Recognition and Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, rights which were enshrined in the Constitution, we thought that we could not give them free rein to take away people’s rights, and in particular, section 4(a) of the Constitution’s rights enshrined.

“(a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person...except by due process of law;”

And in section 5 of the Constitution—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, Standing Order No. 36(1), relevance.

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Member is saying is that your contribution should be limited to the amendment that is before the House. I am letting the Member continue, but I am telling you as far as possible limit your remarks to the amendment that is before the House please.

Mr. S. Panday: I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to indicate the dictatorial tendencies of this Government, in that I am giving the framework of the same section, but it does not want us to speak. It wants to pass draconian legislation and does not want us to speak. It does not want the public to hear the wickedness it is doing to them.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, since we could not have trusted this Government with the liberties of the population, we had introduced as a compromise that there would be a sunset clause in that first piece of legislation coming in 2005. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you because I see that you see the relevance and what they are trying to do.

Mr. Speaker, I think we had given the Government six months and it came back, and I think we came on a number of occasions and most of those occasions we dealt with section 7 of the Act, the sunset clause. So for him to say 36(1), it seems to me that he is really the wrong person to introduce this legislation because he does not understand, or is not willing to understand the purport of the argument.

Mr. Speaker, what was the rationale for that sunset clause? As I said, the rationale of the sunset clause is having been draconian legislation we wanted to keep a tab on the Government. But from the beginning this Government never wanted sunset clauses.

The first time it agreed to a sunset clause was because of negotiations by the Opposition and the Government. Subsequently, it went on to make deals with the sunset clause. Do you remember at one time when it came with one of the amendments on the sunset clause; it asked for 90 days and the then Back Bench, the COP gave them six months, twice the amount. It came back just before the election and made deals with the COP and it got an extension of one year.

The life of that sunset clause was one year and today September 19, 2008 is the expiration and that is what I am speaking about. apart from making deals, which is all it is good to do, it is so incompetent. On a day like today when the Act expires, is the day it comes to the Parliament to amend it. What slackness!

Mr. Dumas: It is obstruction.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, that Member for Tobago East is attacking me. He was the Minister of Local Government and all the work they did, they say was rubbish.

Mr. Speaker, it went with this legislation and during that year, one would have expected it would have said: We come to report to the House as to how effective the legislation has been.

This amendment which is before the House today, when the Bill came before the Parliament, we thought that it was by mistake it had omitted the same clause 7 which it is trying to introduce now, and when we asked: What about clause 7? What about a sunset clause? As a matter of fact, the Member for Tabaquite had introduced an amendment in an attempt to introduce a sunset clause. And do you know what this arrogant, pompous, incompetent Government said? It deliberately left out clause 7, the sunset clause, because it has the requisite majority and it does not need us.

I am talking to the population now. Be careful whenever you go to the polls; be careful how you give Government a special majority. It will use it against you as has been done on this occasion. So it said, Opposition you are irrelevant. We do not care for you, we do not care about you, and we do not need your support, no clause 7. So, therefore, no sunset clause. It was trying to impose this piece of legislation as a permanent fixture on the law books of Trinidad and Tobago, this piece of draconian legislation.

Mr. Speaker, when it went to the other place, it realized that something was wrong and then certain Members in the other place had indicated their concerns about the seriousness of this draconian piece of legislation. When they had indicated they were not going to support this piece of legislation and when it realized that certain Members in the Upper House were not going to support the legislation, in typical PNM style, it started to make deals. This piece of legislation that is before us today is as a result of deals made by the Government with certain Members in the other place.

Mr. Speaker, one would have hoped that the Member for Diego Martin North/East who introduced this Bill would have told us: Look, we came here on a number of occasions where we amended clause 7. When we came on the first occasion when the Bill passed through this House, we said no sunset clause. Now the Government has come back here today with a sunset clause for five years.

We will be happy, and the country will be happy to find out what is the rationale for five years. Tell us! We thought when you are introducing legislation

like this, in order to have a meaningful debate, one would have come to the Parliament and indicated the rationale for the five-year period. I do not know if the Prime Minister would indicate what the rationale is. What is the rationale, Mr. Prime Minister, for the five years?

Mr. Speaker, why the Government was forced to concede to introduce this clause 7 was because in the other place, Sen. Dana Seetahal SC said that there should be a sunset clause when the legislation has been tightened, and the Schedule has been increased to include 46 offences. She said that not only has it included serious offences which were not deemed to be serious, which were in Part II of the First Schedule of the former Act, but by the creation of Part III of the Schedule of the Act that it was including offences which may or should not have been made non-bailable and hence it was a dangerous thing.

2.00 p.m.

In addition to that, what they did, as they opened the Bill they said that the lifespan of a conviction for purposes of bail was 10 years and what this Government did, they increased that period from 10 to 15 years. It is frightening. Now, we want to let you know at once that we do not support criminals. We feel that if criminals commit their offences; they are caught; they are tried, they must feel the full brunt of the law. But we are saying you must also protect private rights against the rights of society. You must balance it and in such circumstances what about the innocent man who is on that second or third occasion, who is being caught; what would be his position?

They moved it from three convictions to two convictions and they said that if you had two convictions, the third time you are charged for an offence, no bail. The further draconian nature of the legislation was that those two convictions may arise out of one incident. Formerly, when there were sunset clauses, the law was that if you have been convicted on three occasions for schedule offences, which occur on the three different occasions, well then your "goose cook". Now what they have done, they are saying that if you have two convictions arising out of one incident, then you are in trouble.

Sen. Dana Seetahal SC, in the other place, thought that that was an important issue to be addressed and she gave an account that sometimes you commit one offence and because of the nature of the charges, you could end up with two counts in the assizes, and when you end up with two counts in the assizes you get two convictions and when after, say, 14 years you have lived a straight life and, let us say when it is about to expire, somebody merely provokes you because they

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, September 19, 2008

want you to go down the road and you probably just assault somebody; a mere assault—that person falls; bursts his head—you end up being charged with assault, causing grievous bodily harm and you could be in trouble. Hence they were saying in the Upper House that they are not going to support this legislation. So although the Government came here and rode roughshod over this House, in the other place, when they went there, they met serious arguments and the Government, in the other place, could not have dealt with it.

Also, you have heard that most of the policemen are good policemen, but if there is a policeman who wants to nail you, because of the number of offences—I think it is 46 offences now that have been included in the schedule of this legislation—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, on a point of Order; Standing Order 36(1)—

Mr. Speaker: Okay. I did tell you earlier on that you need to confine yourself to the amendment before us and you really should not reopen the debate on the entire Bill; so if you could just focus on the amendment to the so-called sunset clause.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is the point I am making. The point I am making is that the Senate never wanted to pass the legislation unless a sunset clause was placed in it and I am giving the reasons the Senate objected to it.

We were asking for the reason for a sunset clause, whether it is this clause 7 or any sunset clause. The purpose of the sunset clause is to bring the Government to account on a periodical basis to the people and the Parliament as it relates to crime. That was the reason for the sunset clause, so that we would force the Government to have crime on the front burner. Whenever the Act came before Parliament for amendment, the representatives of the people in this country are given the opportunity to call upon the Government to account on how they are dealing with crime. So apart from the draconian measures, it was an opportunity for the people to call upon the Government to indicate how they are dealing with crime.

Also, if you did not have a sunset clause, as this Government wanted, what would happen then, they would be using this legislation in a way as to give the impression that they are dealing with crime when in truth and in fact they would not have to come to the Parliament to indicate what other measures there are to deal with crime. That was the purpose of the sunset clause. For example, unless we raise a motion here on crime, these issues could never be debated. Do not forget that this is the Government that started a debate on crime, to give the impression to the country that they wanted to deal with crime and after one sitting, that motion never saw the light of day.

For example, on this occasion when you come here with this legislation—this sunset clause—we ask you, what about simple laws like the Litter Act, are you implementing it? Tell us! This is the last occasion we might have in the life of this Parliament. Tell us! You have passed the breathalyzer law and look at how many persons are being killed on the roads. Tell us what steps have you taken to implement the breathalyzer law to deal with crime. The sunset clause—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1). This is getting a little out of hand.

Mr. Speaker: He is beginning to convince me, you know, so, please, I am appealing to you.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that they do not want to hear a debate, because we are saying that—

Mr. Manning: We want to hear relevant debate.

Mr. S. Panday: I will come to you—the purpose of the sunset clause is to call the Government to book or to explain the other aspects they are using to deal with crime. This is the purpose of the debate. I do not know if they are dumb, if they are thickheaded or what; if they cannot understand the debate or their minds are closed, or if this is the attitude of the PNM that they ride roughshod on the society and we cannot talk. I practise in the courts; I know the rules of relevance. But, you see, they want to tie it down; they do not want their incompetence to show. They want to hold you down. What kind of debate do you expect? It is better that I go in the square and behave like a “wajang”!

The only thing it states here is:

“The Act shall continue in force for a period of five years from the date of its commencement.”

What is the point in a debate? What is the point? You cannot build up a debate? This is what the PNM wants?

Anyway, I will go until you stop me, Mr. Speaker, and I will bow to your ruling because I have faith in you; I have faith in your ability to understand and your ability to be fair and I have total confidence in you.

Mr. Dumas: That is a reversal, boy.

Mr. S. Panday: In the other place, we on this side had indicated that we would support the parent legislation if a sunset clause had been placed to extend the life of the Act for six months. Our people in the other place also introduced an

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, September 19, 2008

amendment, but because of, as I say, the draconian nature of the legislation and the need to force the Government to bring on the front burner the issue of crime, then Sen. Dana Seetahal SC said, "Let us put a sunset clause for three years." Because she says, "Give the Government sufficient time to work the Act; give the Government sufficient time to deal with this amendment. Let us see the statistics on how the Act is performing." She introduced an amendment in the Upper House which said: "Look, let us go for three years."

Then there was another Senator there who, like the rest of Trinidad and Tobago, indicated, for the same reasons, there should be a sunset clause. That was Sen. Prof. Deosaran, who said that the sunset clause should be for five years. He argued that that was the length of time that was necessary to collate information, to analyze and determine how effective the legislation was. I do not know how he came to that conclusion of five years, because it is three years now. Since 2005 to 2008 this legislation has been amended over and over and up to today the kind of information that Sen. Prof. Deosaran was asking, this Government did not give it. Three years have elapsed and they have not given it.

I want to ask Sen. Prof. Deosaran a question: What guarantees does he have from this incompetent Government that he will get it in five years? I think that he did not consider how incompetent this Government was because it appeared, when I read a little of his contribution from the *Hansard*, that he was hobnobbing a little bit. And strange enough, when the matter of the issue of this sunset clause which engaged the attention of the committee stage of the other place the other night, after the Bill was debated in the other place, there was little or no argument at the committee stage about the various clauses of the Bill. Most of the arguments and discussions centred around this same clause 7.

To show you how this PNM operates; how this PNM intends to operate, at the committee stage Sen. Prof. Deosaran himself had realized that he had made a mistake in his amendment and he said, and I quote from the *Hansard*:

"There is something else, though, that the Government would well be advised to consider. I think pressure must be put on other agencies to do their work more effectively, like policing, prosecution and so on, and if you make this permanent, it sort of puts those other agencies in a more relaxed position..."

And they would not perform their functions. This was the argument. I do not know if the Member for Diego Martin North/East, just reading one line, believes

that relevance deals with the one line, but to see how the argument develops. Sen. Prof. Deosaran had indicated five years and he said:

“I think that thinking should be reverse, that the other things should succeed and then you resort to this extensive piece of legislation...

I had initially proposed five years, but I would agree with my distinguished colleague, a three-year period is quite reasonable in all these circumstances.”

2.15 p.m.

When right-thinking people speak about the sunset clause, they are saying that five years is too long. Too many things can go wrong during that period. The more conservative of the two Houses indicated settling for three years. They asked why three years. He went on to say:

“Once you put that three-year period, I am quite sure the Minister of National Security, the Attorney General and the Cabinet would then put pressure on the other agencies to make sure that when the three-year period come up, there is something to deliver to convince the public that yes, we have conducted an experiment...and we have succeeded.”

Sen. Prof. Deosaran who proposed five years said:

“...I want to support the compromise for a sunset clause,...”

I said five years because out of respect for the Government's position,...

The Senate was compromising now.

“...with due respect to the Government and especially to the Attorney General, that a three-year period be put...”

I hear the argument for five years. Here where we are dealing with serious legislation, he catapulted.

“I said five years because out of respect for the Government's position, I did not want to appear as if we are politically haranguing the Government,...”

He does not want to be politically haranguing the Government. We are talking about the rights of citizens and they do not want to harangue the Government.

Mr. Speaker: Be very careful because there is a Standing Order that says that you must not refer to the conduct of Members of the other place, among others. Be careful of the line that you are adopting.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I will be guided by you. Thank you for your kind advice.

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, September 19, 2008

The Senator was saying that the Government said permanent legislation and he suggested five, because if it said none at all and they got five that would be sufficient or might fit the Bill. However, after hearing all the debate in the other place, they agreed that three years were a sufficient period. Lo and behold, I do not know what happened there. Against the trend of play as the footballers call it, and the Member for Chaguanas West will call it, going for three years, suddenly, the Government got the five-year period.

Clause 7 that we are speaking about—I will show the country how this Government thinks; does not care about crime; solving it and what is foremost in its mind.

Sen. Dana Seetahal SC came out with a really beautiful argument. She said:

I am saying three years because we in this House unless the Prime Minister ketch a vaps and calls a snap election, within three years all things being equal, we might be here.

Therefore the Members of both Houses who introduced this sunset clause will be here and have first-hand knowledge as to what has taken place, so we can sit together to review the performance of the legislation.

She was saying to come back to the House during this term of Parliament. That, I think, is a genuine and good argument. The point about it is that during that three years the Government will know that it will be coming back in three years before the end of the term and will have to account on crime.

Hear what Sen. Seetahal SC had to say:

“...this session ends in three years; five years are too long...”

Other people argue and say that we should go for three years because if you go for five, you will go into another legislative term under the Government.

Hear their argument for five years.

Let another Government take that decision whether they want to come back or not. Imagine that this Government is saying, “We do not care. We do not want to account. We want it in the next life of another parliament.”

He went on to say,

“Sen. Dr. Saith....The best time to review it is when a new government comes, whoever it is...”

At least, if this particular Government feels that it is necessary to continue, they will continue until a new government comes. If you put five years, you have done that.”

Sen. Dana Seetahal SC begged them, not five, let us go for four. No! We are going five. Hear what Dr. Lenny Saith has said:

“The Government is saying to you that in our view it should be permanent, because we believe that it has to be there. We also believe that we have come here six times already;”

What is so wrong with that? What is so wrong about coming to Parliament to deal with the people’s business and crime which is so relevant and affects people’s lives. They do not want crime to be an issue. That is why the Prime Minister could have said during the last election campaign that crime is not an issue in an election. People fell for that; voted for the PNM and the murder rate skyrocketed. That is where we are.

Imagine this Government is saying that it makes no sense to come back here to review legislation as it pertains to such a serious issue as crime.

“If you believe that it should automatically be reviewed, then leave it to the next government whether is UNC government or another PNM government or a COP government.”

That shows how they are thinking. They are thinking in terms of their political survival. They are not serious about dealing with crime. They said that this issue about crime, they should not talk about it again; whoosh it away; let this Parliament expire so it would not be an issue in the 2012 election. After election, let the new government deal with the issue of clause 7. That is the thinking of the PNM.

That is why although all the arguments went to indicate that they should go for three years and the Member for Diego Martin North/East would like me to confine my argument, they went on to say that the Act shall continue in force for a period of five years from the date of its commencement. This is how we are trying to deal with crime and the Government is putting obstacles in the way to ensure that crime is being dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, as you said, it is a one line amendment and stick to one line. I see the Member for Diego Martin North/East is getting red under his nose. Keep up the book. You do not understand. I will not deal with ignorance. Other people are seeing through you. Other people are seeing that you are not prepared to deal with crime, but you want control.

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, September 19, 2008

I quote from the editorial of today's *Newsday*. It is instructive that this be read in the record to show the Government how people are thinking. It says:

“The Senate has done this country no favours by voting in favour of the Bail (Amendment) Bill 2008, which allows people to be jailed without bail for a number of offences.

When this Bill was first introduced, concerns were expressed that the Government might abuse its provisions.”

Hence the sunset clause.

“The Bill allowed persons charged with kidnapping to be detained...for 60 days...”

The Opposition supported that draconian legislation. I say yes, that the Opposition supported the draconian legislation, but the interest of the public was protected by the Opposition when we introduced the sunset clause, only the first time. It continues:

“Now the Government, in seeking to extend the life of the Bill, has proved true the concerns raised by citizens three years ago. In its latest version, the Bill seeks to increase the number of offences for which persons can be detained without bail. Moreover, whereas the previous Bill had a “sunset clause” of one year, meaning that it expired after that time, the Government now wants to make the amendment permanent.

This would be a dangerous development at any time, but it is even more worrisome that the Government should be seeking to remove a fundamental right guaranteed in Section 5(f)(iii)...”

They attacked the Opposition for agreeing. I explained why we agreed on the sunset clause. It continues:

“And here we come to the crux of the matter. Although the police have had relative success...they have not demonstrated the kind of integrity and efficiency which can justify giving them more power over citizens.”

The PNM was trying to have this legislation permanently and now giving five years which means nothing. It continues:

“There are still too many corrupt police officers who would be tempted to trump up charges against persons who would effectively be jailed merely on the say-so of an officer.

Even more importantly, the Government, as demonstrated by the rally in Woodford Square last Friday, has shown what it can do for its own political ends.”

This is what we are tired of.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Princes Town North on the amendment before us has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

2.30 p.m.

The Speaker indicated that the extension is to debate:

“Duration 7. This Act shall continue in force for a period of five years from the date of its commencement.”

And to indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that this will not solve crime in any way. Do you know why? When the leaders of the society and the heads of Government themselves break the law with impunity, what message are they sending to criminals? "If you can break the law, so can we?"

We ask them today—they say that they are an upright Government—did they inform the police that they were having a public meeting at Woodford Square?

Mr. Speaker: I am being very generous to you—I am being told too generous. Let me appeal to you for the last time.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This amendment will not go anywhere because the leaders of Government, including those on the other side, break the law with impunity and are setting bad examples. Apart from not implementing the law, they are setting a bad example. The editorial spoke about their using legislation for their own political ends. It goes on to say.

“On this basis alone, the Government cannot be trusted with the reduction of citizens' constitutional rights.”

This amendment—before I am ruled out of order—does not go anywhere to prevent and to assist the concern of these people.

It says.

“Some citizens may be willing to support such draconian provisions, however, on the basis that...crime...is serious enough to warrant extreme measures...But this is not the case, as the Bail Bill itself proves. Additionally,

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, September 19, 2008

if the Government is allowed to pass such laws, it is all too likely that this will reduce the implementation of more effective measures since politicians are quite content to seem to be taking action rather than to actually do so.”

This is the point I am making. This amendment fits that statement that if Government is allowed to pass such laws it is all too likely that this will reduce the implementation of more effective measures since politicians are quite content to seem to be taking action rather than actually doing so.

It says that:

“Despite all this, the Independent Senators saw fit to pass the Bill with a five-year, instead of a one-year, sunset clause. The Bill now goes to the Lower House where, hopefully, the Senate amendments will be rejected out of hand.”

I am not saying this, although I wish to say it also. Civil society and intelligent persons are saying that we cannot support this amendment and we are telling the Government today that if we want to deal with criminals and we feel that the time has come when some stiff legislation must be put in place, and we must support the society to help suppress and deal with crime, if the Government is interested and it reduces the time limit from five years to one year or even two years, we will support it. Save and except that, we are not going to support this amendment.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*).Mr. Speaker, I rise to give a short intervention on this Bill because there are a number of issues that ought to be explained in the context of the sunset legislation.

First of all, this legislation was passed in the context of the Government and Opposition agreeing, and the Prime Minister would remember when he made this statement on November 18, 2005. I would like to quote from his statement in Parliament. What we are discussing is whether we are going to review it in one, three or five years. There must be rationale for the expectation of a review.

First of all, the Bail Bill was agreed to by the Opposition in the context of the Government agreeing to bring nine pieces of legislation to deal with crime. I quote what the Prime Minister said on November 18, 2005:

“Mr. Speaker, as you will recall, when debate on the issue of crime in this honourable House adjourned on Thursday November 10, 2005, it was agreed that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition would meet to discuss further this very pressing issue of crime and the mechanisms for arriving at comprehensive solutions.”

This Bail Bill was brought in the context of arriving at comprehensive solutions to deal with the whole issue of crime in which kidnapping for ransom is encompassed and in the reduction of criminal activity as a whole.

The Prime Minister went on to say:

“I would therefore like to thank the Leader of the Opposition”—and there was desk thumping on their side—“for making the progressive step of agreeing to this new round of meetings aimed at addressing the scourge of crime that has been occupying national attention for several years...”

So the Prime Minister acknowledged that there was a scourge of crime, moreso within those times, in 2005. He acknowledged:

“It is therefore fortuitous that we have had an opportunity to meet on this matter of urgent national importance.

I am pleased to report that both sides came to the table exhibiting a desire to find legislative and administrative solutions to the pressing issue of crime.”

This Bail Bill, with clause 7, was brought in the context of a whole series of legislation to deal effectively with the crime situation and we agreed with the Government to pass the Police Service Bill, the Police Complaints Authority Bill and the Constitutional (Amdt.) Bill to deal with the criminal situation. Those were three major pieces of legislation to which we agreed in the context of the Bail Bill coming on as well.

Everyone will remember that this Government—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1)—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, in your opening remarks, you did say you are going to contribute on the Bill, but it is not really the Bill; it is the amendment.

As I did for the hon. Member for Princes Town North, I urge you to confine your remarks to the amendment before us and try not to repeat what the Member for Princes Town North has already elucidated.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much for your guidance. I am not going deeper into that except to say that a number of these Bills related to crime have not been completed. We did a lot of work on things like the breathalyser, the DNA legislation; we spoke about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Bill and many others. We therefore find difficulty in coming here this afternoon to discuss just a clause in the Bail Bill when there is the whole issue of crime, not only on the Bail Bill itself, but on so many other pieces of legislation. We have to ask the rationale

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 19, 2008

for this amendment and this will not be out of order when the Prime Minister in the context of discussing what the legislation was going to be said—

Mr. Speaker, I must say that it is very sad in Parliament that we are treated with such discourtesy and contempt that my acting Chief Whip had to call us at 12.45 p.m. to tell us that the Government plans to discuss the amendment to the Bail Bill when we knew last week they were going to discuss the Supplementary Appropriation Bill. They knew when the Senate stopped that it was necessary to come back to the Lower House.

Mr. Speaker: That matter was well prosecuted by the Member for Princes Town North.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, repetition is for those who cannot hear. I hope they understand that they are treating the Parliament with total disrespect, discourtesy and contempt. That is something we cannot accept. Treat us as human beings. We represent the people and are supposed to be treated with some degree of dignity.

Mr. Speaker: Again the point has been made. Come to the amendment, please!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I wanted to make the point for the *Hansard*. Thank you for allowing me to make it.

In the context of what the Prime Minister said on Friday, November 18—and this is related to the amendment—

“In order to ensure that civil liberties are not infringed, we agreed to make the legislation”—which is the Bail Bill—“sunset legislation, that is, after a specified period of time, the legislation dies. However, during the life of the legislation”—I am quoting the Prime Minister—“it would be continuously assessed and if at the end of its life it is assessed to have been effective, it would be re-enacted.”

I want to ask the Government whether there has been any assessment whatsoever on the whole issue of the Bail Bill related to kidnapping for ransom. The Prime Minister said there would be an assessment and if at the end of its life it is assessed to have been effective, it would be reenacted.

Can the Government tell us what assessment has been done in terms of kidnapping for ransom? Over 175 cases have taken place within the last six or seven years.

Mr. Speaker: You are late by a couple weeks. That is a contribution for the Bill that was passed. Concentrate on the amendment!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: If we were to determine whether we would have a sunset clause or not, we were to have an assessment. If we could not assess, how are we going to decide whether we would continue with a sunset clause or let the Act go ahead without a sunset clause. We need to determine whether it was successful.

If there are 175 cases of kidnapping for ransom, we need to know how many people are behind bars for kidnapping for ransom and are not being let out. That is the evaluation necessary to determine whether it should continue. Can they tell us how many people behind bars have not had their cases tried within the 60 days we have spoken about in the legislation? Those are two pieces of important information we need to have in the assessment of whether this sunset clause is necessary.

2.45 p.m.

Do you know why the Government is bringing this legislation? It is because they are ashamed. They are coming to tell us to allow the amendment to be passed for five years. The Upper House told them that they do not like it, but they want us to agree to pass it for five years, when we know full well that it has not made any iota of a difference in the kidnappings for ransom.

It is almost 100 days since this young guy, Ali, was kidnapped. He is not released. We do not know whether he is dead. Nobody has been caught. They cannot tell us how many people have been caught and put behind bars. We understand there are 25.

They do not want to do any analysis of it because they are ashamed of their performance, as far as enacting the Bail Bill. It has not met the requirements that they wanted. They have not been capable and competent. The Ministry of National Security has not been able to do what was required of them. Imagine 175 cases of kidnapping for ransom and only 20 or 25 people are behind bars. There are 12 persons in one matter. Where are the other people who did the kidnappings out of 174 other cases of kidnapping for ransom? This is why we are finding difficulty in accepting the fact that we must allow this to go for five years. This is about the sixth or seventh time this House is debating the Bail (Amdt.) Bill with an amendment to clause 7. Therefore, why have they not come with any analysis of it?

There are two small questions I want to ask before we ask for the answers to them. If they are worth the salt and if they are not ashamed of themselves and do not want to shame themselves in the national community, they should answer.

Bail (Amdt.) Bill
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 19, 2008

How many people have been put behind bars of the 174 cases of kidnapping for ransom? How many of these prisoners behind bars have had their cases tried within the 60 days that is required?

Before I come to the two other questions, this sunset legislation impacts upon Schedule 3, which speaks about people not being given bail if they committed two previous cases. They named the types of criminal matters. Therefore, if they committed a crime a third time, they would be behind bars. This must be within 15 years of the first two commissions of criminal activity.

This Government has no record of the people who have committed a crime or two crimes within the last 15 years. With respect to this whole piece of sunset legislation which impinges upon the other part of the legislation, the Government cannot determine who have committed crimes within the last 15 years on two or more occasions and, therefore, they cannot give any analysis of it. What is the use of us agreeing to an amendment to the legislation of accepting clause 7 to be five years, when the analysis has not been made and when the Government cannot give any facts and figures? What is the use of passing sunset legislation, or allowing the law to go on indefinitely, when the Government cannot give us that information? They have passed the law for people who have committed crimes on two occasions within the last 15 years. They cannot give that information. There is no way in Trinidad that has that information. They are bringing blunderous types of laws to be passed before this House.

The two questions now—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You have asked two questions already.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Recently, the Chief Justice mentioned that it is time enough to do away with the Preliminary Enquiry Act.

Mr. Speaker: You go again. No, the Preliminary Enquiry Act has nothing to do with what is before us. Again, let me appeal to you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It has something to do with the Preliminary Evidence Act, which is the evidence that has to be taken within the first 60 days when that person is put behind bars. Therefore, there has to be some relevance and the Government has to tell us, in some way or the other, what they intend to do about that, based on the fact that the Chief Justice has asked for it.

The other issue is the question of the witness protection programme. That impinges upon this. What is the use of holding people behind bars? You say that they must not be allowed bail when the witnesses are killed while in jail?

Therefore, the person is set free because nobody is going to give evidence against them. The Chief Justice spoke about it. It needs to be strengthened. We all know that this Government has not been capable, incompetent, they have not performed and the witness protection programme has just gone to naught under their watchful eyes.

The Prime Minister and this Government have presided over a situation where people are murdered. Only 10 per cent of the people are caught and are behind bars and at the end of it all, those who are caught—the witnesses are afraid to go, they are murdered and their cases are discontinued.

It is in that context we say that the Government should have brought the analysis of a number of issues to us and Parliament for us to deliberate on before we could make a judgment as to whether we would allow the sunset legislation to continue for five years.

Therefore, in the absence of that, in the short term, we continue to ask for the sunset legislation for one year and we cannot support five years.

Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, we had two contributions from the other side. The Member for Princes Town North treated us with a rambling discourse, which had nothing to do with the amendment. I will not fall into—*[Interruption]* It was not a trap. He regaled us for 55 minutes.

The Member for Caroni East—*[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: “Yuh cyah answer it. Da wha happen!”

Mr. Imbert:—was on a frolic of his own and gave us a rambling presentation in true quixotic faction; a true Don Quixote. “Kicksoctic or however yuh want tuh pronounce it.” He went all over the place, forgetting completely that in a previous debate on this matter, the Opposition rejected the concept of permanent legislation. He rambled all over the place. He went up and down all over the hills into valleys and ended up saying they want to have a sunset clause for one year. You could have said that at the beginning and your contribution would have been relevant.

The fact of the matter is that the matter before the House is an extremely simple amendment coming from the other place. The other place was of the view that this legislation should not be permanent and that it should have a finite life. The amendment is all of 18 words. The effect of the amendment is simply to put an expiry date on the legislation. Nothing uttered by the other side had any relevance whatsoever to those 18 words and, therefore, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Third Report (2007/2008) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation of the 2008 Appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Wednesday, September 17, 2008, and agreed to the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$3,900 million to transfer to the Infrastructure Development Fund. The Infrastructure Development Fund was established by Legal Notice No. 347 of December 29, 1997, under section 43(2) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01, to finance wholly or partially certain projects under the Public Sector Investment Programme. As provided for by the aforementioned Legal Notice, these additional resources being transferred into the Infrastructure Development Fund will be used to finance projects included in the Public Sector Investment Programme.

After examining the historical implementation capacity of the civil service, the Government came to the conclusion that the service lacked the capacity to implement the magnitude of capital projects that were necessary to facilitate the attainment of Government's vision of achieving developed nation status by 2020. In an effort to fast track the implementation process, Government established a number of special purpose state enterprises under the Companies Act as limited liability companies for the purposes of executing certain protections which fall under the portfolios of certain ministries and departments. Ministries and departments have been contracting out the project execution function of these special purpose state enterprises.

In the 2008 budget, the sum of \$4 billion was appropriate for transfer to the Infrastructure Development Fund to fund a number of infrastructural projects being implemented by special purpose state enterprises. A detailed listing of the projects and sums allocated are contained in the estimates of the development programme for the financial year ending September 30, 2008.

The approval of the Cabinet—it should not be the Cabinet, I apologize. The approval of the Parliament is now being sought for the appropriation of a further sum of \$3.9 billion to be deposited in the Infrastructure Development Fund. This

would bring the total deposits into the Fund for fiscal 2008 to \$7.9 billion. As at August 28, 2008, the total system released by warrant from the Infrastructure Development Fund in fiscal 2008, was \$4,472,671,279. The additional funding required was met from the unallocated resources of the Fund which was unspent as at September 30, 2007. The projected expenditure for 2008 is \$5,570,000.05.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in order to provide the Parliament with full disclosure on the projects of which the projected \$5,570.5 million will be spent in fiscal 2008, a detailed listing of expenditure on the Infrastructure Development Fund projects was circulated to Members, along with the third report of the 2007/2008 session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the proposal for the supplementation of the 2008 appropriation. Hon. Members are asked to note that the balance in the fund as at September 11, 2008 is \$2,357.7 million.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01, parliamentary approval is required for transfers from the Consolidated Fund. Although the additional \$3.9 billion would be recorded as expenditure, approximately \$2.4 billion will not be utilized in the 2008 fiscal year and would therefore be available to finance future projects.

May I conclude by reiterating that the Bill before us is seeking the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$3.9 billion under Head 18: Ministry of Finance, for transfer to the Infrastructure Development Fund.

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

Question proposed.

Mr. Vasant Bharath (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, thank you. Well, here we go again. For the third time this year they are coming back to the Parliament for more money to spend at their will. On Wednesday, September 17, 2008, we attended the Finance Committee meeting, and it was mentioned that the Government will be coming back for a further \$3.9 billion of taxpayer's money, and I was tempted to roll out my speech of May earlier this year because, effectively it is the same thing all over again. Certainly, nothing has changed in the last three months or in the last 12 months. My immediate reaction when this further sum was mentioned was that this must be some kind of a sad sick joke.

Mr. Speaker, to compound matters even more, when we attended this meeting on Wednesday, one would have thought that the Opposition, on behalf of the

people of Trinidad and Tobago, would have had the opportunity to ask questions of the chairman at the time, and also to look at matters arising out of the previous meeting, but we were brashly informed that it is existing practise that we were not allowed to ask questions on matters arising. So, here we are in the dark.

The Minister did mention that \$3.9 billion is being appropriated, and I have to say that we do not know what projects these moneys are going to be spent on. We are here to make a determination on appropriating \$3.9 billion of taxpayers' money and we are buying cat in bag, so to speak. We have no idea of what we are here to approve effectively today. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, what is perplexing to most people and to the general public at large would be why the Government would come on the eve of a budget debate next week, a new term, and ask for \$3.9 billion.

We already have on record the largest sum ever allocated of taxpayers' money in Trinidad and Tobago to a budget, and possibly the largest sum of taxpayers' money anywhere in the democratic world that has not been accounted for or suitably spent.

Mr. Speaker, not only is the financial world on its knees at the moment, and our actions should be more circumspect than it has been in the past, but as I mentioned, this is the third time that they have come back. This has become almost an act of piracy. This is a continual raiding of the Treasury in the full glare of the public and they continue to do it.

When housewives all across the world make their budget and they go to the supermarkets to do their groceries month after month, they are so precise. It is very rare that they would have to return to the supermarket before the next month. Well, that used to be the case, but now most people have to do their groceries on a weekly basis because of the astronomical cost of living.

Nevertheless, I had always taken for granted that this aspect of housewifely home economics was something engrained in most of their financial disciplines. I look at a Government who has many technocrats and experts at hand to do the budgeting process, but yet they continue to get it wrong. They continue to come back to Parliament, because they continue to overspend the people's money.

If such a shameless miscalculation were to take place in the private sector, those who are responsible would have been figuratively feathered and tarred, disgraced and hung out to hang—[*Interruption*—]to dry. No one would have wanted to hire them anymore. In fact, heads would have rolled if that had

happened. In most homes, people have to go through a basic budgeting process. Having said that, I realize that there is a crying need or a shouting need in this House for a definition of what a budget is, because it is very apparent that the Government is unaware of what a budget means.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote the great Cicero, that incomparable orator of ancient Roman times of whom we all know of. Many years ago, this is what Cicero said. He was talking about what a budget should be and he said:

“The budget should be balanced, the treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome should become bankrupt, the mobs should be forced to work and not depend on government for subsistence.”

One would be forgiven if it was felt that Cicero wrote this especially for the PNM. It is so apt and so appropriate to our times that we are living in today. In fact, Cicero’s rumination is as appropriate today as it would have been for his contemporaries over 2000 years ago. I think it may be worth it, if I may make a humble suggestion that we frame Cicero’s words and hang them somewhere in this Parliament for those on the other side to see for the very short time that they may be involved in the presentation or the preparation of the budget, so that they will continually see it—before its gaze. I am sure, like me, the public has now become extremely fed up with this most insufferable and vexatious exercise.

Mr. Speaker, what urgent life and death matter does this Government have at this point in time that justifies its coming to this Parliament for another \$4 billion just hours before the next budget is proposed? Is there some sort of closing down sale going on somewhere in the world that we need—*[Interruption]*—a garage sale, as my friend from Princes Town North says—that we need to suddenly rush through a \$4 billion expenditure? What kind of bargains are we looking for? I do not know if it is for the Bombardier Jet or if that has now changed, and we are now looking at something more luxurious along the lines of the QE2, but whatever the rush, rush, hush, hush, last minute shopping list of the Prime Minister's last presented budget is, one certainly gets the impression that there is much work ahead for the Integrity Commission. In truth, this Government is treating this country’s money and the treasury as though it is an ATM machine, and that all it has to do when it wants to go on a spending spree is to punch in its code and bingo, out rolls billions and billions of dollars.

This reckless and incompetent Government has returned to this Parliament for appropriations in the order of \$10 billion in the last 12 months alone. That is in fact a 25 per cent increase on the initial amounts allocated. Let me remind this honourable House and the people of this country that is also in addition to the \$1.2 billion they came for and that was for the release of Treasury Bonds and the \$7.5 billion that they also came for in the last couple of months under the Development Loans Act. Let me put it in the context for you and the ordinary folks out there who are listening, what this \$10 billion means and what it is.

In the UNC's first year in administration as the government of Trinidad and Tobago in 1995/1996, the entire budget for the year was \$9.3 billion; in 1996/1997 it was \$10.4 billion; in 1997/1998 it was \$11.6 billion; in 1998/1999 it was \$10.5 billion; in 1999/2000 it was \$12.4 billion; in 2000/2001 it was \$13.9 billion and in 2001/2002 it was \$14.2 billion.

Mr. Ross: Thank God it was not more.

Mr. V. Bharath: My, friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan said "thank God it was not more," but the paltry amounts that we had and we allocated, we built over 100 schools; we provided free secondary education for all; we built 47 health centres; two new district health facilities, one in Couva and the other in Princes Town; we launched the Emergency Health Service with 65 fully equipped ambulances; and we created 85,000 new sustainable and productive jobs [*Desk thumping*]—

Mr. S. Panday: Not CEPEP and URP!

Mr. V. Bharath:—we built 22 new police stations; we put over 1,700 new police officers on the road; we put 241 police cars into the fleet; we delivered water to over 85 per cent of the population; we paved over 3000 kilometres of road; we built a desalination plant in Point Lisas, and yes we built a state-of-the-art working international airport in Trinidad and Tobago that is the envy of all of our Caribbean neighbours with oil as low as \$9 a barrel.

3.15 p.m.

To further reiterate the magnitude of this \$10 billion, because we get caught up now, everything is billion, so of course, the man in the street, most of us here, including me—and I have an accounting background—have lost track of all of these zeros, we become numb to it after a while. In doing my research, I looked back at some of the budgets in the early days of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, I went as far back as 1970, and for the years 1970—1979, that 10 year period, the

total amount allocated for budgets was \$9.8 billion. We ran this country from 1970—1979 with less than \$10 billion over those 10 years. Here we are coming today for an appropriation for this last 12 months; just an appropriation, an additional amount of \$10 billion, that is to put it in context of how much money we are spending and how much money we are wasting. This last minute supplementation of appropriation is seriously flawed and it is disturbing on several fundamental fronts, and I want to talk about those.

For starters—and the Minister made mention of it in her introduction—billions of these dollars are now being tossed into PNM created special purpose companies—this is what this is all about—whose general unwritten laws and mandate is to undertake politically inspired work at constituencies represented by Members on that side.

Mr. Parsanlal: Would the Member give way? Thank you for giving way, Member. Just for clarification, what is the equivalent, in modern terms, of that \$9.8 billion you said was spent from 1970—1979? What would be the equivalent?

Mr. V. Bharath: I have not done a backward calculation of the retail price index, but I could work it out and let you know in due course. I have no idea, that is the truth. That is the actual ugly record of these well-funded organizations; that is their *raison d'être*; that is why they exist. These companies do not have any generally accepted auditing systems, they have been deliberately placed out of the purview of the Auditor General's reach, out of the Central Tenders Board; they are not transparent in any of their dealings and they are very selective in the choice of products that they undertake. You just have to look at the completed projects around the country and the secrecy that shrouds their work.

The Minister is correct when she said that they are an executing arm of the Government, they are an executing company. But what are they executing and on whose behalf? Where for example, are most of the street lighting projects being undertaken under NSDP? Where is the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago doing most of its improvements to sporting facilities? What has the Rural Development Company done to alleviate flooding in farming areas and communities?

In other words, these special purpose vehicles are nothing but glorified CEPEPs and URPs. They are just more sophisticated units operating as CEPEPs and URPs, designed to undertake a sinister PNM plan, an agenda, and not to be open to independent and critical scrutiny.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the essence and the backbone of the matter that we have come here to discuss today, for which we are being asked to give legislative approval. As the Minister rightly said, this amount of \$3.9 billion brings to the total \$7.9 billion in the last 12 months that the Government is now allocating to the Infrastructure Development Fund. It is classic PNM governance, and I predict that the Auditor General will invariably and inevitably frown upon lack of accountability as she has done in many other state enterprises in the last 12 months.

I am also sure that even though the Auditor General will express her deepest concerns about this funding and how it is being used, the Government will also turn a blind eye to the Auditor General's concern, in much the same way that they have turned a blind eye to the \$1.6 billion corruption in CEPEP, and the lack of accountability in many other government agencies and several state agencies.

This additional funding clearly highlights the inadequacies with a budget that promised so much, yet delivered so little, and is increasingly becoming a distant reality from the lives of the common man in the street and for a wide cross section of our citizens. It is becoming irrelevant. It has become something that the Government gets up, talks about on budget day, that the Opposition responds to and 12 months later what has been done has borne no resemblance whatsoever to what had been promised 12 months prior. This was a budget that simply did nothing to address the scourge of poverty; the concern of most people about the cost of food and food production, and national security nightmare.

There is another deeply troubling issue that adds a severe dimension to this already bloated budget and creates additional problems by taking another \$3.9 billion of taxpayers' money to further inflate the budget. There is a saying, "You do not know who is bathing naked until the tide goes out". [*Crosstalk*] The harsh reality is that the tide has gone out at several international institutions and capitals around the world, and based on vital signposts in Trinidad and Tobago, our forecast may be quite troubling. Yet this callous spending illustrates a Government that has been skinny-dipping without a care in the world, even as the international financial community has now been brought to its knees and is being brutally struck by catastrophe after catastrophe.

Most of the developed world and the developed countries in the world are in deep financial crisis. Major financial institutions like Bear Stearns, Merrill Lynch, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in the United States, and the AIG recently; and

Northern Rock and Halifax Building Society in the United Kingdom have been propped up and bailed out by the regulators in those countries and the regulatory authorities. Others like Lehman Brothers have not been so fortunate.

The housing market on both sides of the Atlantic is in dire straits. They are at the lowest ebb for many a year. Stock markets across the world, developed stock markets, underdeveloped stock markets, stock markets in emerging countries, have all plummeted in recent times; some by 50 per cent and 60 per cent of their values. You know what, Madam Deputy Speaker? All of these countries, all of these organizations have taken decisive measures to deal with the unfortunate realities that are now confronting them in this new globalised world.

The Governor of the Central Bank recently said in an *Express* article of Tuesday, September 16, 2008, and I quote him:

"The stunning sudden tumble in the US financial system at the weekend is not good news for investment markets around the world, including Trinidad and Tobago's..."

But for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago it is business as usual. As the Member for Diego Martin North/East likes to say, "It is full steam ahead", and I noticed recently the Minister of Finance is also now saying, "Full steam ahead".

The message—that this country must clearly understand—and the actions coming out of the PNM Government are no different from the boom and bust years of the 1970s and 1980s that took us to bankruptcy; that led us to an empty treasury, and into the waiting arms of the IMF and the World Bank. That is what boom and bust economics is all about; that is what they practised then and they practise today. As unfortunate and as far-reaching as the international financial meltdown is, it should really carry a timely and relevant message to Trinidad and Tobago, especially to this slash-and-burn PNM Government.

It brings into sharp reality and sharp focus the increasingly critical need for financial discipline and proper management of our country's resources. We on this side and indeed the country know that these are alien concepts to this boom and bust administration. We know that financial discipline and prudent management are oxymorons in the PNM lexicon. Look at their pathetic record of management, I should not say management, I should say pathetic record of mismanagement; witness the ongoing utterances of their frontline speakers and their policy makers.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East says flippantly that if we want development we have to spend more and more. He clearly does not understand, I

suspect like most of his colleagues, the difference between growth and development. It does not bother the Member that billions of Government's money is expended in non-productive activities, and there are no concomitant increases in output or productivity at all. It does not burden the Member that greater emphasis should be placed on domestic savings. They do not know what that is.

Witness the spectre of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the chairman of course, of the PNM, Mr. Conrad Enill, very recently saying that a fall in oil prices will lead the PNM Government to reduce savings, but not to cut back on spending. What manner of madness is this? Listen to the Minister of Finance who says the economy is in good shape to withstand the current crisis in the United States, and it is too early to say exactly how the ongoing turbulence in the United States financial system would affect Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Minister of Finance, do we not import most of our food from the United States? Are we not tied to the US dollar? Is the United States dollar not losing value against the euro and other major currencies? Are visitors less likely to visit our shores because of the shutdown of their companies in which they work and the problems in their own countries because of loss of jobs and their homes? Have not many of our insurance companies in Trinidad and Tobago reinsured their risk abroad? To say that it is too early to say what impact this global crisis will have on Trinidad and Tobago, is to display a profound lack of understanding and appreciation of how global markets operate.

Hear what the next—and some say the real—Minister of Finance, Mariano Browne, had to say about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. I quote him:

"As far as I remember from when I last looked at the numbers and the last audited statements in September of last year"—that is a whole year ago he last looked at the statements of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—"it was well spread in terms of money market instruments in fine banks."

Madam Deputy Speaker, was not Lehman Brothers a fine bank a few weeks ago? What about Bear Stearns and Merrill Lynch? Were they not bastions of the financial world only a few short weeks ago? You see these are people that cannot be trusted; they have become accustomed to not telling the truth to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Are these not the same people who boldly lied to the population last Friday when they said they had nothing to do with the illegal assembling of thousands of their supporters in Woodford Square?

3.30 p.m.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “uh hmm.”

Mr. S. Panday: Shameful people!

Mr. V. Bharath: Were they not the same people, Madam Deputy Speaker, shamefully aided and abetted by the Mayor of Port of Spain?

Mr. S. Panday: True. What a shame! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. V. Bharath: Bring his office into such disrepute.

Mr. S. Panday: Shameless!

Mr. V. Bharath: How can they be trusted with anything that they tell this country?

Mr. S. Panday: Liars!

Mr. V. Bharath: But, you see, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is vintage PNM style governance from 1956—2008. [*Interruption*] But, we hope that good sense will prevail; we continue to hope that good sense will prevail. And we once again appeal for the Government to heed the telltale international signs that are being displayed from the current dramatic financial problems we are having and to adopt some urgent, pertinent and effective measures.

We make this plea on behalf of our already battered and beleaguered nation. Even though the evidence to date indicates that this cavalier and reckless administration is highly unlikely to change its wanton ways. Like a Friday night prostitute [*Interruption*] will casually toss away all the windfalls that have befallen us. [*Interruption*] What justification, other than the smelter syndrome, could there be for not one, not two, but three appropriations to what has already been the heftiest national budget in our history? What explanation is there for this wild and thoughtless spending even though more than 70 per cent of last year's budgetary proposals have not been delivered? What possible validation could there be for this 11th hour addition to the budget in the face of the dire international scenario that we face; which begs—I would assume—for a Government who is responsible, which begs for careful policing of our resources, tighter monetary policies and an updated regulatory system?

What rationalization can there be for this pork barrel spending, while the Government has again failed in spectacular fashion to implement food production as they promised over and over again? What is the reasoning for this freewheeling spending in the absence of appropriate oversight mechanisms, [*Interruption*]

limited transparency and massive corruption. How does the Government explain this bloated budget when there is such urgent and vital need for improvement in the financial regulatory systems in this country and for a greater application towards the people's benefit and the people's future? *[Interruption]* What is the justification for continuing to pad this budget at a time when oil prices are sliding?

Mr. S. Panday: They do not care anything; they do not care.

Mr. V. Bharath: How does the Minister of Finance defend this new fiscal allocation in the midst of soaring inflation and impending world recession?

That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is what makes this spending spree, this spending frenzy deeply worrisome. Not just for us on this side, but I am certain for most right-thinking and conscientious citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. But you know this Government never ceases to impress us as financially inept, creatively incapable and woefully uncaring.

The current international meltdown should be a wake up call to all governments, but especially to one that is positioning itself to be the regional financial capital. Also, particularly, for one that is so highly dependant on a volatile commodity such as oil and gas.

This Government continues to insist that financial fundamentals in this country are sound. Let me take this opportunity to remind them that that was the mantra of the Bush administration and of John McCain not so long ago, both of whom have had to change their minds very rapidly, in fact overnight, in the midst of the financial crisis. Now McCain is saying that if he were president, he would have fired the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. In Trinidad and Tobago, it is, of course, business as usual, even as the incompetent and bungling Commissioner of Cooperatives continues on his merry way. That is financial management PNM style.

There is another disturbing scenario pertaining to this puffy and unwieldy budget that now totals in the region of close to \$50 billion for the last 12 months. It pertains to the woeful non-delivery of major headline projects outlined in successive budgets. This is indeed, a timely occasion for us to point out some of the vital measures that were outlined in the budget last year but were never undertaken or delivered. It is timely because it should give the hon. Minister of Finance an opportunity to pause, to reflect and to review those projects as she prepares another lofty PNM wish-list on Monday.

Permit me to cite some of the measures in the current budget that simply fell by the wayside or were ignored completely in characteristic haughty PNM arrogant style. Because of its critical importance, I want to start with agriculture and food production. This Government promised a review of the entire package of incentives to farmers and agro-processors. There was a pledge of a joint farming project with Guyana; the setting up of a special regime of incentives for new farms and an all-out assault on praedial larceny. Some 417 acres of land at Mon Jaloux ought to have been allocated to the Small Ruminants Society and there were grandiose announcements of improvements to access roads, irrigation and other infrastructure.

The Prime Minister told us of these great plans to expand YAPA and of the establishment of demonstration farms, in addition to new marketing arrangements to be put in place for NAMDEVCO. Any conscientious administration would have been shamefaced about the non-delivery of these projects, at a time when food sufficiency and the cost of food itself is a front burner, even a life and death issue, both here at home and internationally.

Yet, on top of that, this cold-hearted Government has moved to reclaim more than 1,000 acres of Caroni lands and put them in the hands of the EMBD for more housing. They have failed to deliver consistently despite the court's ruling to deliver the lands to the ex-Caroni workers, up to today. This, in the context of a Government that has spent \$50 billion in a calendar year. [*Interruption*]

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Do you know what? Not one word; not one sign of regret, not one sign of concern, not one word of apology; from a hopeless and unproductive regime.

Mr. Warner: Shameless.

Mr. V. Bharath: In fact, agriculture has further receded from the PNM's frame of reference, if, in fact it was ever there at all—I do not know—to the point where we often forget who the Minister of Agriculture is. [*Laughter*] What is his name again?

Mr. Warner: Banker. He is a banker.

Mr. S. Panday: I forget.

Mr. V. Bharath: I do not think many on that side even know who the Minister of Agriculture is.

Mr. S. Panday: Let us hear; let us hear.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, you would recall that a Prices Advisory Committee and a Consumer Advisory Board were set up some months ago. That was the last this country has heard of those lofty sounding bodies. Maybe its mandate was simply to watch the prices rise in the supermarkets.

I want to turn briefly to the issue of national security, because of course, that is where many billions of this country's dollars—I nearly slipped and said millions, but of course, everything that I have said before is now in billions—have been funnelled for the last six years, and many more billions have been put into the last budget, and I am sure that when the budget is read on Monday, several more billions of dollars will be put into more plans to be hatched over the next 12 months.

Mr. Sharma: Crazy plans.

Mr. V. Bharath: The plans in the last 12 months included: resources for the police service; offshore patrol vehicles; gun ships; helicopters and surveillance units. But all we have had, Mr. Speaker, as a result of all of these billions being spent—do you know what we have had?—all we have had is a record murder rate; a record murder rate approaching almost 400 murders for the year to date. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Panday: It passed 400.

Mr. V. Bharath: We have had increases in virtually every criminal offence. [*Interruption*] We have had a complete collapse of the criminal justice system, to the point where, a court conviction is as rare as a competent PNM Minister. [*Desk thumping*] Routine assassinations of witnesses almost on a daily basis. That, Mr. Speaker, is governance PNM style. Yet the hon. Prime Minister would dare to state in the budget address that his Government was reaching its goal and accomplishing its mission. What goal? What mission?

Mr. S. Panday: Dreamer.

Mr. V. Bharath: To further pauperize this battered nation, to subject us to more bloody criminal attacks and to leave us hungry and destitute? Is that the mission? Is that the vision? Well, if it is, for once they are doing an excellent job.

The ugly truth is that the PNM Government has little to be proud of with respect to its performance in the last 12 months. Where are the hundreds of early childhood care and education centres that were promised? Who is benefiting from the housing programmes and what quality of housing are these people receiving? People continually come to my office to complain that they cannot access houses

constructed by the HDC. *[Interruption]* They have made applications; they have qualified; they have gone to the Mortgage Finance Company; they have been approved, but no house; five and six years they have been waiting for houses, Mr. Prime Minister. No houses for people who are needed.

Mr. Manning: Why is that so?

Mr. V. Bharath: In fact, the Oropouche East constituency of the PNM—according to Dr. Moonilal recently—actually took a motion to the PNM's convention this year as saying that, and I quote:

“Residents of such constituencies are having great difficulty in receiving housing units, even though they meet the stipulated criteria.”

Mr. Manning: All over the country.

Mr. V. Bharath: Yes, there are PNM people also crying out for Government houses. *[Interruption]* Not UNC supporters only, who, of course, we know are automatically debarred and disqualified—

Mr. S. Panday: True!

Mr. V. Bharath:—and they do not have a chance at all. *[Desk thumping]* But what we have to ask ourselves is to whom are these houses being allocated? *[Interruption]* Is it to friends of the PNM big boys? Is it to relatives of party financiers? Because there seems to be a number of houses built all over the place and it appears that the poor people who are needy are not being able to access them.

Mr. Manning: Ask the Member for Caroni East, he is supposed to have an answer for it.

Mr. V. Bharath: All we hear are snotty excuses from an uncaring, pompous and condescending Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment, a lady who claims to be a Christian with a big “C”.

Miss. Kangaloo: He cannot be insulting a Member of Parliament like that.

Mr. V. Bharath: Is that not what she said? She is a Christian with a big “C”.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And across there tell her to shut up. Sit down! *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. V. Bharath: I would have liked to tell her I was a Protestant with a big “P”, *[Laughter]* But I would be lying, Mr. Speaker, because I am not a Protestant. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Member: I think you doth protest too much.

Mr. V. Bharath: I would not ask you how you know.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for St. Augustine for giving way and I would like to tell him that self praise is no praise at all. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. V. Bharath: I thank the hon. Prime Minister for his words of advice and I shall remember them. Mr. Speaker, I think the disaster in health is now incalculable and I am sure when Dr. Gopeesingh gets up to speak, he would discuss it more in length, but even by PNM's standards, this Minister is a disaster of tsunami proportions. He belongs to that rare place that was previously reserved for the Minister of National Security, but we should have been forewarned. They should have known in advance about the Minister's absence of skills and his ability by his very appropriate first name.

You would recall, hon. Prime Minister, the signs that were held up at your own PNM party, convention by supporters of your party, "No more "jerry" from Jerry." Well of course you would remember. You may not want to admit to it, but those were signs that were held up by a number of PNM supporters. This Minister has unleashed a "jerry" upon this nation by ignoring an outbreak of dengue simply by trying to reclassify it and reclassify what an outbreak means. That is pure PNM politics and PR, where the only people who suffer are the people of the nation. I ask him to come clean and attend to the problems and the woes of the country for once.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, in the midst of all this dilly-dallying by the Minister of Health, several innocent people have died, including children. We all know this and still no urgent attention is being placed on the health crisis. If only the Minister was a man of conscience, he would have moved to ensure that another life had not been lost or another life would not be lost, and we are now hearing fears that there may be an outbreak of small pox and other commutable diseases.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health what has become of the 100-day plan that he had promised this Parliament about a year ago. We have not heard anything about that 100-day plan since then. Mr. Speaker, in a country with a budget of \$50 billion, I believe, and I think many people believe that this country deserves more from its health care system. This Government must stop hiding behind spin doctoring and PR exercise because the lives of so many of our people, particularly children and the elderly are at stake.

With respect to infrastructure, this country continues to wait and hold its breath for the much awaited water taxis. The delivery—so is Christmas—of this election promise, is as bizarre as the weather pattern that the Minister was so bothered about recently and so intensely bothered about it. The improvement of road infrastructure in selective parts of the country is outmatched by the traffic woes, and the chaos on roads that people face on a daily basis. With regard to the watercourses throughout the country, we have horrifying evidences, whether it rains heavily or not. Before our very eyes, every time it rains, it floods, whether it is a small drizzle or not.

On the issue of the energy sector, the long overdue diversification of the economy of that sector is moving at typical PNM's snail's pace and the Government continues to ignore all reason or rhyme and all rationale with regard to the warnings from experts, including the Ryder Scott Report. I could go on and on and on about the chronic failure of this Government to deliver its budgetary promises. I could talk about the planned national health care system which has never gotten off the ground. I could discuss the disastrous state of WASA, where 40 per cent of the supply still escapes through leaks; where pipes are literally rotting; and where there is wanton waste and corruption, all under the dutiful watch of the Member for Chaguanas East.

Indeed, in the face of that sobering reality, permit me to quote from the Prime Minister's budget presentation last year:

“This master plan...will ensure that all of Trinidad and Tobago will have a nationwide, 24 hours, seven days a week water supply...”

Mr. Manning: I did not say when.

Mr. V. Bharath: He did not say when. You are quite right. He did not give a time frame. Maybe he meant when the UNC got back into Government.

Mr. Manning: When is that?

Mr. S. Panday: When cock get teeth.

Mr. V. Bharath: In due course. I am not saying when either, hon. Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and talk about the politicization of CEPEP and URP, and the threats that workers received last week Friday, when they attended the circus at Woodford Square; that they would not get paid if they did not turn up and it would affect them in getting further employment.

We have been told that that exercise cost this country \$2.5 million to organize an illegal activity, an illegal activity under the guise of a PNM party group. I could speak of how the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs spent millions of the dollars on something called, Youth Month, and yet a Minister was saying recently that nine-year-olds are now consuming illegal drugs. I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, how poor people are seeing hell to live in this country today on their paltry pensions, even as the Prime Minister bails out regional economies and is able to jump on a flight at whim, to all parts of the world.

Mr. Speaker, I could give you more examples of how this \$50 billion budget means precious little to the ordinary man in the street, and how it is not impacting positively in any way on his/her life. I could read out and reel out a litany of examples of the absence of accountability, coming out of the Auditor General's office with regard to state-run organizations. I could give examples in the St. Augustine constituency of how social welfare benefits are being taken away from those who need them the most, and given to card carrying PNMites, [*Desk thumping*] and how needy and bona fide people have become frustrated because they are being ignored and bounced from pillar to post. I could talk about the people who are on minimum wage and are enduring the worst times of their lives, and how the number of working poor is increasing.

I have made the point that this administration is not governing for all of the people. It is out of touch with the realities on the ground and it is insensitive of the international financial scenario that is on our doorstep. I have explained that we must wet our own homes when our neighbours' homes are on fire. I have detailed how we could be one step away from a slippery slope, and yet another energy boom would have dissipated before our very eyes without the requisite and much needed improvements to the quality of the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I have stressed how the strongest economy in the Caribbean and in the region could turn into a shameful begging bowl, running back to the international lending agencies like we did in the mid-1980s, if we do not prudently manage our God-given windfall.

Mr. Speaker, I often wonder if this is a test of our patience and of our character, a test for them to see how far they can go; how much they can take; and

how much they can get away with. All of us here who are not part of this conspiracy to empty the Treasury and to steal the democratic process from beneath the feet of our people, have a bounden duty to let this Government know that enough is enough. We have a duty to read them the Riot Act; to let people know that billions and billions of our dollars are being allocated to all kinds of projects—from budget to budget—while this Government is virtually liming on the block or jetting all over the world, living it up in penthouse style with all and sundry getting double chins and extended waistlines, and fat bank accounts, as they live the good life. Many of these projects—that they deliver—ever come off the ground or have ever seen the light of day, although the moneys that are being allocated have disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Mr. Speaker, I say so, not only in light of the legislation before us here today, but particularly in light of the upcoming fiscal package that we are about to have presented to this honourable House on Monday. It is not too late for a critical review of the delivery process for projects and a review of the impending package to make it more relevant, to make it meaningful and to make it beneficial to the greatest number of our citizens.

In conclusion, the inequality in any society breeds hatred, in a wealthy country such as ours where those who have it flaunt it conspicuously. What we are in danger of doing, is of creating a society of haves and have-nots, which in due course is bound to lead to social upheaval. If we are unable to provide for the many that do not have, we will never be able to protect the few that do.

I offer these words of advice, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I guess the Member for St. Augustine felt that he had to pitch his presentation in a manner that would create some sort of atmosphere of excitement and he has spent quite some time making a number of uninformed remarks. I am sure that he knows better because he has told us at one point in time that he was an accountant, and therefore, he knows that most of what he said today, was untrue, inaccurate, ill conceived, misplaced, misleading and just plain wrong.

Let me deal firstly with the first piece of mischief that he has introduced into this debate, and that is the allegation, false as it is, that during the finance committee on Wednesday, September 17, 2008, Members opposite were told that they could not ask questions. And for the debate today, the Members opposite have been given no information on the projects that are funded or will be funded

under the International Development Fund (IDF). Mr. Speaker, all of that is untrue. All of that is entirely untrue. What happened on Wednesday was that the Members of the Opposition sought to revive a debate on a Finance Bill that was presented to this Parliament some seven or eight months ago, and that was the Finance Bill of January 2008.

4.00 p.m.

In the Finance Committee on Wednesday, although that debate had long passed and the matters related to the debate on the Finance Bill of 2008 had long passed, and had been debated to completion, the Members of the Opposition still attempted, as they have done previously, to revive matters in a debate on a previous Appropriation Bill.

They were reminded, as they had been reminded previously, that the matter before was the appropriation of some \$3.9 billion in savings—and this is the point I will come to in a short while—in fiscal 2008, were to be appropriated to the budget of 2008 in order to ensure that these funds could be used for infrastructure in 2009. Therefore, what the Member for St. Augustine has done is put a horrible piece of mischief into this Parliament.

The fact of the matter is that the \$3.9 billion, which is the subject of the debate today, is unspent balances. In fiscal 2008, the revenue outturn was better than anticipated, because it was quite the opposite of what the hon. Member tried to tell us had occurred, the PNM administration, the hon. Minister of Finance who delivered the budget of 2007, had projected its revenue for 2008 based on a conservative oil price. In fact, the figure, if my memory serves me correctly, was in the vicinity of US \$50, based on the benchmark crude oil that we use for our budgetary calculations.

So the hon. Minister of Finance, who, at the time, was the hon. Prime Minister, came to this Parliament in August 2007 and presented a budget based on a projected oil price of approximately US \$50. Based on that projection of the US \$50 oil price, a certain revenue was projected for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, for the country of Trinidad and Tobago, in fiscal 2008. When the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister, delivered the national budget in 2007, he was, in fact, delivering the budget for fiscal year 2008, which runs from October 01, 2007—September 30, 2008. The financial year was changed some time ago by the other side to October to September. It used to be January to December.

When the hon. Prime Minister delivered the budget in 2007, he used a US \$50 oil price as an estimate in order to estimate revenue going forward into fiscal

2008. Of course, all of us know that oil prices have been way in excess of US \$50, which demonstrates the prudence and foresight of this PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] It is the exact opposite of what the Member for St. Augustine said. We used an extremely conservative oil price, because we did not want to be fiscally irresponsible. During the fiscal period, the 12-month cycle, October 01—September 30, 2008, oil prices have gone past US \$100; in fact, they reached as high as \$143, and now they are hovering around the \$100 mark; therefore, the actual outturn in terms of an average oil price, based on marine production, land production and all of the crudes that are used in the basket of crudes that developed our oil price for revenue purposes, is now going to be much closer, I would think, to \$100. I am not sure what the figure is exactly, but I suspect that the average oil price for the year may be somewhere in the vicinity of US \$100, US \$90, or something like that.

We have also had the benefit of an increased natural gas price, because, again, in developing the budget for fiscal 2008, the hon. Prime Minister used a conservative gas price. We used a conservative crude oil price and a conservative natural gas price. The outturn, again, for natural gas prices in fiscal 2008 has been far better than we projected and the outturn for crude oil prices has been far better than we projected. So the country and the Government has benefited from surplus revenues, from excess revenues, in terms of revenue generated from an oil price which was over and above what we expected and what we used for our calculations for fiscal 2008.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you now what the Government has done with those funds. Almost \$5 billion will be appropriated during fiscal 2008 to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; almost \$5 billion. Let me repeat that. In one year, almost \$5 billion in surplus oil revenues will be appropriated to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; \$5 billion in one year. That is because of the conservatism of the PNM in its approach to fiscal matters. Because of the responsibility of the PNM, the excess revenues, over and above the projected oil price, have yielded a benefit, a deposit that is going into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in the sum of almost \$5 billion. That could only happen if we were responsible and conservative in our estimates.

If, on the other hand, we had estimated oil prices to be US \$100 in 2007, which is probably what the actual outturn is going to be, and we had done a budget based on that, then there would have been no money available to go into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. We went the other way and have been fiscally responsible and conservative, thus allowing, by legislation—because, as

you know, there is now a law that governs the operations of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Mr. Speaker, 60 per cent of the excess revenues, based on your prediction of an oil price in your budget, automatically goes into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So \$5 billion out of the revenues generated in fiscal 2008, approximately, will go into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

Now we come to the matter we are dealing with today, a further \$4 billion, a further \$4 billion, \$3.9 billion, in unspent balances, in surplus revenues generated by the unexpected outturn in oil prices, also generated by unexpected collections in taxes. I heard the Minister of Finance say on Wednesday, I believe, that the outturn in terms of collections of VAT has been very impressive. In fact, we have collected more than \$1 billion in additional revenues from value added tax. So that we have surplus revenues from value added tax, we have surplus revenues from oil income, surplus revenues from gas income, and so on. Rather than waste these funds, we are appropriating it to the Infrastructure Development Fund; it is savings. *[Interruption]*

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Will the hon. Minister please give way? If the funds were put into savings like the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, would it have been wasted there?

Hon. C. Imbert: Certainly not. The Government has a number of options available to it. The Government could take surplus revenues and put it into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; of course we could do that, we could put everything, whatever surplus there is, way beyond the 60 per cent allocation by legislation, because the 60 per cent is a minimum figure. If it wanted to, the Government could take 100 per cent of excess revenues and put it into the Heritage Fund, but that is not what the Fund is set up for. The Heritage Fund is set up to access 60 per cent of the excess revenues based on the prediction in the national budget. So this Government, and any government, when faced with additional revenues, would put some of it apart, would sterilize some of it, as we are doing in terms of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

As I said, \$5 billion is being sterilized in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, which is now going to hit about \$15 million, and create a cushion in the future in the event that there is a drastic reduction in oil prices; that is one thing. Of the additional surplus revenues, the remainder, the other 40 per cent, we are putting the bulk of that into the IDF; we are not spending it. That was the mischief the Member for St. Augustine put into this Parliament. We are not spending that \$4 billion; we are appropriating it to the Infrastructure Development Fund, so that the money would then become available in fiscal 2009, for spending on infrastructural development in this country.

So it is not a question of the Government coming like a thief in the night, as the great accountant from St. Augustine tried to pretend; that the Government was coming like a thief in the night. Let me use his emotive language, "What life or death problem exists that we need to rush through a \$4 billion expenditure?" Such drama. "What is the last minute shopping list that has caused this massive expenditure?" And he said it in the best English accent as well.

The fact of the matter is that the \$4 billion does not represent expenditure; it represents savings. That is exactly what it is; we are appropriating \$4 billion in savings during fiscal 2008 into the IDF. We are transferring money that would have gone back to the Consolidated Fund and would not have been available for the citizens of this country for development expenditure. We are transferring surplus revenues, parking it in the Infrastructure Development Fund, so that it will now have a significant balance to be utilized during fiscal 2009. So it is not expenditure; that was the mischief put into the Parliament by the Member for St. Augustine.

You know, Mr. Speaker, he spoke about the \$50 billion budget; he screamed about the \$50 billion budget of 2008, of course, conveniently not telling the Parliament that contained in that \$50 billion was \$5 billion for the Heritage Fund, which is not expenditure, and \$4 billion for the IDF, which is not expenditure; almost \$9 billion in savings in that \$50 billion.

If you look at it very, very carefully, we came to this Parliament with a \$40-odd billion budget, about \$41, if my memory serves me right. We came here with a \$40 billion budget about a year ago, now we have a \$50 billion budget, of which \$9 billion is savings. [*Desk thumping*] So what is the point? [*Interruption*] [*Dr. Gopeesingh rises*] No, I am not giving way to you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: On a point of order!

Hon. C. Imbert: What is the point of order?

Dr. Gopeesingh: He is misleading the House.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is not a point of order; sit down! I am not giving way to you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: I will deal with you. I am coming after you. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Imbert: You could deal blackjack if you want. Go and deal cards; go and deal poker.

Let me look at what the hon. Member quoted. [*Interruption*] Go and deal blackjack, you want to deal with me.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 19, 2008

Marcus Tullius was Cicero's correct name; a Roman statesman who lived between the years 43 BC and 106 BC. The quotation is as follows:

"The budget should be balanced. Public debt should be reduced...assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed, lest Rome become bankrupt."

What are we about today? We are balancing the budget. [*Desk thumping*] It was the most foolish contribution I have ever heard. Marcus Tullius told us to balance the budget. If we do not appropriate this additional revenue, the budget would not be balanced. [*Desk thumping*] If you want to quote, get your facts straight.

Mr. Peters: Marcus did not have Calder Hart! [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Imbert: "The public debt should be reduced."

That was what Cicero told us. The debt service ratio of Trinidad and Tobago [*Crosstalk*] is now half of what it was under the UNC.

4.15 p.m.

In fact, we reduced the foreign debt by firing the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] When the population got rid of the UNC in 2001, the public debt was reduced instantly and the budget was balanced immediately. If you look at the facts in terms of the public debt, when they were in office almost 50 per cent of GDP was required to service foreign debts. Now that we are in office, it is half of that. So we have reduced the public debt and it is even lower, as the Minister of Finance is telling me.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: [*Inaudible*] It is less than the Heritage Stabilisation Fund.

Hon. C. Imbert: Imagine that. Yes Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is now telling me that our public debt under the prudent management of the People's National Movement Government is now less than the funds that the PNM has placed in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. That is management for you. So we could pay off the country's debt tomorrow with the funds that the PNM Government has put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund by way of savings.

Because I am in possession of these facts, and the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air is fond of saying: "Facts are stubborn things they won't go away," I want to repeat for those who might have been hoodwinked by that mischievous contribution from the accountant from St. Augustine, our savings in the heritage fund are now equivalent, or more than our foreign debt. So we can pay off our foreign debt tomorrow. Which country in the world could do that?

[*Mr. Bharath rises*]

No. Not even the United States of America. No, I will not give way. “Sit down nah man. Ah didn’t harass you, ah let yuh talk.” I allowed you to talk. No, it is my turn now.

Mr. Speaker, which country in the world could boast that they have savings in a fund that could pay off their entire debt? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Bharath: That is not true, he is misleading you.

Hon. C. Imbert: The United States of America cannot do that. “Boy, you could say whe yuh want. Jump high, jump low, yuh could say whe yuh want.”

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That is not true.

Hon. C. Imbert: “Mr. Speaker, I am speaking about our foreign debt, what you think ah talking about?”

Mr. Manning: What do you think he is talking about?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You should say it louder.

Hon. C. Imbert: Hush, oh hush.

Mr. Speaker, let us move on. He complained again of assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome become bankrupt. Well, Rome was in real trouble when the UNC was in office. They wrote off the debt to Guyana of US \$500 million. You heard the amount? When they were in office, the Republic of Guyana owed this country in excess of US \$500 million, TT \$3 billion, and that was plenty money. And they are bleating and carrying on about oil price being \$9 which was not true anyway. You know they like to make up their own statistics, but the fact of the matter is, they did not have the kind of revenues we have now, yet they took a decision to write off debt to the Republic of Guyana in excess of TT \$3 billion and they are talking to us about assistance to foreign lands. Good grief! And he goes on to say that in the private sector, the Government should be tarred and feathered for this disgrace. What disgrace? Taking \$9 billion of the people's money, putting \$5 billion in the heritage fund, and putting \$4 billion in the infrastructure bond as unspent balances?

If you are in the private sector you will be tarred and feathered for that? What kind of private sector you have experience with? Mr. Speaker, the only private sector experience that I am aware that the Member for St. Augustine has is the ignominy of causing this country to spend \$30 million on two shipments of dog rice that never arrived here. That is the only private sector experience of which I am aware in terms of the Member for St. Augustine and it was public.

His private sector behaviour became very public. It was subject to public scrutiny. Thirty million dollars up in smoke. That was his private sector experience. I want to warn the Member, the next time you want to quote from some dead person, from some Roman statesman, get your quotation right. Cicero told Rome more than 2,000 years ago—

Mr. Manning: What was Cicero's name?

Hon. C. Imbert: Marcus Tullius—told us the budget should be balanced, and all we are about today is an exercise to balance the budget because we have revenues and we have to do something with them. Any two by four accountant who is preparing a balance sheet and a statement of income and expenditure for any company will be aware that in the balance sheet, or in the statement of income and expenditure, you have to account for everything. So because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has earned additional revenue, it has to account for it, it has to balance the budget and that is why it is here today with a Supplementary Appropriation Bill which is designed to balance the budget.

It is real bad you know, 55 minutes of all that tomfoolery we heard from the Member for St. Augustine talking about the Integrity Commission. We are putting \$5 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, \$4 billion for savings—that is a spending spree, the Government is treating the Treasury as an ATM machine. Nonsense! You knew very well that the \$4 billion we are speaking about today are savings, not expenditure.

Mr. Bharath: That is not true. If you do not understand the difference between savings and expenditure, sit down.

Hon. C. Imbert: Foolish! Mr. Speaker, you know he spent all his time carrying on about how we are throwing money into the special purpose state enterprises and nothing is happening for them. He carried on about access to houses, and he tied up himself in his own arguments; he quarrelled about UNC supporters not getting access to HDC houses, and one second later, he referred to a complaint about . supporters who are not getting access to HDC houses. And all he was demonstrating there, was the question of supply and demand.

It is a matter of public record that the applications for HDC houses are somewhere in the vicinity of 100,000—over 100,000 the Prime Minister is telling me—so that the number of applications from citizens of Trinidad and Tobago for state housing exceeds 100,000. And since nobody in the world can build 100,000 houses in one year, or six months, or three months as the case may be, however brilliant they may be, however magical they may be, you cannot build 100,000 houses in one year.

Therefore, since it is impossible to satisfy demand, demand exceeds supply—and he should know these things, he is an accountant—by about 500 or 600 per cent and, therefore, there are going to be a large number of persons, over 80,000 persons who have made applications to the HDC and are unable to get a house at this point in time.

Currently the Government is constructing somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000 houses per year, and at that rate, it is going to take five, six or seven years before the current demand is satisfied. So for the next five years, people will be complaining that they want access to houses. It is a fact of life. It may be longer because as more and more persons come into the system, more and more may wish to avail themselves of state housing.

Mr. Manning: Success has its own dynamic.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, success creates demand and our housing programme has been so successful that it has created and fuelled its own demand. And the very fact that UNC supporters are complaining that it is taking a long time, and they are finding it difficult to get an HDC house and PNM supporters are also complaining that it is taking a long time, and it is difficult for them to access an HDC house demonstrates that there is no victimization and no discrimination. [*Desk thumping*] And I have to listen to this tomfoolery from the Member for St. Augustine? What is the point he was trying to make? A non-point. You know it pains me when I listen to these things.

He says he has received no information on projects. What is this?

[*Holds up document*]

In my documents today, I received a document which everybody has, which speaks about estimates of development programme expenditure, and it lists every project that has been done in every Ministry. It gives details of expenditure on every single project and I will just go to one; the Ministry of Education, social infrastructure, primary procurement of furniture and equipment; Upgrade of Egypt Village Government; Construction of New Grant Government; Construction of Iacos Government; Construction of St. Mary's Government Primary; and Construction of Enterprise Government Primary. A barrage of information in terms of what the money from the Infrastructure Development Fund is being used for.

Mr. Bharath: When did you send that?

Hon. C. Imbert: There are almost 100 pages, you can pull anything. Let me go now to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. It talks about expenditure on the Academy for the Performing Arts, the PanTrinbago Headquarters, recreational facilities, community centres, almost 100 pages of information relating to expenditure under the Infrastructure Development Fund. And it was in this place on his desk before he got up to speak, and he was well aware that this information had been made available to him. And, therefore, when he said that the Members of the Opposition have been given no information on expenditure from the Infrastructure Development Fund he was being very economical with the truth. I cannot use the words I want to use. He was not speaking the truth. He was behaving like a typical UNC because that is all the UNC knows to do, speak untruths, lies. That is all the Members of the UNC are capable of doing, telling lies; that is all you can do.

Your party is in shambles, there are two factions in the UNC as we speak. There is the Jack Warner/Ramesh Maharaj faction and the Kamla Persad-Bissessar faction. Then you have the Panday faction and then you have them “fellas” in the back there. [*Desk thumping*] So there are at least three or four factions in the UNC, they are like crabs in a barrel. They are standing on each other jockeying for position; disorganized, disoriented, they are like drunken men. [*Laughter*]

And that is why when any of them gets up to speak they are totally disoriented, they do not know what they are talking about, they talk on the wrong Bill, they talk about something that happened already, they talk about a debate that went a long time before, and they use prepared notes about some other debate.

Mr. Speaker, I am very—

Mr. Speaker: I think it is an appropriate time to have some refreshing tea. The sitting is suspended for tea and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: You have 14 minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not sure I will use all of it because there is very little to respond to in terms of the contribution made by the Member for St. Augustine, who has run away and really should resign in humiliation. He is a chartered accountant, after all; so I am told.

The Member for St. Augustine, as part of his diatribe, told us that he needs to read out the riot act; that billions and billions of dollars are being spent on projects; that we are jetting all over the world acquiring double chins; living it up; extended stomachs. Clearly, he was thinking about Members on his own side when he was talking about people jetting all over the world and living it up. He could only have been speaking about the Member for Chaguanas West. [*Laughter*] And when he was talking about extended waistlines, he could only have been talking about the Member for Caroni East. [*Laughter*]

But, you know, I really find this is all very tragic. As I said, the information with respect to the expenditure incurred by the Government on special purpose state enterprises in pursuance of their mandate to implement infrastructure projects was all given to the hon. Members opposite in their envelopes as they came to the Parliament today. One of the companies that the Member for St. Augustine was screaming about was the Estate Management and Business Development Company (EMBD). But if you look in the estimates of the Development Programme, Head 701, Infrastructure Development Fund; when you look at the Revised Estimate for fiscal 2008, the figure that appears in the document given to the Member for St. Augustine—documents that he claimed he did not receive—is \$490 million. That \$490 million spent by the Estate Management Company in fiscal 2008 has been spent preparing the 7,000 housing lots that was part of the agreement between the Government and the former Caroni workers, that they would all be given a plot of land—those who did not have houses—to build a house on, at a subsidized rate and that \$490 million has been used for that purpose.

Whereas it has cost the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and it has cost the State \$490 million to prepare these thousands of lots—and this will also include the expenditure on the agricultural parcels; the two-acre plots that the Caroni workers have also benefited from. So they are to be the beneficiaries of a parcel of land for housing purposes and also the beneficiaries of a parcel of land for agricultural purposes as part of the agreement between Caroni (1975) Limited and the workers when Caroni was wound up.

That is what that \$490 million is for. In fact, there is a court ruling which has given the Government a timeframe to complete the lots, both housing and agricultural, if my memory serves me correctly. Justice Deyalsingh had given the Government a particular time frame to complete these lots. That has now been extended because the decision is under appeal. But notwithstanding the fact that the decision is under appeal, the Government is pursuing the directives given to it

by the court to complete these lots for these ex-Caroni workers in the shortest possible time in order to fulfill our commitment to them. That is what this expenditure is for.

But if we were to listen to the Member for St. Augustine, the so-called accountant, this money should not have been allocated to the Estate Management Company. The ex-Caroni workers, some of whom would be supporters of the UNC, should get nothing! Put a zero there, if you listen to the hon. Member for St. Augustine! Put a fat zero in Head 701, Item 18, Item 03, 001: Development of Lands at Caroni and Orange Grove, because as far as the Member for St. Augustine is concerned, spending \$490 million on ex-Caroni workers is wasted expenditure! That is what he is saying! You see, when you do not prepare for a debate, you see how foolish you can appear? Because if we listen to the theme of the argument of the Member for St. Augustine, he was objecting to this expenditure—this \$490 million that is being spent on the ex-Caroni workers, his own supporters! It is a good thing they are not listening to him at all!

As you continue to go through, if you go to, again, Head 701, Head 21, Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment—Social Infrastructure, Item A: Development of Rural Communities, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has spent some \$70 million on the upgrade of community infrastructure in south and southeast Trinidad.

Mr. Warner: Central.

Hon. C. Imbert: It says south and southeast; that is what it says. I am reading from the document. Member for Chaguanas, I am going with what is before me. There is a total of \$70 million spent; \$19 million on urban redevelopment and \$50 million on the upgrade of community infrastructure in south and southeast Trinidad. I think southeast Trinidad is the constituency of Mayaro. I believe that is southeast Trinidad, unless I am wrong.

So if we were to listen to the accountant from St. Augustine, not one cent of that \$49 million should have been spent in the constituency of Mayaro and the Member for Mayaro should get nothing! Not even “jumbie beads” you shall get if we were to listen to the Member for St. Augustine! You should get nothing! Nothing for you because, according to the Member for St. Augustine, this is all wasted expenditure! So we waste money on you! We waste money on upgrading community infrastructure in southeast Trinidad. He might be right. The Member for St. Augustine might have a point. That is true. We might very well have wasted some money on the Member for Mayaro. But we are not like that. True, it

might have been wasted on the Member, but certainly not on the people of Mayaro. It was expenditure well spent on the people of Mayaro.

If we go through the document, we see that money has been spent on improvement to police stations; that money has been spent on a number of national security projects. Would the Member for St. Augustine prefer that we did not spend money on upgrading police stations? Is that what he wants? We have money here for the Judicial and Legal Services Department; we have a north office for the Director of Public Prosecutions. Some \$4.5 million was spent on that. Is he saying that we should give the DPP no money; that the Director of Public Prosecutions should have no accommodation? Is that what the Member for St. Augustine is saying?

We also have within the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, an expenditure of some \$20 million on the establishment of a number of commercial farms. Is he saying no money for farms? Member for Chaguanas West, do you agree with that?

Mr. Warner: No.

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh. I know you are not like that. You are not dotish, so you are not going to oppose expenditure on farms. I mean, come on!

Let us go to the Ministry of Education which has a Revised Estimate of Expenditure of some \$497 million. When I go through I see that they have spent \$48 million on Early Childhood Care and Education; that they have spent money, as I said, on a number of schools. I listed out some of them: St. Mary's Government; there is Tranquility Government; Chatham Government; Palo Seco; Arima West; you have emergency upgrade to a number of primary schools. All of this is in the document. You have secondary schools construction. Some \$390 million has been spent on secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Is the Member saying that we should spend no money on schools? Is that what he is saying?

Let us go to the Ministry of Health. It has a revised estimate of some \$91 million in the documents that were given to the Member for St. Augustine. Money has been spent on hospitals, district health facilities, health centres, and so on. Is he saying that we should not spend money on hospitals? I can go through this document; I can go through all the pages of this document.

The sum of \$18 million has been spent out of the IDF on the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies. Is the UNC saying we should abandon the trade union movement? No money for the Cipriani College of Labour and

Cooperative Studies? Do you agree with that? I mean, if you listen to what the accountant from St. Augustine is saying, that is what he is saying we should do: Do not spend money on the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies! Do not spend money on hospitals! Do not spend money in southeast Trinidad! Do not spend! Do not spend!

I have said it before. How can the hon. Members opposite rationalize the plethora, the barrage, the multitude, the voluminous torrent of letters that I, as Minister of Works and Transport at this point in time, and all the other Members on this side as Ministers with their portfolios at this present time, how can we reconcile the torrent of letters—

Mr. Warner: The multiplicity.

Hon. C. Imbert: The multiplicity of letters that we get from hon. Members opposite requesting attention to roads, drains—

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

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

Question put and agreed to. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: As I was saying, if we were to listen to the accountant from St. Augustine, then we should reject every single letter that we get from every single Member of the Opposition UNC, so that when I, as Minister of Works and Transport, get a letter from the Member for Chaguanas West who asks me to upgrade some road in his constituency, I should reject it because it involves expenditure. When I get letters from all the hon. Members opposite about the dredging of rivers—and I got many of them recently; quite a few—I should reject them because the money is being appropriated into the Infrastructure Development Fund to dredge all of your rivers! But if I listen to your spokesman, he is saying put it into the Heritage and Stabilization Fund.

5.15 p.m.

I think that the Member for Siparia also uttered that foolishness. Do not put the money in the Infrastructure Development Fund; put it in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. The hon. Member for Siparia knows fully that when you put money in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, you cannot spend it. It is there for a rainy day. That is for when there is an oil price shock.

In advocating that we take our surplus revenue and put it in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and not in the Infrastructure Development Fund, then I should return every letter to every Member of the UNC who has asked me to pave a road or dredge a river. Is that what you are telling me to do? Send back your correspondence with a little note saying in accordance with the mandate from the Member for St. Augustine and the Member for Siparia who said that we should not put money in the Infrastructure Development Fund and spend money on development, here is your letter.

Until you change your minds and come to your senses, keep your letters. Do not ask us to build hospitals, health centres, roads, drains, community centres and lights. Nothing for you, if I listen to the foolishness that was presented in this Parliament by the hon. Member for St Augustine. Essentially, that is what he is saying. He said not to put any money in the IDF. Do not put it in there. That is what you are saying. What foolishness, Mr. Speaker!

Mr. Bharath: Put it in your pocket.

Hon. C. Imbert: When the Member for St. Augustine sends me a letter telling me to dredge a river in his constituency, I know what to do. I will send it back because according to the hon. Member, we should not spend money on infrastructural development in this country. That is the sum total of his dissertation here today.

As I go into recreation, we have a project in the Ministry of Tourism, improvement and expansion work to the Emperor Valley Zoo. The little children in Port of Spain, no zoo for them because of the UNC. Do not expand and upgrade the facilities for the animals in the Emperor Valley Zoo because the Member for St. Augustine said so.

Mr. Bharath: They have you to look at every Friday.

Hon. C. Imbert: We will not upgrade the facilities. We will prepare a place for you inside there. If we listen to what you have to say we will prepare a place for you in the zoo. Listening to you, you are saying that we should not upgrade recreational facilities for the little children of Port of Spain and its environs. We will not upgrade the zoo. We will prepare a place for you in the zoo because that is where you belong.

Mr. Manning: With the orang-utans.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes with the orang-utans as the Member for San Fernando East—[*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: You need to elevate your contribution.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am so sorry. That was an insult to the orang-utans. [Laughter] In fact, I apologize to all simians for comparing them to the Member for St. Augustine. I deeply apologize to all members of the ape family. That was an insult to them.

Let us go to Head 701:36, Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, Settlements, Accelerated Housing Programme, the revised estimate of expenditure for fiscal 2008, \$1.1 billion. If we are to listen to the Member for St. Augustine, the HDC should not get a red cent. That is why I say that they are all following Don Quixote tilting at windmills. If we do not put any money into the IDF to construct houses, then do not bother to send your letters to the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment. Keep your letters! If they have no money, they cannot build any houses and they cannot allocate any houses to your constituents. That is the absurdity of the arguments coming from the hon. Member for St. Augustine.

We have \$44 million for WASA. According to the accountant and hon. Member for St. Augustine, WASA should not get a cent. People of this country should not benefit from an improved water supply because the hon. Member has argued that this money should not be here. It should be put it in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Do not put it in the IDF.

Look at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. We have development of industrial sites; port facilities and the construction of a multi fuel pipeline and the construction of a pipeline to Tobago. The people of Tobago must starve, if we listen to the hon. Member for St. Augustine. No pipeline for Tobagonians. No oil and gas must go to Tobago, if we listen to the hon. Member for St. Augustine. Of course, we are not listening to him. That is “dotish” talk! We know it is “dotish” talk.

You cannot have development in this country unless you spend money. Everybody knows that. You cannot create development out of thin air out of M&Ms. You cannot build anything with chocolate sweeties, jumbie beans as we call them or dog rice. Dog rice is not a tradeable currency in Trinidad and Tobago at this time and it will never be. We cannot take that dog rice that the hon. Member for St. Augustine bought for us, trade it on the stock exchange, convert it into currency and use it to build roads and bridges in this country. It cannot be done.

Mr. Manning: I tried to beg for you. “De man eh listening to me.”[Laughter]

Hon. C. Imbert: The sum of \$28 million was spent on the upgrade of infrastructure in southeast Trinidad by the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr. Manning: “Time longer than twine.”

Mr. Bharath: You know that more than anybody.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is not only the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment that spent \$28 million upgrading the infrastructure in southeast Trinidad. It is the Ministry of Local Government as well. I get the impression that we should not spend any money in southeast Trinidad. Do not spend any money.

As we go through this document it is replete with references to projects; expenditure on basic infrastructure; expenditure on sporting facilities; recreational facilities; schools; industrial parks; energy sector projects; national security installations and everything that is required to develop this country to achieve our 2020 vision of becoming a developed country on or before 2020.

Listening to the hon. Members opposite, when they are telling us not to spend money and come with this mythology that the country is in financial difficulty, what they would want the people of this country to remain as is hewers of wood and carriers of water. You want us to ride donkey carts. The vision of the Member for St. Augustine is that people of this country should ride in donkey carts. That was the vision in the past and he wants that to be the vision in the future. The people must ride donkey carts.

You tell your supporters that. Let him tell all his supporters who are driving BMW, Mercedes Benz and expensive cars that because of the money going into the economy and their businesses are prospering, that he would like them to ride in donkey carts because he wants the Government to curtail expenditure; their businesses to go bust and people to be unemployed. That is the inevitable consequence of a cutback in expenditure. Imagine that we have saved almost \$10 billion this year and put it into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and the Infrastructure Development Fund. Can you imagine if they had access to those funds? We would have had 10 Piarcos; 10 projects where the people's money would not have been used for the purpose intended, but would have found its way into foreign accounts. That is what we would have found if they were in charge of the Treasury.

Talk about double chin and living it up. Look behind you. Look around you. Look in the mirror. It is the people on your side who have double chins and are living it up. It is not the people on this side. It is not us.

When I started my contribution, I made the point that you get the impression when the honourable Members opposite are speaking that they are punch drunk like an old boxer; too many blows to the head; they are groggy and swaying on

their feet; they are disoriented and incapacitated. When they speak you get the impression that they have no understanding of economics, accounting, development and have no vision for this country. They want this country to go backwards when you listen to them.

They have not learnt their lessons as yet. The reason the People's National Movement is the Government of this country is that the population, has lost confidence in you. It lost confidence in your squandermania; your propensity to take people's money and use it for improper purposes. That is why we are here and you are there. President Robinson in his wisdom took a look at the landscape. He took one look at the Member for Couva North; another look at the Member for San Fernando East and he had a decision to make. Of course, when he was looking at the Member for Couva North, he was also looking at the Members for Oropouche East and St. Augustine. He was looking at the rogue gallery. He had a decision to make and had to—

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that you should refer to hon. Members opposite as being Members of a rogue gallery.

Hon. C. Imbert: I was doing no such thing and if any offence was created I apologize deeply for seeming to allege that Members opposite were Members of a rogue gallery. I was not talking about them. I was simply saying that when President Robinson took a look at the Member for Couva North; the members he associated with and the rogues' gallery, I was talking about the other persons who are no longer with us. The other Members of the UNC who are no longer with us are the rogues' gallery to which I am referring. They are now before the courts. That rogues' gallery that spends almost every Monday morning on the courthouse steps. If any offence was taken I hope that I have clarified that matter.

When President Robinson took a look at the rogues gallery in the UNC and a look at the hon. Member for San Fernando East, he gave his famous speech about streams flowing into rivers and rivers flowing into seas. He was talking about corruption. Streams flow into rivers; rivers flow into seas. Wisely, as the wise statesman he was, he chose the hon. Member for San Fernando East based on the principle of moral and spiritual values to be the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

That is why I say to the Member for St. Augustine, you are a bright young man with much potential. Do not come and disgrace yourself with that kind of stupidity that I have to listen to this afternoon. Make an argument that makes sense. Let people think that you have a modicum of intelligence. Let people

believe that there is something inside that cabeza. There is something inside there except empty space. Let people believe that you are a young “fella” with much potential. Do not come in this House with this “dotishness” for us please.

Thank you.

5.30 p.m.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] I am fearless in my speech.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third time for fiscal 2008 that the Minister of Finance and the Government, through her, is asking the Parliament to approve further supplementations to the appropriation for the fiscal year 2008. We are also being asked to approve money that has been already spent, in addition to \$41 billion in the budgetary allocation and an additional \$3,490,016,910 earlier this year, which was discussed and now a further \$3.9 billion totalling \$7.39 billion, money that has already been spent. This excludes \$2.4 billion, which they say they will use for infrastructure development funds next year.

It is a shame and a mockery of democracy when we have to come three times to Parliament to look at budgetary allocations and restructuring of the budget. It means that the Government does not know what it is doing and has no vision for the budget for the particular year. We will understand if it comes once for variation of appropriation, but three times and one time a few days before the budget for 2008/2009 is being presented. Nearly \$50 billion has been spent in this year in questionable and widespread corrupt and illegal expenditure in many cases, and that is the record of performance PNM style.

While \$50 billion is being completed to be spent in this fiscal year, nearly 200,000 poor citizens live below the poverty line; people who cannot afford one decent meal per day, and citizens are dying like flies in and out of hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago.

This Government has no conscience and we have witnessed the audacity, arrogance and impertinence displayed in the Finance Committee meeting, not only one meeting, but all the Finance Committee meetings—on Wednesday, January 16, 2008, Monday, May 26, 2008 and the last one, Wednesday, September 17, 2008. It was totally unacceptable, reprehensible and it is getting worse. It is as though the Minister is doing the Opposition a favour by forcing an agenda on us and telling us to accept it when she knows it is wrong. She is unwilling to answer questions and tells us we will hear it in the budget debate and

the budget debate comes and you never hear the answers to the questions. She goes through the meeting faster than the Prime Minister's Bombardier jet.

She took less than 45 minutes per meeting to approve an expenditure of \$7.9 billion, railroading and bulldozing; totally disrespectful. If the Prime Minister can sit here today—he was not at the last meeting—and allow his Minister of Finance to do that, it is a sad day in the democracy of Trinidad and Tobago. People must know how their money is being spent and the Opposition must ask questions.

Let me tell the Minister and the Government something here today. We will not tolerate their disrespect, discourteous and contemptuous behaviour. We deserve and command respect from you and your Government and if you want to disrespect yourself with market behaviour, well go ahead, but we are not tolerating your nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, they on that side will say. Sit down! Shut up! How can we accept that type of behaviour? We are decent human beings and will not sit down and accept that. You disrespect the thousands of citizens in this country who have put us here to defend them. Three hundred and forty-three thousand persons voted against this minority government. They are there by default and the people are fed up and tired of them, even their own supporters after just one year in Parliament. Those who do not learn from the mistakes of the past are condemned to repeat them.

Who is the Member for Diego Martin North/East to tell us about factions in the UNC? Let him look in the mirror. He is lucky that he was not removed; that the Prime Minister had a little bit of thing, but he will be removed shortly. The Prime Minister knows what he is doing. He could not remove Dr. Rowley before the election because he knew that he would have formed his own grouping and contested an election against him. He decided to wait until after the election to remove Dr. Rowley. [*Interruption*]

What faction do you have? The Joan Yuille-Williams faction? Do you remember when she got up in Cabinet and took her bag and walked out? We know your business. When you did what you did to Larry Achong; when you did what you did with your own friend, the ex-mayor of San Fernando; what you did what you did with Ken Valley and Fitzgerald Hinds, you treated them with contempt and discourtesy and they said. To hell with you, go about your business. When you did what you did to Camille Robinson-Regis, Christine Sahadeo. I want you across there to know that politics is temporary and do not put your hat out to hang when you know you cannot retrieve it. Politics is dirty. It comes at a price. Do not sell your souls.

The list is endless, Mr. Speaker, so when the Member for Diego Martin North/East talks about UNC being in shambles, let him look at and talk about his own business. UNC is a strong party. It is 20 years young and has leadership material all around because we have competence and capability in our party and everybody shines.

I want the hon. Minister to know that she should not be throwing any more tantrums and infantile gesticulations. She must know that she is just the Prime Minister's flavour of the month and when she treats us with contempt and tells us she will give us the information—

Hon Member: That is not necessary.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: You all are rude and you must be dealt with in a manner so that you understand that you are rude and stop that rudeness. If you do not stop it, we will give you back. If it is war you want, it is war you will get.

This is what they provided for us today. [*Holds up envelope*] When we asked for it on Wednesday; when we asked how they would spend the \$3.9 billion, we were treated with discourtesy. We were told that they would send it. It was brought to us today, presented on the desk so that when we come here we would have to go through it.

That is what the Member for Diego Martin East is trying to tell us; that we must accept that nonsense from them. Let me tell them that 200,000 persons voted for us and those who are looking on will understand that they are presenting something for us to swallow right before the debate. It is wrong. It is morally wrong and it is reprehensible and disgusting behaviour.

Hon. Member: You have to withdraw that.

Ms. Le Gendre: You really have to withdraw that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am withdrawing nothing.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am a cool person, but-

Hon. Members: No! No!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Let me tell you something. The Speaker knows my profession is medicine. I look at patients on a daily basis. I am a cool person. I save lives by the grace of God. I am in a Parliament where you are becoming disgusting and you must not encourage that, Prime Minister. You must do your part. When you go to Cabinet speak to your colleagues.

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member for Caroni East for giving way. In the cut and thrust of Parliament, there are times we say things we do not really intend to say and, upon sober reflection, we come to the conclusion that perhaps we ought not to say them.

I expect a certain standard from the very distinguished Member for Caroni East and I suggest, in the spirit of the Parliament, whatever may have transpired on both sides, that he withdraw the remark. He knows that we find it a little off the line. I recommend it.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I understand and appreciate what the Prime Minister is trying to say, but he must understand that we are hurting when remarks are thrown at us and they say: Shut up! Sit down! You must do something on your side and we will do something on our side. Last week you were here. [*Interruption*]

We will go ahead now. I think the message was given. If I have said anything to hurt any particular person, I withdraw those comments. It was not meant for any particular person. In the spirit of parliamentary debate, we must not be less than anybody else. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Prime Minister, I know you will do your duty to put order back into the minds of your colleagues. When you have to tolerate what Minister Imbert says and his behaviour, it arouses your emotion to the highest so that you feel that you should respond to him immediately.

Mr. Prime Minister, the people in Trinidad and Tobago look at television and listen to the radio. If the Minister feels that by insulting people, he is doing something good, he is fundamentally wrong; he must analyze himself. There are many things we can say, but decency must prevail. That is what the Speaker tries to do and I am happy that you are here to ensure that goes on.

We believe that there has been widespread corruption in this expenditure of \$50 billion and the population is confronted by an amazingly frightening peril; confronted by an alarming feeling of disheartened impotence. The people in Trinidad and Tobago feel impotent to respond to what is happening. They are watching Prime Minister Manning governing irrational and trusted devotion with discriminatory and divisive societal lines. This is no longer acceptable.

The Minister of Finance is duty bound to protect the financial interests of the people and not to serve the personal agenda of anyone whose desires may be to see that his cronies fill their pockets at the expense of a decent life for the poor people.

Do not be busy surveying particular agents, forgetting your real master, the people who have been put you in office. Every one has high hopes when he or she is appointed, but do not disappoint the people. They are talking. This Government has created lawless behaviour; carefully crafted, engineered, molded and manipulated by PNM over decades and you are asking today for approval of \$3.9 billion, already spent in corrupt special purpose companies. Your PNM friends, families and cronies are laughing all the way to the bank; widespread nepotism, cronyism and corruption exists in all these 15 special purpose companies and many of the state enterprises and statutory board and authorities: 105 of them.

5.45 p.m.

You have spent almost \$40 billion over the last seven years in the state enterprises and special purpose companies, UDeCott, UTT, EMBDC, eTecK, NEDCO, Educational Facilities Management Company Limited, NEC and NGC. You have spent \$22 billion in transfers and subsidies and \$18 billion in off-the-balance sheet accounting, with guaranteed loans for your boys to enjoy and poor people to starve. There is all this spending, but there is anger on the roads, deaths and carnage on the roads and miles of traffic jam everywhere.

Inflation is close to 12 per cent. There is a 200 per cent increase in the price of food just over a period of two or three years. Two hundred thousand workers are working for less than \$3,000 per month and they cannot survive on that; 200,000 below the poverty line, which they say is 17 per cent. Seventeen per cent of a population of 1.3 million is almost one-sixth and, therefore, that is more than 200,000 persons who have to live with less than \$655 per month and another 200,000 working for salaries less than \$3,000 per month. So, 400,000 persons are almost starving in this country. That is one out of every three people. This Government is spending \$50 billion; a record spending in 2007/2008 fiscal year. No more! This is the PNM that cares. Every time a Minister gets up. "Do you not know that we care? We are a Government that cares." Up till two days ago, 321 persons were murdered. There have been 20,000 serious crimes for the year and 175 kidnappings for ransom under their regime. This is a Government that cares.

Fifty billion dollars, while hospitals are in stench. Patients are dying on the floors, defecating on floors and bodies are rotting in the mortuaries of public hospitals. Patients are lying on trolleys for 48 hours and 72 hours without being attended by anyone. Pregnant mothers in labour are on benches, rats and roaches are in the kitchens, but this is a PNM Government that cares. They care for their friends and families pockets.

I had the opportunity to visit the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex Emergency Department on Saturday, because one of my patient's relatives told me that they were there for five hours and was not being seen. The patient had renal failure. The mess I saw when I went to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex Emergency Department, made me feel like vomiting, just at what the patients were doing on floors. The patients were defecating right there. There were patients with renal failure almost dying on trolleys for 48 hours. There was a 25-year-old man with Hutchins Lymphoma who was getting IV infusion drip while sitting on a chair. There was a guy who had a heart attack who had the drips on his hand sitting on a chair. How painful it is! I feel the pain as a doctor. If I have to do that in my life and see people—Mr. Prime Minister, and Members of this Government, you ought to be ashamed of how the health sector has gone down under your regime for seven years. What a shame and disgrace.

In another country, you could not stand before the people any longer. What do you want the sum of \$3.9 billion for; for what infrastructure development project? Have you given an account of your stewardship and your accomplishment? You had \$5.57 billion in the Infrastructure Development Fund for expenditure this year.

Hear what PricewaterhouseCoopers said. The Minister wants to say. "We must not do this. If you ask to do this we should not do this?" Hear the record of performance of this Government by PricewaterhouseCoopers. This is their 2008 budget memorandum. Listen to them in their 2007 budget deliverables.

- Macroeconomic factors under the different Ministries: agriculture; culture; education and training; energy; health; housing; national security; public utilities; social development; sport; tourism; trade and industry; works and transport; and Tobago projects. There were 117 projects in summary.

Do you know how much have been completed? Twenty-seven out of 117. Less than 25 per cent of the projects under this Government have been completed in 2007. What a national disgrace. One out of every four of the projects and that is vision 2020. That is development and a Government that cares. That is 33 per cent; one out of three of these projects have not started. I wonder if this Government—when they sit in Cabinet and the Prime Minister looks at his Ministers and asks them what have they accomplished, does he understand that one out of every three of the projects that were contemplated at the beginning of the year has not even been started and only one out of every four projects have been completed from 117 projects?

I would give you some examples of it.

- Agriculture—the provision of funding, manpower, equipment and adequate logistical support for the establishment of a praedial larceny police unit, not started.
- Education and training—establish a quality assurance unit to ensure schools meet standard of accountability, efficiency and performance, not started.
- Purchase 800 additional sixth form places from private secondary schools in addition to 500 bought each year, not started.
- Commence construction of two advanced level colleges, not started.

The list is almost long. It is almost 10 pages. PricewaterhouseCoopers did it; not the UNC or the Opposition. This is an independent accounting body with management, auditing, and financial skills.

In education and training there is more.

- Health—construction of Sangre Grande enhanced health centre, not started.
- Construction of the Point Fortin Hospital which was promised early as 2002. Larry Achong promised them that it must be built. Six years later and it is not built.
- Construction of Scarborough Hospital.

Hon. Prime Minister, sit and listen. The sum of \$100 million was already spent and they have to now renovate an already started hospital; a hospital that is not completed. Only the foundation is built. They expect it to cost \$500 million and should have cost \$120 million.

- Construction of a new wing at San Fernando Hospital, not started.
- Construction of the National Health Laboratory, not started.
- Initiate the Port of Spain General Hospital Replacement Facility, not started.

The list goes on.

- National Security—acquisition of six patrol boats, not done.
- Acquisition of four interceptors for both inshore and offshore operations, not done.

Mr. Manning: You are not correct.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Acquisition of four armed helicopters—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: In respect of the OPVs of which he has spoken, all has been ordered with clear delivery dates. I can give you the delivery dates if you wish. The first is due by September 2009. Then there would be one February 2010 and a third in October 2010, under construction right now.

With respect to the fast patrol boats, we should get two in October 2009, and four in February 2010. In fact, the way it is looking, we might get all six in October 2009. What the Member for Caroni East is saying is just not correct.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: This is PricewaterhouseCoopers auditor's report and I am indicating what they have put it in the category of not completed. I am giving you the information from it.

Even though the Prime Minister says that these are being ordered, do you know what is the problem there? The country does not know where these tenders went. We understand there was mass discrepancy in their tendering procedures. We understand and I do not know the final value of the OPVs and the armed helicopters. They are millions of dollars, some exceeding billions. What is the use, when we are spending exorbitant billions of dollars on armed helicopters and offshore patrol vessels when we cannot deal with crime on land? You have \$61 million for radar put away in a building and you cannot do the coastlines of Trinidad and Tobago. Guns and drugs are coming in by the thousands and thousands and are used in the commission of crime.

- Trade and industry—create a financial park to house local and international financial centre, not done.

There are so many more. The fact is—

- Dualling of the Diego Martin highway from Victoria Garden Acton Courts, not done.

There is the rapid rail. One out of every three of the 117 projects is not completed. If the Prime Minister wants to say that one or two are in progress, it is 117 projects.

Mr. Manning: Because the way he is making these statements, it is giving an impression that is not correct. The rapid rail project is well under way. There are three phases to it. Phase one is well under way and we expect the entire rapid rail system to be in place by 2013. All these things were already said. I am urging the Member for Caroni East, not to give an impression that is not correct.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Even the rapid rail; was it a stealth rapid rail? We do not know. The people of Trinidad and Tobago do not know about the rapid rail or who tendered for it. The people are ignorant of the facts and information of this. How much will it cost? Which company got it? What are the phases of development? You have not consulted the population on anything and you have just decided to railroad the population and say you want a rapid rail and bring a rapid rail and decide to go through for tendering. Who you are giving it to? It stinks. It is really bad. The rapid rail and the water thing from south coming to north; all these things are drowning with corruption.

The Prime Minister predicated the 2008 budget on oil and gas price assumption of US \$50 per barrel for oil, compared with an average realized price of US \$61.57 in 2007 and gas price of US \$3.55 per million British thermal unit. Based on the assumption of US \$50 per barrel for oil and natural gas of US \$3.55, the Government forecasted a budget of \$4.381 billion comprising energy sector revenue of \$15.363 billion and non-energy tax collection of \$18.654 billion.

We are very happy as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that the windfall has come for us and that we are able to enjoy the benefits of the increased price of oil and gas, but that does not mean to say that because we enjoy the increase in price that we must fritter it away. This was the point that my colleague from St. Augustine, Mr. Bharath, was making.

Prudence demands that Government ensures that money be put in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. I want to ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he said that \$5 billion would be put in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. The calculation is that 60 per cent of the excess revenue must go, how does he know what the value of the United States dollar is; the average price of a barrel of oil, to allow him to calculate that \$500 million will be put in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund? *[Interruption]* You will get your chance to explain. We would like to have an explanation. We had oil prices as high as US \$147 per barrel on July 11 of this year and gas at US \$7 per million BTU on Wednesday, September 17, 2008, which was even less than half the all-time peak which peaked at nearly US \$14 per million BTU.

6.00 p.m.

How much money has the Government received or earned in excess of the budgeted figure? I believe you can give the population that answer. He said that approximately \$5 billion would be put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Is that a definite figure or is that amount going to be varied? Perhaps this

Government has met the guidelines for the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund by putting 60 per cent of the excess revenue in the fund. My colleague, the Member of Parliament for Siparia asked why the Government has not deposited all the money into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, because it is an investment fund. Why not save all? You said that you wanted to keep some and spend it next year—

Mr. Manning: There is a law.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, we know that there is a law that you cannot take it out once it is deposited there, but put more money in. There is an income you can derive from the savings.

Mr. Manning: We are complying with the law.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Why are you not trying to neutralize and sterilize the excess revenue? If you have \$2.4 million to spend then you are not neutralizing and sterilizing the excess revenue. You have \$3.9 billion more which you could have used differently.

You know that government's aggregate demand contributes to about 30 per cent to the demand. It is the largest contributor of demand in the country's economy. Are you aware that by virtue of spending this \$3.9 billion that you are going to be putting pressure on inflation; pressure on poor people; pressure on the economy; and pressure on the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? We want the hon. Minister of Finance to prove to us that the fiscal multiplier is zero. The Minister understands that. The Minister understands what is the fiscal multiplier; once the Government is spending, there is no impact on the rest of the economy and on inflation, but that is not so. You would have to prove to us why you are not sterilizing that money in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

This is the first time in at least 80 years we have seen a debacle of this astronomic proportion in the financial sector worldwide. In 1929, practically all commercial banks collapsed. Now, most of the investment banks are now collapsing in the United States of America. My colleague, the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, gave the names of all the banks. If these investment banks are collapsing—they are the ones who put the money out for investors so, therefore, businesses will not grow and the economy will stagnate and fall. If businesses cannot raise capital, the economy will fall.

At the moment, Asia is very concerned about the economy of the United States of America. The bankers for businesses, Merrill Lynch and Lehman Brothers, everyone knows that they raise money for multinational corporations

around the world. So, the Asian economy is feeling the pinch of this as well, and there is significant slow down for investment in the economy. The Asian economy is buttressed by the American economy. In fact, recently, we understand that the Asian economy lent the United States of America one trillion dollars.

We want to ask the Minister and the Government. Are they not concerned that we are in a period of world economic slow down which must inevitably affect us? They have predicted that it is going to be a two-year slow down in the first instance. In fact, the chief economists of the Asian Development Bank are saying that the Asian economy will slowdown by about 6 per cent and the Asian economy has the capacity to buy supplies and commodities. Trinidad exports a lot of commodities like methanol, urea and so on, so we should take some degree of evasive action, because the prices of natural commodities will fall and the demand for these commodities will fall.

Mr. Speaker, if we have a Government and a Minister of Finance who seem to be impervious to what is exploding around her and the Government—they seem to be resistant to the thought that we have oil and gas and nothing could happen to us—the people of Trinidad and Tobago will suffer as a result of their incompetence and financial inability to deal with the situation.

Inevitably, there is going to be volatility, and there is volatility now in the commodity markets. That means that the country should start to reorganize itself so that the overflows that we are receiving now will help us through the next few years that we have to go through. We know that oil has a price effect on the economy, but gas has an output effect. We cannot be complacent because the Ryder Scott Report has told us many things.

Mr. Speaker, the 15 special purpose companies which were established in 2004, a procurement regime was promised by the hon. Prime Minister and today, four years later, the 15 special purpose companies are operating without a procurement regime and, therefore, the whole tendering processes and the bidding processes have left much to be desired. As a result, we are seeing widespread corruption in these 15 special purpose companies.

Mr. Speaker, in these special purpose companies and state enterprises, we have evidence and ample proof that they have funded a number of things in their political party. Last Friday, this disgraceful exhibition outside Woodford Square was a really sad day for the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Jerry Narace, the Minister of Health, was looking into our eyes and denying any planned mass event and swearing blindly that it was a spontaneous

response from PNM supporters who were angry that their leader was under attack and they come to say: “I is for meh man, Manning.” No offence meant, Prime Minister. That is what the people said. But mobilizing was taking place one month before with jerseys, flags, banners and expensive structures for Woodford Square. What is worse are your constitutionally, violating, discriminating and bullying tactics—Mugabe type of dictatorship—which forced people under threat of their jobs, subject to the worst form of humiliation. Prime Minister, Mr. Manning and Jerry the dreamer, wielded the whip threatening their jobs. Prime Minister, Massa day come back! They could not even muster a crowd of 2,000 people with all their bullying. [Laughter] They are living in a fantasy world, but everyone else is living in a realization of PNM drudgery and sycophants. [Laughter]

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Stop reading your contribution. You should not be reading you contribution.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We are living under slave-like conditions with no benefits. Everyone saw that it was slavery once more of the country’s vulnerable. Mr. Speaker, this sham of display is a testament of the confidence in the people who put their faith in you, and this is how you have treated them. This is when government has lost its sense, shame and conscience. They cannot lose what they never had.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Stop reading!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I have to read this. It is the same Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace who, according to the *Express* dated Sunday May 08, 2005 by Camini Maharaj said.

“A government minister, attempting to dissuade this newspaper from pursuing its own investigation into bribery allegations against two of his colleagues.”

The article was headlined: “PNM protects its own” He said:

“I tell you just relax with Matthew. The party will help any party member.”

These were his words. Do you remember Matthew Pierre? It continues:

“We have had people who have had their things thrown out...There’s a benefit for being a member of a party.”

That is the man who organized the thing outside in Woodford Square. The same Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace, telling Dansam Dhansook that the party is going to look after him. “Do not be worried, just talk to Matthew Pierre.” The party will do this and the party will do that—obstructing the course of justice, but there is one law for the UNC and one law for the PNM.

The same Minister deliberately weaved himself into a sterilized cocoon of self-denial and said that there was no dengue epidemic when the figures for 2002 showed that there were 478 cases, and anything beyond the expected value is an epidemic. Presently, there are over 1,447 reported cases of dengue in Trinidad and Tobago. Four deaths have occurred as a result of it. It is no longer an increase, it is no longer an outbreak; it is no longer an epidemic, but it is endemic in the population, and you have a Prime Minister sitting and not doing anything about his Minister of Health. *[Interruption]* I am just speaking the facts. *[Interruption]*

You have our people in precarious livelihood, and a people tethered and beholding to the emperor Manning. Massa says to come otherwise we will fire you from your job if you do not come. How much of the \$3.9 billion or the \$7.9 billion that they have asked for is going to help the thousands of poor people who are frightened to death of dying from dengue in all the hospitals and institutions in Trinidad and Tobago? The institutions are filled to capacity, but what is he doing?

The Minister talked about giving \$6 million to eradicate mosquitoes the *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, when you are spending \$50 billion. He makes it a big deal that he is spending \$6 million, and half of the things that they have purchased are not working and people are dying like flies. What are they doing?

To cover up their deficiencies and inefficiencies, they want to advertise. Do you know how much money they have spent on advertisements? The Government's advertising media expenditure cost for January—December 2007, a variation to Appendix B of the reply to the House of Representatives question No. 59 of the 2007/2008 session of Parliament is \$73,871,850 of advertising cost. They feel that they can fool the people and that is the one of the first signs of dictatorship. That is what Hitler did with information and he tried to bombard the population with false and misleading information.

They have spent millions of dollars on the MORI poll, but why are they afraid to say what the MORI poll is saying? The MORI poll is saying that your approval rating is dropping, but you are not telling the people that. You know that the approval rate of your performance is dropping.

6.15 p.m.

I come now to a critical juncture in my contribution of this Supplementary Appropriation, 2008.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you proceed further. Before I move the Motion to extend the Member's speaking time, the Member had raised earlier on

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. SPEAKER]

Friday, September 19, 2008

in his contribution, he alleged that certain Members opposite would tell Members opposite them "to shut up and to sit down". I am ruling that the words "shut up" in Parliament are unparliamentary. In terms of telling a Member "sit down" in the context in which it is uttered, may not be unparliamentary, but I think to tell a Member contributing to "shut up" is in fact very unparliamentary. So, I would appeal to Members not to tell your colleagues to "shut up" certainly when they are on their legs.

Again, hon. Members, let me appeal to those of you who are yet to achieve developed parliamentary status in terms of your contribution, try to emulate those of your colleagues who have reached there. There are examples on both sides of the House, which you can follow. Members, I am appealing to you to try to elevate the content of your contribution.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker; thank you very much, hon. Prime Minister, for affording me the opportunity to go another few minutes again. Mr. Speaker, I said I was coming to a very important part in this debate in terms of the supplementary appropriation.

I want to draw to the attention of this national community and the Parliament, a serious state of affairs that is existing at the moment. When I asked the question, which is recorded on page 13 of the Finance Committee Minutes, the fifth paragraph and I quote:

“The Member for Caroni East sought information on whether the University of Trinidad and Tobago was operating cardiovascular and diabetic services in conjunction with Johns Hopkins University; whether they were treating patients and if so, who were the doctors involved.

The Chairman promised to answer in time for the debate.”

We never got the answer for that, Mr. Speaker, but I want to give the answer today, because they knew the answer but they refused to give the answer because the answer will cause problems for them. They did not produce the answer, because they smelt the rat.

“Without any national or international tendering Johns Hopkins was awarded a contract for four years to provide training of technicians and CAT lab nurses and physicians related to the cardiac catheterization laboratory operations at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.”

I want to repeat that:

"Without any national or international tendering Johns Hopkins was awarded a contract for four years to provide training ..."

This Cardiovascular Services Initiatives (CSI) was proposed in January 2007. The Minister knows the answer but refuses to give it. Four years of involvement of Johns Hopkins, there was no advertisement, no tendering and no bidding for this contract, just a direct award. By whom?

You know what is the cost of this contract? The total cost of this programme is US \$41.8 million, TT \$263.3 million, of training one week per month for 48 months, so therefore 48 weeks. Johns Hopkins is providing one international cardiologist, so it is costing TT \$5.5 million per week for training nurse technicians and other technicians for two months. The training as outlined, I have the information here. This is voluminous information that has come into my mailbox, endless corruption.

It tells you that the training of 24 CAT lab nurses and technicians for two months, that is two weeks; diagnostic cardio catheterization, 10 people for two weeks; advance and complex interventional techniques, 10 people for two weeks; electrophysiology nurses and technicians, 24 people for two weeks; permanent pacemakers to doctors, 10 doctors for two weeks.

So, 130 people being trained, some who will be trained once or twice, for two weeks, costing the Government \$260 million, \$2 million per trainee for two weeks. It is not the university, it is the marketing arm of Johns Hopkins University, which is trying to go around the world to market their skills. Here it is Trinidad and Tobago Government, University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), Ken Julien, went into an arrangement with Johns Hopkins for TT \$260 million without any tendering, without any bidding and without any advertisement locally or internationally.

They are also charging the people of Trinidad and Tobago for an annual cardiology symposium, which our professionals conduct almost twice per year free. In addition, our professionals host Caribbean cardiology symposium free. Johns Hopkins is charging our people for these symposia. They are extorting payment from our poor people for an American Heart Association approved basic and advanced cardiac life support programme.

For the last 20 years, my colleagues know that there has been a basic and advanced troller life support programme being taught at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex for the last 20 years free to people. We have at least five interventional cardiologists in Trinidad who will be willing to train people free. We have people who are training ultrasonographers at minimal cost. We have cardiac specialists in certain pacemakers. We have training centres for sonography training scores of technicians, but the UTT and Ken Julien have decided to go unilaterally and spend \$260 million of taxpayers' money without any transparency, any type of advertisement and tendering whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, that should put people in jail and people should go to jail for that. You know what Johns Hopkins is demanding? That the CAT lab be in full operating order. Who is responsible for that? We are. It is a \$25 million CAT lab, two labs. All equipment must be functioning, calibrated and maintained; staffing and administration of the labs to be provided by the management services provider, who will be responsible for nursing staff, medical supplies and office supplies.

So, they are just coming down, everything must be there for them, and just say they are training people for one week; 130 people over a period for four years at \$260 million. To train one technician it is \$2 million for a two-week programme. What a shame and national disgrace! Johns Hopkins requested the help of the Ministry to resolve the outstanding financial issues between ACI and the North Central Regional Health Authority, but ACI just has a memorandum of agreement signed with the acting CEO of the North Central Regional Health Authority and ACI.

This agreement is just a memorandum of agreement, not a contract. This agreement is made as of this 25th day of October 2007, and between Advance Cardiovascular Institute Limited, a limited liability company, whose registered office is situated at 7 Fitzblackman Drive, Woodbrook in the island of Trinidad, and North Central Regional Health Authority, limited liability company, whose registered office is situated at Building 39, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

“NCRHA and ACI hereto agree as follows with regard to the provision of services related to the management and operation of two catheterization laboratories at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and ACI obligations to form a new company which shall be wholly owned subsidiary of ACI;”

Not done.

“through its management company to enter into a three-year contract with NCRHA based upon the terms of this agreement and in accordance with clause 75 of the agreement.”

So, if the Government wants to see this, this is a memorandum of agreement, not even a contract, not advertised, no bidding, and no tendering for this ACI management of CAT lab at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. It is \$25 million in a CAT lab and no advertisement for it. What is more important, the same ACI is now being asked by Johns Hopkins University to be the management partner in it, but they know that there is a problem between ACI and the NCRHA, because they know that there was no contract and they are operating that for months now, making millions of dollars for themselves at the expense of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The \$25 million CAT lab was opened on October 30, 2007. Do we understand? Seven days before the general election of November 07, 2007. Why the rush? Was somebody rushing to get it done because they knew that they were not going to be in Parliament and not going to be in Government? Somebody has to go to jail!

A memorandum of agreement, not a contract, to use \$25 million CAT lab, but ACI is now charging the public patients for using the facilities which the public own, and they are charging private patients coming into the CAT lab and asking the Regional Health Authority to provide the materials and supplies and they are making their profits and taking it outside. Who was responsible for that memorandum of agreement? Two issues here this evening, the ACI and the Government, the Ministry of Health or the NCRHA, not with any contract, making millions and \$260 million given by Ken Julien and UTT to Johns Hopkins marketing arm of the university.

Mr. Speaker, ACI is charging the Government for supplies, and you know a little stint, like a match head, that goes into the heart vessels cost as much as \$20,000; pacemakers, \$17,000 with no audit of the use, while the same ACI is using similar cardiac supplies at West Shore Medical. You see why I had to read because I had to be certain about what I was saying. The same company that running up at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex have their own private thing at West Shore Medical, and no audit being done on the supplies.

If they could take supplies from Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, do their private cases down at West Shore—You know how much to put in one stint in a patient? It is \$70,000. You know how much to put in two stints in a patient? It is \$140,000. You could imagine what is going on, Mr. Speaker? So, when you feel emotional about this and when my colleague tells you that there is so much massive corruption, who is the PNM to talk about it? I have always said the PNM invented corruption; they masterminded corruption and they perfected corruption. [*Desk thumping*] These are two glaring examples of it.

Mr. Speaker, this memorandum of agreement with ACI, what can be worse? The same management company partnering with Johns Hopkins for the training and the same personnel from ACI, an incestuous relationship of two companies using the CAT labs without any open tendering, just a gift. Who is managing the Cardiac Intervention Initiative Programme? UTT and Ken Julien, not the ministry, not the University of the West Indies, not the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, not the North Central Regional Health Authority. They are being told what they have to do, because they cannot do anything, they just have to provide what they are being asked.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I asked question No. 103. Have there been audits done in UTT?

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education said they do internal audits. But she could not give the answer as to when these audits were done and from what years.

6.30 p.m.

Ms. Kangaloo: I gave when they were completed.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: But the Minister said:

“UTT is therefore not a body whose accounts are required to be audited or examined or enquired into in accordance with the Constitution or Exchequer and Audit Act by the Auditor General.”

It is in the *Hansard*.

“UTT is therefore not a body whose accounts are required to be audited or examined or enquired into in accordance with the Constitution or Exchequer and Audit Act by the Auditor General.”

Therefore, on September 05, 2008 no audit was done by the Auditor General and as a result the Opposition UNC took the liberty of writing the Auditor General, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Commissioner of Police on this matter and we have gotten a response from the Auditor General indicating that she has received our correspondence and she has noted it and will be doing something about it.

So why is it that these special purpose companies are outside of the ambit of the Auditor General? The Exchequer and Audit Act enables the Auditor General to go in, but she would not go in just like that. It has been brought to her attention now and she will be going in. So why has there been no audit of these 15 special

purpose companies who have spent almost \$40 billion of our money? Why has there been no audit? And they want to talk about internal audit. UTT has never had an external audit.

On September 05, 2008; in response to a question on UTT, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education said that two campuses had been constructed at O'Meara and Chaguaramas. O'Meara, \$150,509,741; Chaguaramas, \$101,997,390; and the construction of the main campus of the UTT at Tamana, InTech Park, Wallerfield, at an estimated cost of \$1,145,004,000 which was supposed to cost \$600 million originally; \$400 million more just on the Tamana, InTech Park.

Ms. Kangaloo: Where did you get that from? That is wrong.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: That is wrong? That is your answer you gave in Parliament.

Ms. Kangaloo: I gave that answer?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: That is the answer in Parliament. It is in the *Hansard*.

Ms. Kangaloo: I did not give that information, you add in some nonsense.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All right, you have a chance to revert it. Mr. Speaker, this is recorded in the *Hansard*. I have just quoted you. I took it from the *Hansard*. [Interruption]

In addition, \$1,162,838 was spent in 2006 by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, most of which went to UTT. In 2007, \$1,654,563 spent by the Ministry, most going to UTT. When I said in this Parliament a few weeks ago that the very respected Chief Executive Officer of bpTT, Mr. Robert Riley went to the Prime Minister and offered his resignation from the UTT board because of serious questions and concerns of non-accountability of expenditure in UTT, the Prime Minister got up here and said: "This was not so." I want to say categorically here this evening; that the Prime Minister was furthest from the truth when he said that that evening. Furthest from the truth! He misled this House, and as a God-fearing man he knows the truth.

[*Hon. Colm Imbert stands*]

Mr. Speaker: No need to do that. [*Inaudible*] What you can do is bring a substantive motion concerning the matter. So, to accuse a Member of misleading the House is also unparliamentary, but you can in fact bring a substantive motion.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that guidance which I believe we will have to entertain in discussions with my

parliamentary caucus. [*Interruption*] I believe, based on what I know, the Prime Minister should apologize to this House, and I know that he will have to apologize to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I know for a fact that what he said here that evening was the untruth and I say it from my heart. I could take a lie detector test now and tell you that what the Prime Minister said was the untruth, and you cannot take a Prime Minister when a CEO, Robert Riley went to him and told him, I want to resign because there is massive corruption in UTT and I am not in agreement with what is going. He said: "Do not bother with that." He is shielding his friends; he is shielding the Ken Juliens'; sacred cows, cash cows on two legs, not on four legs—Calder Hart, Uthara Rao, Ken Julien and Harry Ragoonanan. I am not afraid to call names in the Parliament and I will say it outside.

Hon. Member: Good, go and say it outside.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Ray Brathwaite with SWMCOL and CEPEP.

Ms. Kangaloo: Go and say it outside.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: SWMCOL has one auditor and he is a private guy who rented the government building for them for \$4 million and he is on the board of Petrotrin, and without any Ministry of National Security entering the building. Same auditor for SWMCOL; the same auditor for CEPEP, and there are 400 contractors in CEPEP, and it came to light in this Parliament and this country that almost \$1.2 billion was spent and there are almost 400 contractors. Where they came from? Who gave them the contracts? What money are they getting?

No tendering whatsoever, but they give their friends and their families and their cronies so that they could go out in Woodford Square and try and prevent us from entering Parliament. Jack was accosted; Vasant was accosted; I was accosted—

Mr. Speaker: Address the Members properly.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Sorry. The Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East; the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine and the Member of Parliament for Caroni East were accosted and attacked in the precincts of Parliament. This is why our Chief Whip said that he is going to bring a Motion on this matter shortly.

Mr. Speaker: I would like you to clarify that. The precincts of Parliament as you know is the Parliament building and just the curtilage around the Parliament. It does not extend to Abercromby Street nor further east into the pavement abutting Woodford Square. So if you are saying that Members of Parliament were accosted in the precincts of the Parliament, you should let me know that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was in the driveway right here coming out which is in the precinct. *[Interruption]* It was in the driveway, and I had to be pulled away by Deputy Commissioner Reyes.

Mr. Imbert: Not true.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Not true? The newspaper had it. Mr. Speaker, the newspaper had the photograph. *[Interruption]* I want to ask who is protecting their boys. You know, Prime Ministers have had to resign for that. There was the Israeli Prime Minister having to resign on an issue of \$150,000; but the billions of dollars in corruption here which the Prime Minister is presiding over—he thinks he is lord and master—

Giselle Marfleet, resigned from the board of directors of UTT because of the same thing that Robert Riley said to the Prime Minister. She has resigned.

Mr. Imbert: Not true.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Prime Minister is presiding over a massive corruption with \$263 million at UTT with Johns Hopkins, which is not the university but the marketing arm of the university.

Mr. Speaker, on that issue also, the Prime Minister should resign. He is protecting his friends—the czar, Ken Julien—another Calder Hart—larger than life. What is the UTT doing in the business of medicine? That is a business for the University of the West Indies and the Regional Health Authorities. *[Interruption]* I know that you all will find difficulty in that, but here it is, UTT was supposed to be designed so that— We have no difficulty with a second university in this population; we agree with it, but if you want to do engineering, para-engineering work and associate degrees, we welcome that, but you are going into something just to make money.

I was reminded of the *Sunday Express* of December 03, 2006: “UTT’s global handouts”, and around the world you see that the UTT global handouts: “\$21 million Cambridge University”—five year deal; “US \$60 million Johns Hopkins University life of contract; US \$18.7 million University of Texas, 2004; US \$2.7 million Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2004; US \$3 million South Hampton Institute, and WASA, Maritime Centre, US \$3 million Aachen University, Germany.”

All around the world Ken Julien has spread his tentacles of widespread corruption; a tangling web of corruption surrounding UTT, and the Prime Minister is presiding over it because his friend is there; \$104 million of deals worldwide and questions to Ministers unanswered and anticorruption chief Virgil prevented from investigating.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 19, 2008

The Prime Minister makes a big statement: "UTT to partner with Johns Hopkins" on Monday, December 11, 2006. What a quagmire of corruption! I have so many articles, I can pass them on to my colleagues. Mr. Speaker, a letter was written about this to the Minister of Health about six months ago—Minister Jerry Narace—telling him about the corruption. We have the letter here; I will give him a copy of it; he knows what was written to him and he hid it from the Prime Minister. The former Minister John Rahael is part of this as well. [*Interruption*]

We call upon the Prime Minister to fire the Minister of Health Jerry Narace now! We call upon him because he is part of this corruption; he knows about it. This letter was sent to him six months ago and he has been trying to hide it, and he is your greatest liability. No pun intended. Jerry Narace is now your greatest "liar-bility". [*Laughter*] I have not even gone into the \$20 billion programme with the diabetic issue.

Any Prime Minister worth his salt should not be afraid to take action; any valid action against non-performing Ministers and senior technocrats. A report in the *International Herald Tribune* published on July 03, 2008 talks about the South Korean President firing three Cabinet Ministers, and that report says that:

"President Lee Myung-Bak of South Korea dismissed three Ministers on Monday in a Cabinet reshuffle aimed at restoring public trust in his four-month-old Government which has been shaken by weeks of protest."

Do you think this Prime Minister will do that?

"The agriculture, health and education Ministers who were replaced have been under fire as South Koreans rallied almost daily to protest the Government's decision in April to lift the ban on beef imported from the United States."

You heard that they fired the agriculture minister, the health minister and the education minister, and if this Prime Minister is worth his salt he would have the intestinal and testicular fortitude to do the same, especially, when it comes to your health Minister. In all the sectors you have failed this country. Nothing is more tragic and unforgivable than your handling of this health sector.

Yes, it is your handling of the health sector, Mr. Prime Minister, because you are directly responsible for the appointments of all your Ministers, and therefore, their performance. Seven years, three health Ministers, each one taking two years to learn the job, and the sad thing is you could have been forgiven for moving Minister Imbert and Minister Rahael, but the fact that you have no intention moving the current Minister is testimony to your failure as a leader and the Prime Minister.

A true leader would have unashamedly apologized for his bad choice to the country and fired that worthless Minister, but no, not Prime Minister Patrick Manning. Who in his right mind puts a grocer to run something as complex as the health sector, and as soon as he entered he uttered nonsense, a 100-day plan, that we do not know have a clue about—a 100-day plan. He caused an exodus of senior doctors and the collapse of the health sector. If you walk into the Port of Spain General Hospital you feel you are in another country; you see doctors from all parts of the world and you do not see your own doctors. That is a deliberate thing by this Government; they wanted to get rid of all the doctors and stifle and suffocate the doctors, and this Regional Health Authorities regulations is a means of stifling the doctors and shutting them up. That is why this health sector is going the way it is, and deaths of innocent people, including an eight-year-old child dying from dengue.

We can go on and on, but I want to indicate in my closing few minutes that we must understand and appreciate the meaning of democracy. It is an ancient political term meaning government by the people; in classical Athens where the word originated ruled by the Demos. In current usage it can refer to popular government, but is this Manning government popular? Popular by corruption or popular sovereignty, which the emperor Mr. Manning who wants to control the Caribbean, to a representative government, which they do not know anything about.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this Government can no longer be trusted and the people have lost all hope in this Government. Democracy should continue as an aspiration to excite the hopes of humankind, but this Government excites the despair and hopelessness of our people. This arbitrary and coercive rule incompatible with political liberty and a constitutional government the rule of law all incompatible with that, we are witnessing a tyranny and a barbaric monarchy, like slaves submitting willingly to an absolute ruler who alone is free; usurpation of power by an individual using deception or force, as we have seen here over the last seven years. We are heading down a pathway of rule by demagogues, who swiftly set themselves up as tyrants, exercising absolute and arbitrary power over their subjects.

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

The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Rennie Dumas): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I would like to join in supporting the Motion before us, but I cannot help noting the contribution of the Member for Caroni East and treating it as a statement of failure.

Mr. Speaker, given the Member for Caroni East's own experience, given the record of his life in public service, I had hoped that he would not be casting these aspersions around as freely as he did. There is a whole bundle of things that can be said about him or other people and, I really believe that we could conduct the business of the people without the type of spurious allegations that are being made. It almost comes across, given what I have been hearing in recent times, I see the Member for Caroni East as having a one-man crusade. I do not know what Prof. Ken Julien has done to him sometime in his life.

Ms. Kangaloo: He has a "tabanca" for him.

Hon. R. Dumas: I do not know. I think it has been suggested over and over that when an individual does not have a presence in this House so that he can defend himself, that if you want to speak to and of that individual citizen who is giving public service, then you have an option of going into the street and facing him. You have an option of bringing a private action before the court or an option of confronting the individual in public office and treating with the matter. I wonder if we have not arrived at the time where we will not need to put an amendment in place to the way in which we conduct business, to ensure that the question of parliamentary privilege being used to castigate individuals who are serving the country could not proceed in that manner. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I can stand here and say for surety that you have not heard that kind of attack being unleashed on an individual public officer. I really take it as a failure on this generation of parliamentarians. This generation of parliamentarians must rise above that. I read the documents and I am saying, if one is to stop or stand here and begin to read, you would read different things and you would be able to say, "These are official records, whatever might have happened to them." Certainly, we prefer not to join in that. When I hear of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and the kind of hope and future that UTT in the hands of Prof. Ken Julien is delivering to the young population of Trinidad and Tobago, I stand proud of the fact that this is the Government that instituted and started UTT. [*Desk thumping*]

When I know that at this point in time, we have created an opportunity for hundreds and thousands of our citizens to see a future that they did not have because of the elitism of the University of the West Indies, and the UTT has changed the opportunity and the range of activities for thousands of our people, then I am suggesting that other mechanisms be used other than this parliamentary forum, the forum of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the forum which people look to for hope and for changing their life opportunity, changing their entitlements, changing the expectations of their relationship with the rest of the population.

I am suggesting that the Member for Caroni East could treat with this matter in a very different way if he is sure about his information. But I want to suggest that until that information is made public and put in a public mechanism to indulge him, the Member is not doing himself well. I see it as a colossal failure in dealing with the question of character of leadership of Members of the public leadership. I want to say that, because one of the experiences you have is interacting with the public, and when we smear the mud in that way—and I heard the Member for Caroni East saying that he sees \$50 billion worth of corruption. We have experiences that tell us that the public leadership begins to take on a character of target for other criminals in the system and that criminals in the system begin to see us as fair game. I say “us” deliberately, because I want to suggest that if you begin to cast the aspersions that every single person in public office is involved in the corruption you are referring to, is involved in destroying as you said, we should not be able—your words betray your thoughts.

You stood in the Parliament and said, "We would not be able to stand anywhere before another country." In other words, you are legitimizing the possibility that we could meet other ends and other fates besides being able to go home to our loved ones in the night. I want to suggest that you are on dangerous grounds, Member for Caroni East, and the danger does not stop only on this side. So, if you believe that your contributions are going to expose us to danger to which you would be immune, I want to send out the warning that neither you nor anybody in public leadership is going to be immune if a public officer, Members of the Parliament, Members of the Government are seen as “fair target”. I want to suggest that we should all be careful.

Mr. Speaker, we have in our possession the issue of the North West Regional Health Authority accounts and therefore being put in the public. I heard—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Take them to the police. Whatever you have, take them to the police.

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, we have that example being put on public record and the Auditor General who is being invoked tonight by the Member for Caroni East as a person who is infallible and who has the superior right to judge every single public officer, in every single public institution—the suggestion is being made that whatever the Auditor General says about the conduct of every public officer is correct, immutable and should be the basis of action against that person, as to whether they are fit for public office or not.

The Auditor General therefore, if they make a pronouncement against you, they should debar you from public office. That is what they are saying. Therefore,

any single authority, any officer who is questioned by the Auditor General, whoever that person may be, suddenly becomes unworthy of public office, that is the thrust, that the Auditor General should have this capacity to mark every one of us out, down and out. Unfortunately, that is not the way the thing works. The Auditor General is saying, for example: the Member handed out contracts without authority; the Member overpaid certain people; the Member, the Member, the Member.

I want to suggest that these reports went further and were laid in Parliament. These reports went further and were examined, and I am saying to the Member, that the Member should be as careful of other people's reputation as he was of his. That he should be as concerned, that the persons whom he attacked should be given fair procedural possibilities for answering those charges as he received. This is what I want to see.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of his training, sometimes you wonder whether we do not know better and sometimes in the haste to castigate this Government they are in fact complimenting the Government. When a public programme of projects which treats with the development of this country is put in place and as he said, you have 117 projects and 25 per cent of the projects are successfully completed in a given year, given the size, scope and complexity of the development projects that are entered into by this Government, which has never been matched in this country; with a scope of intended impact on this population that we have never seen before, and 117 projects go through a predictable programme life cycle, which last year—as the Member knows, none of the projects we have, are likely to be completed in a year. They are all multi-year projects and therefore, when we can complete year after year, 25 per cent of the projects that we have in the project stream, then certainly that is good performance anywhere in the world.

7.00 p.m.

I want to suggest, therefore, that if we understand the concept of the project life cycle and we understand how a programme of this nature and size is put together, then the Government is delivering on the responsibility that it has taken on. I want to remind the Member that the responsibility that this Government took on, with the agreement of the population of Trinidad and Tobago, is a developed country by 2020; that is the responsibility. In the execution of that responsibility, the allocations made are to guarantee that the project flows are not interrupted, to guarantee that the ways in which we finance this does not put us into trouble, and that is being executed.

When, therefore, the Member said to us that he did not understand, and the company he spoke of suddenly took on, again, these omnipotent qualities, that

they were supposed to be able to evaluate our programmes, and if they said we were doing well, we were doing well, and if they said we were not doing well, then we were not doing well, certainly, that cannot be accepted.

Just as you, the people we have there have their MBAs, but you do not understand what is happening in terms of the public management of the public portfolio of projects for public development. You do not understand, because if you stand there and endorse what they are saying, then the MBA which was given to you is an embarrassment to the University of the West Indies. [*Crosstalk*] I want to suggest to you that we should look again.

I refer you to one of the preliminary books that we use to study project management; [*Desk thumping*] the name of it is *A Guide to Project Management, a Body of Knowledge*. [*Mr. Dumas shows book*] I want to suggest that you are embarrassing your teacher. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the Supplementary Appropriation speaks to a number of things. Do you know one of the things that it does not speak to? It does not speak to CEPEP; it does not speak to URP, but speaker after speaker characterized the expenditure of this Government on multiple projects, as complex as the programme is, on CEPEP and URP. Then you go on to castigate those people: "They are worthless; they have no use," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. "Expenditure on them is a waste of time; expenditure in the communities that they are exercising their capacity and the work they do is a waste."

But yet, let the election come around; let the discussion come around, and Member after Member on that said would be promising them thousands of dollars in salaries, thousands of dollars in projects, thousands of dollars promising. I want to suggest that the problem which the Opposition has with CEPEP and URP is the fact that they have become convinced that you will never represent them, that you do not care about them and you will never make arrangements for their welfare. [*Desk thumping*] That is the problem you have. I suggest that we step away from that posture.

Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary experience tells us about appropriation. Year after year, they hold out the issue of supplementary appropriation as a sign of abuse, a sign of ignorance, a sign of incompetence; but it is certainly the opposite. It is because we are concerned about accountability, it is because there is competence being exhibited, it is because respect for the parliamentary procedure is being put in place, why we are here tonight. This, as someone suggested, could have been done another time. There is no bunching up, as the Member for St. Augustine

said, and the Member for Caroni East followed down that blind road; there is no suggestion that revenues received are being abused. It is rather a savings, as we pointed out earlier, and we continue to demonstrate prudent management. I would just like to take a little example to suggest that I am from Tobago East; when we speak to the expenditure, I am certain that the people living from Scarborough to Charlotteville would be happy to see the programme that is under the Infrastructure Development Fund.

I am suggesting that people across the country would be happy to see this expenditure, but in particular the listing of the projects that are available to the Tobago population, as a result of the expenditure on the IDF, that ranges from expenditure on fishing depots—*[Interruption]* I have this listing here; I want to be very careful.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What page?

Hon. R. Dumas: I think it is Head 701, under the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). I am seeing economic infrastructure. I remember when the expenditure on Tobago was cut to \$30 million. It had nothing to do with the oil price being \$9. It was cut to \$30 million.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Cut by or to?

Hon. R. Dumas: There was nothing in that programme, managed by this now Opposition, that had to do with construction of fishing facilities, whether they were at Pigeon Point or Delaford, but now this IDF has that as part of the programme. Am I to suggest to Tobago people that the Members for Caroni East, Siparia, Couva South, Oropouche East and Princes Town North believe that it is a waste to build up the economic infrastructure of Tobago?

When I see the Goldsborough Irrigation Project as a mechanism for the development of agricultural capacity, in and of Tobago and, certainly, contributing to the agricultural capacity in Trinidad and Tobago, is that a waste? Should we believe in Tobago that this expenditure should stop, run the risk of not continuing or be aborted, because the Opposition says reduce it?

When we look at drainage and irrigation, and we remember that Tobago is an island with the furthest reach into the Atlantic, are we suggesting that the Milford coastal protection or the construction of sea defence walls, is a waste? Is that what the Members for Caroni East and St. Augustine are saying? Is that the message that they want to send to Tobago East? Is that what we are saying?

We are saying tourism, and we are talking about Scarborough beautification, the Crown Point Airport, mechanisms that we use to welcome our brothers and

sisters from Trinidad into Tobago for whatever, whether it is for recreation, whether it is to pursue investment, whether it is to help us expand the other tourism facilities, whether it is to help us deal with training. Are we suggesting that is waste, that should not happen, that this is expenditure that should be aborted? I am suggesting that cannot be the intent of this Government, even if it may be the intent and concern of the Opposition.

When we see the expenditure on the Cove Industrial Estate, in Trinidad and Tobago, the Point Lisas Industrial Estate is famous. Of course, we know about the attempts to stop the extension of the industrial capacity of the country into La Brea and other places; of course, rightfully unsuccessful; I am sure the Member for La Brea would agree.

Mr. Jeffrey: Yes.

Hon. R. Dumas: When we see the Cove in that light, and we see the extension of the gas pipeline in Tobago, when we see the extension of the production of electricity which the Member for Chaguanas East is overseeing, should we suggest that it is a waste, that Tobago should have no opportunity to have its industrial base, its economic diversification, be participant to the national development thrust, as we are suggesting? Is that what you are suggesting Members for Caroni East or St. Augustine?

Mr. Imbert: They do not like Tobagonians. [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Dumas: I do not mind if they do not like Tobagonians, but they must like Tobago. At least that is paradise. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: My best friend is a Tobagonian; the Member is a Tobagonian and I like him.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: He loves his villa in Tobago. Tim, how many villas "yuh" have in Tobago? [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Dumas: I am suggesting that one of the reasons I could have such comfort in standing and dealing with this matter, is that whether we come from Cumuto/Manzanilla, we come from Mayaro, we come from Tabaquite, all across the country the development programme is being carried out. The Member for Siparia, I am sure, would agree.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: "Shut down de court in Siparia."

Hon. R. Dumas: That has to be some temporary glitch that we would fix, and be treated better than you are.

The original appropriation was \$40 billion; a midterm review carried it to \$47 billion, and they know that a lot of this money was put away, but they still come before us and say no. One of the things that struck me was that the Member Caroni East spoke about this propaganda; that the PNM was about propaganda. I listened to the Member for Caroni East on the television station the other morning. I am sure that it is the same list he has here today, because he masters the art of repetition of the same things every week, every radio station, every television station, every public forum he goes to. He says the same thing over and over, believing like with a drop of water it will bore a hole through people's head and get them to believe it. [*Laughter*]

The truth is that he is in a multi-project programme.

Hon. Member: Only his head has the hole. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Dumas: I want to suggest to the Member for Caroni East, that it will not work to tell the people that the development they are seeing in their communities, in their villages, in their towns and across Trinidad and Tobago, is not happening. They are seeing it; they are experiencing it; they are enjoying the benefits. To keep telling them that it is not happening, they will know that it is not true, and all it would do is make you less and less popular and eventually cause your party to disintegrate and disappear. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That should make you all happy if we disappear. [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, the validity of the appropriation cannot be refuted, try as the Opposition might. Therefore, it is the responsibility of elected representatives to manage this. This is a money bill; it speaks directly to the concept of representation and, therefore, the right to appropriate money from what is received by the country. It is appropriate; it should be supported by all Members. Certainly, the attempts to revive last week's debate, because that is really part of what was going on with the Member for Caroni East. I do not know if he ran out of time last week. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: He did not get a chance to speak last week.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: Ramesh not here today. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Dumas: This is the second set of recycled notes that we got from the debate. The Member for St. Augustine would not have his chance to be the first respondent in the budget debate, but having prepared for it and being replaced by Siparia, he had to give us his rendition and preparation. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Caroni East did not take the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: No, Tabaquite tell him he could not talk, but Tabaquite not here today.

Hon. R. Dumas: Ooh! He did not trust what he was going to say, therefore, those notes were brought to bear in this debate today, but they were inappropriate. [*Crosstalk*]

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the final statement I would like to make treats with this question of the Corruption Perception Index. The last time this index showed us in a negative light according to the interpretation and the Opposition was so quick to bring it to the attention of the Parliament. I am wondering why it was not as quick to bring that to the Parliament at this time.

Here is one answer. Just as every other statistic that puts us in a good light as a country, just as every good progress that the country makes is jealously looked upon as a negative by the Opposition, in this case, the change in the profile that is established by the Corruption Perception Index now that the issues of corruption that started under the UNC government have worked themselves through the system, when all of that have now come they are saying it is not a matter to discuss anymore.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Corruption Perception Index has changed and I am asking the Opposition to research their matter and bring the level of improvement and exactly what it means to the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] You see, I want to leave with the argument that says in the long run that politics must be about delivering better benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and once the politics is for the people, the PNM will continue to be the People's National Movement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate on a few issues that I would like to raise in this honourable Chamber. The first is to indicate that I know the hon. Member for Tobago East has a good heart and has good intentions, but today, I truly feel sorry for him after listening to him because it is very clear that he has absolutely no idea of what the supplementary appropriation is about.

When he spoke about Tobago, he said Tobago will be happy to see projects in the Infrastructure Development Fund. The message the Member for Caroni East is sending to Tobago is that all these projects contained in the IDF, should this expenditure be aborted and whether you like Tobago or Tobago people—

Hon. Member, with due respect, have you read the details of expenditure that have been given out? When we were here on Wednesday, I said we cannot approve cat in bag, let us see what you are going to appropriate this money for, what are the specifics. And the undertaking was given that we will get the document; there was a little tiff backwards and forwards with the Chairman and one of the technocrats as to whether we would get it on Thursday or Friday. We got it today at 1.30 p.m.

I do not know when you saw it, hon. Member, but at 1.30 p.m. when we got it, the debate would have been starting in a short while and, therefore, Members may not have had the chance to read it. But we will talk about that on another occasion where we are asked to approve billions of dollars and we are not given the details in sufficient time for a study to be made.

You can say that is a strategy that you will use against the Opposition, but certainly you will not employ that against your own Member, to have your Member stand up here and defend this, and not one cent of that \$3.9 billion has been appropriated for Tobago, not one cent. [*Desk thumping*] The Member stood up, and I started to feel sorry for him and I said let me really check this, and he was reciting the items.

First of all, Estimates of Development Programme Expenditure 08, Head 071 IFB. It starts off with the Judiciary, the original estimate was \$14 million, the revised estimate, zero; EBC, zero in the estimate, zero in the revised; Office of the Prime Minister, \$43.5 million in the estimate, \$87.6 million in the revised. I will come back to that in a moment, because we will see what that increase is for.

Then we come to the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). I asked you which item, you said 701, well 701 is the whole head for the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) and then you break it down into ministries. We come under Head 15, the Tobago House of Assembly, blank, blank. Not a cent, and then the hon. Member goes into the details and starts to read the projects.

So let us take it, totals on the very first page, blank, blank. Nothing was given in the original appropriation and nothing was given in this revised allocation. We come now to the breakdown of the items which the hon. Member raised.

He talked about the Goldsborough Irrigation Project and said, should we tell the people of Tobago we want to abort this? Mr. Speaker, the estimate in 2008 is blank; the revised estimate today, blank. He talked about the Milford Coastal Protection, 2008 estimate, blank; revised estimate, blank.

The hon. Member spoke about the Scarborough Beautification; the 2008 estimate which would have been the original appropriation, blank; the revised estimate today, blank. Not a cent.

He spoke of the development of the Cove Industrial Estate; the original appropriation, blank, zero; today's blank. When you look at the Draft Estimates for fiscal 2008, that volume gives you expenditure for the previous year. Do you know when we look at those projects again in 2007 that it was blank for the THA. So for 2007 you got nothing under this fund, and then you come today, with due respect, saying you are so happy for Tobago and Tobago did not get a cent.

I really feel very sorry because the Member said he is proud to support this because Tobago is going to benefit from this fund, and the Member for Caroni East wants to stop it. But there was absolutely nothing for Tobago.

Member, I will give way because I really do feel sorry.

Mr. Dumas: Well again, Mr. Speaker, and Member for Siparia, I can stand proud because my understanding of how the IDF works is that those projects are approved projects. The special provision for each project and its development as I just said, unfortunately, Members on that side do not understand how a project works, and the different phases in a project's life cycle. And, therefore, the preliminary work is continuing, and I know those plans are drawn, and surveys are done, and I know on the physical programme, those are all projects which have started. Therefore, I am assured that the appropriation made into the IDF will fund those projects.

Thank you.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I live in hope together with the hon. Member that some of this money will actually come to Tobago, and you will greet me at the Cove, wherever it is. I really would like to see that you get some money. Because in the same way you said the Siparia development is taking place, the same way I would like to see Siparia, and all Members would like to see projects in their area.

The point I am making through you, Sir, is that there was no appropriation in this supplementary for Tobago. There was none in the IDF in 2007. You may say that is not true, there are other fundings and so forth. Yes, there is a Tobago House of Assembly Head 15 in the original appropriations, but today we are

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

talking about Head 701, which is the Infrastructure Development Fund which the Member raised—I do not know how sometimes people would take truth and make it look as though it is not the truth.

The black and white is there, and not a cent has been allocated now, not a cent was allocated in 2007 when we did the original appropriation, not a cent was allocated or spent out of the IDF in fiscal 2007 as well. In fiscal 2006, there were some projects, I will be honest with that, but in 2007 there was nothing, and in 2008, not a cent from the IDF. That is the first point.

Let us go back to basics, I need to go back to the original note given to us which was dated September 12, 2008 where we were invited to attend this meeting of the Finance Committee on Wednesday last, and at that meeting, we raised issues relating to what the supplementation of the appropriation was for.

First of all, paragraph 2 tells us in this note for the Finance Committee:

The Finance Committee will note the idea was established by a legal notice 347 December 29, 1997 of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 to finance wholly or partially certain projects under the PSIP.

Fair enough, the Minister did say that this was a fund that had been set up by the forward-thinking, pioneering UNC government in 1997. Yes, the Minister reminded me on that day of the Finance Committee.

That explanation was given to say that we can come to this House to put moneys into the fund because legally, under that law, we can do so. Then the note continues:

With a view to fast-tracking implementation—and I am sort of summarizing from this—Government established a number of state-owned companies for the purpose of executing projects. These have been called SPSCs in budget for 2008 \$4 billion appropriated and a detailed listing was provided in the estimates, and that was at Head 701 in these original estimates.

Now Government proposes that a further sum of \$3.9 billion be appropriated for deposits which will bring deposits for fiscal 2008 to \$7.9 billion.

As of August 28, 2008 the total sum released by warrant in fiscal 2008 was \$4.472 billion. Additional funding was met from unallocated resources of the fund. That is to say there was an unspent balance from the previous year which helped to take you at \$4 billion appropriated and you used some of the unspent moneys to spend \$4.4 billion.

Projected expenditure is \$5.57 billion and the Finance Committee was asked to note the balance in the fund at September 03, was \$2.4 billion.

In accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act, approval is required from transfers from the Consolidated Fund; although \$3.9 billion was the recorded expenditure, approximately \$2.4 billion would not be utilized in fiscal 2008 and, therefore, will be available to finance future projects. And then we were asked to approve this money.

First, we must make the point as the Appropriation Bill which is really the legislation for the Motion now is to authorize the issue from the Consolidated Fund in the sum of \$3.9 billion.

Mr. Speaker, where is this money now? It is sitting in something called the Consolidated Fund. It is not floating in the sky or in the water; it is in the Consolidated Fund. And I will return to that in a moment to look at the law in terms of authorizations for moneys to be drawn out of the Consolidated Fund.

So when the Member for Diego Martin North/East says we have to balance the budget, and we made more money and we would be wasting the money if we do not do this, that is not so. The money is in the Consolidated Fund and it is sitting there as we speak. *[Interruption]*

You know, we were asked for parliamentary behaviour and so forth, when you hear this yapping, yapping it is very annoying. And the Member had his 75 minutes, and he could have more, he is a Minister he can do anything he wants in this House. So can I please ask—and I cannot tell him to shut up because that is unparliamentary.

Mr. Speaker: No, I ruled earlier that is not parliamentary. The Member is asking for protection, so please afford her the courtesy of listening to her.

7.30 p.m.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He has a great example. He mentioned foreign examples, he has an example in the Member for San Fernando East. That is his leader there.

Mr. Manning: I know, but press on.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Well, I am hoping it will work on him; it will not work on you.

So, through you, Sir, money is in the Consolidated Fund and, therefore, we are authorizing the issue of moneys out of the Consolidated Fund. The Member said that this money would be wasted, that you have to balance it. Moneys in the Consolidated Fund can be appropriated at any time, by an Appropriation Bill, whether by original appropriation or by supplementary appropriation.

And we raised the question in the finance committee meeting as to what was the necessity, why was it so urgent that you must do this now on the eve of a budget. Why must you bring this supplementary appropriation now, noting that it is not for moneys to be utilized only in fiscal 2008, but you have appropriated moneys for future expenses, which is what the note to us said. What is the urgency? And the reply was that moneys earned in one fiscal year have to be spent in that fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, what happens with moneys that are sitting in the Consolidated Fund when the fiscal year ends and the next one begins? Does the law not authorize that you can bring a supplementary appropriation and, therefore—*[Interruption]* If you want to explain, I would be very happy. So that moneys earned in one fiscal year must be spent in that year. *[Interruption]* Please, you will have your 75 minutes! Kamla, Kamla, Kamla, what? You will have your 75 minutes!

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: I will not take so long.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Good. Well, you could take as short as you like.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying, that is not so. The Member for Caroni East then asked: “Do you have to spend it? Why do you not put it into the savings, into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund?” And the answer was—I am just quoting what happened—that Government has its priorities as to how it would use revenues that are accrued to it. That was the reply, and the Government is totally entitled to do that. Government can do that. They are the Executive and they can do that.

But there are serious questions which arise and I want to ask, through you: How do we answer the questions when we see what is happening in the United States with the meltdown? What happens when the Governor of the Central Bank tells us that some of our reserves have gone directly through Lehman Brothers as brokers to invest those funds and they have gone into bankruptcy; how much of our moneys, if any, have been affected?

I would like answers. The ministry may know; the Government may know, we do not know, so we are asking questions in this very volatile situation. Have any moneys been lost? The Governor of the Central Bank said, “Well, you know, it is not going to affect us because it is subsidiaries.” But I have seen where in other countries subsidiaries are being affected and, therefore, I ask, through you: Please tell the country, have any moneys been affected by that meltdown in the US with respect to Lehman Brothers in particular? Because I am sure we have moneys invested through them. How much money did we invest through them? Is it at risk? If any has been lost, tell us.

I know I read a report—again, I do not know if this is true but we ask questions—that we have lost money in the past that was invested in the US through brokers there. So I am asking that question.

We come back now to this issue of the Consolidated Fund and whether you tell me moneys earned in this fiscal year must be spent in this fiscal year, I am saying it could have gone into savings; it did not necessarily have to be appropriated into this fund. Let us see what the law says about supplementary.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for Siparia for giving way. I wonder if the hon. Member is of the view that the only fund in which Government can save money is in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Is that your view?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I think it is one of the funds.

Mr. Manning: In other words, there are others.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Tell me if there are.

Mr. Manning: Well, you see, this is the point. The Member seems to be operating on the premise that it is the only place in which you can save. For the record, it is not the only place.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Hon. Prime Minister, I agree with that. There are other funds that moneys could be put in but the HSF. The fund was created by legislation with rules as to when you can draw down from it or not. The other funds, you can put moneys, but you do not have that kind of restriction or regulation as to drawdowns on those funds. So, therefore, once they go in there, they can be spent in any which way without that regulation, oversight or monitoring. Again, whether people are happy with that is a different issue. There are some who would be happy on that side; there are others who would not be happy, but I want to go to the Constitution which talks about finance in this country and in the Parliament. Chapter 8, section 112 states:

“All revenues or other moneys raised or received by Trinidad and Tobago, not being revenues or other moneys payable under this Constitution or any other law into some other public fund established for a specific purpose shall, unless Parliament otherwise provides, be paid into and form one Consolidated Fund.”

So the revenues collected go into the fund except where there is a law which says to put it elsewhere and we have some of those. We have the Green Fund which was created by legislation; we have the Unemployment Levy Fund where the moneys do not come into the exchequer at all; they go directly into an

exchequer suspense account and from there they go into these various funds: Green Fund or Unemployment Levy Fund and so on. So that you have law that says go straight, but everything else comes into the Consolidated Fund.

Section 112(2) states:

“No moneys shall be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund except to meet expenditure that is charged upon the Fund by this Constitution or any Act or where the issue of those moneys has been authorised by an Appropriation Act or an Act passed in pursuance of section 114 or in accordance with any other law.

- (3) No moneys shall be withdrawn from any public fund other than the Consolidated Fund unless the issue of those moneys has been authorized by an Act.”

You know, this whole expenditure and finance has come from, what was called the parliamentary systems that have developed in Westminster, what they called the power of the purse. The Parliament has the power of the purse that expenditure cannot be made unless authorized by the Parliament. That is what that section speaks to. Section 112(4) states:

“No moneys shall be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund or any other public fund except in the manner prescribed.”

Then we come to section 113 which authorizes expenditure from the Fund. There are two ways in which you can authorize expenditure and that is what we are going to be doing shortly, where we are going to be authorizing money out of the Consolidated Fund into the IDF. The Minister shall cause estimates, and so on, which will be happening by Monday. Then it says:

- “(2) The heads of expenditure contained in the estimates, other than expenditure charged upon the Consolidated Fund by this Constitution or any Act, shall be included in a Bill, to be known as an Appropriation Bill,…”

That is the big one; that is the big whammy that comes to us each fiscal year. So that is one way you authorize money out of the Consolidated Fund, apart from any special Act. Section 113(3) states:

“If in respect of any financial year it is found—

- (a) that the amount appropriated by the Appropriation Act for any purpose is insufficient or that a need has arisen for expenditure for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated by the Act; or

- (b) that any moneys have been expended for any purpose in excess of the amount appropriated for the purpose by the Appropriation Act or for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated by the Act,

a supplementary estimate showing the sums required or spent shall be laid before the House of Representatives and the heads of any such expenditure shall be included in the Supplementary Appropriation Bill.”

What this is telling us is that there are two ways in which you can get moneys out of the Consolidated Fund: one, through the Appropriation Bill; we will be doing the next one on Monday, and the second way is that if the amount appropriated is insufficient for that financial year or if a need arises for expenditure for a purpose which you had no amounts appropriated in respect of any financial year. That is it: The need arises or the money you appropriated was not enough or, thirdly, moneys have been expended in excess of the appropriated amount or for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated.

You come back and basically ratify expenditure if a need arises or if you have gone in excess, and so on. There is absolutely nothing here—and I will be very happy if the Minister can show me which section authorizes by Act of Parliament to withdraw from the Consolidated Fund for future expenses; for next year. I did not make that up; that was clearly in the note that was given to us and I would be very happy—I raised it in the committee stage and the Minister said we must account for it in this fiscal year. Okay, fine. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said we have to balance the books, and so on. Fine. There are other ways of balancing the books if that is true, and that is another issue which I will not deal with now. So if you believe you have to balance the books, that is okay and there are other ways in which to do it. But this law, which is the Constitution, which is the supreme law, tells me that it must be done in respect of any financial year where the amount you appropriated is insufficient.

Therefore it should be for things that you are already doing, that you did not have enough money; already committed to; or a need has arisen for expenditure for a purpose for which no amount had been appropriated. For example, we did not do anything for the Goldsborough project when we did the first thing in 2008 and a need has arisen to do that, fine; “I now appropriate into the Goldsborough project.” Then further, moneys expended in excess of the amount—well that happens all the time, what we call over-expenditure. You had estimated \$5 and you spent \$10; \$5 billion, \$10 billion. I am saying there is nothing in here for what we are doing and I would be very happy if we can get an explanation,

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

because I do not see it and this is the supreme law. I do not see any authorization for the Motion—and thereafter the Bill—that we are doing today.

Section 114 authorizes expenditure in advance of appropriation, but this is a different kind of advance, not for what we have here, for future expenses. It states:

“Parliament may make provision under which, if the Appropriation Act in respect of any financial year has not come into operation by the beginning of that financial year, the Minister responsible for finance may authorize the withdrawal...”

So that is where the financial year ends in September 30, 2008—

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 10, I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the conclusion of this matter and Motion No. 1 on the Order Paper under “Private Business”.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (ADOPTION)

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this point I am asking for some clarification or explanation of the legal authority for us to be passing this Act of Parliament, because even though it could be passed here with the majority of the Government, it is not legally authorized under the Constitution which deals with finance.

From September 30 to October—and we have had that experience before. I think in the 18/18 situation, if I am not mistaken, where the budget was done after the start of the financial year, where the Minister of Finance could then authorize to carry on the business of the Government and the country during that year prior to the passing of the Appropriation Bill for 30 days, which is section 114.

So these are the ways the Constitution provides for authorization for moneys to be appropriated out of the Consolidated Fund, and there is no explanation. I have gone to the Exchequer and Audit Act which is Chap. 69:01 and this IDF was established under section 43. Again, I have read the establishment of the funds; I have read the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 and, again, there is no authority. I do not want to go through every section and say, “that section is not it;

that is not it; that is not it.” From my reading and interpretation there is nothing in there again which gives the authority for a supplementary appropriation such as is before this House at this point of time. So that is on the legal issues.

Then we come to other issues in terms of what is happening here. The Member for Diego Martin North/East really does his job well as Leader of Government Business in carrying the flag of the Government. He really tries to do that job very well and to many it would appear that he is succeeding, but, you know, he said the Member for St. Augustine was economical with the truth, but the Member for Diego Martin North/East is not economical with the truth. When we talk about economical with the truth, at least there is truth in an economical way, but the Member for Diego Martin North/East, with due respect, in many of his statements that he made today, there was absolutely no truth in them. To say, “stranger to the truth” is still to put it too mildly, but no truth, and I will so demonstrate in a few moments.

I do not want to prolong this debate too much but we need to answer the comments that come to us on this side; to be able to rebut those and hear further explanations from your side. So I am saying, when we look at what is happening here, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, raised several issues. The hon. Member talked about surpluses and excess revenue. The Member spoke about public debt; the Member spoke about housing and the fact that the Member for St. Augustine was talking about people complaining they cannot get any HDC houses and so on, and there is a perfectly credible explanation.

7.45 p.m.

He said, “There are 100,000 applications for houses from the HDC. We cannot build all of these in one year or two.” In the five years we will take 90,000 people will be complaining that they are not getting HDC’s houses. That really acknowledges and admits that at least 100,000 persons in this country do not have adequate accommodation, housing and shelter. *[Interruption]* I am not disputing. I am agreeing with them. I am saying that this is an admission that these people do not have houses. My problem is that you know and acknowledge that. You tell me that is your policy to help these people and yet you send people to break down the little shacks and sheds in which they are living.

Mr. Manning: We do not propose to sit and let that comment pass. What the hon. Member for Siparia does not say is that there are hon. Members opposite who encourage people to occupy state lands illegally and when the State intervenes in the matter then that is what we get in Parliament. *[Desk thumping]* We “won’t” allow it.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me take myself out of that. You cannot make a statement like that and do not allow us to answer. You said, “Members opposite” not Members in the UNC. We are sitting opposite here right now as far as I can see. Members opposite encourage people to go on state lands illegally. I have done no such thing and I do not know any Member on this side who has done that. If that is the case, then deal with them according to law. Do not say I understand and I know. These people do not have a house that is why they are complaining. People put up a shack and a shed and you break them down. In one area where those houses were broken down they got no notice. People just arrived; tied ropes to those houses and pulled them down. What heart do you have? I saw the people in tears.

When I remember that—it is all well and good. Members talk and they have much money. The country has done well. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said how we did well, surprise, because of the price of oil and natural gas that we got. You have the money. Why do you need to go to the poor people and break down their houses? I am appealing through you, hon. Speaker, please, until such time as you can provide these houses which you are building, that is your policy to provide the houses, allow people to have a shelter above their heads. Where do you want them? Vagrants on the streets of Port of Spain. Where do you want them to live? Where do you want them to put their children?

Please come with us. Let us walk the ground and you would see them. The areas that they are living in are the worst land in the country. It is not that they are on prime property somewhere. Contrary to the view that they are illegal, that is not for the judgment of the hon. Member for San Fernando East. It is not for the judgment of any one of us. Whether they are there legally or illegally is for the judgment of the courts. You have that attitude and say that they are there illegally, that is why you may feel justified to send a gang to break down the houses. That is not for you to judge. That is not for you to decide. In this country there are laws that protect people on state land and private land.

Mr. Manning: You want a debate tonight, no problem.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I am not afraid, Sir. I am going to debate. That is all right. You have done it many times. You do well when you do speak. I do not have a problem with that.

Do not break down people’s houses. He does well for his people, his supporters who come to the square.

Do you know what compounds this problem? I was responding to the housing issue. I am coming back to the document that we got. You will see every head.

We had so little time because we got it at 1.30 p.m. That is another issue, but we can still look at it. Under Head 15, it is the Tobago House of Assembly. Under Head 13 it is the Office of the Prime Minister. I am still on the issue of people who do not have houses in this country. There are people who cannot afford to buy food. Some can afford. The country has done well. There is plenty money for some. My colleague, the Member for Caroni East spoke about the poverty line.

Let us go into the document because it is there for us in black and white. Head 13 says that money is coming out of the IDF into the ministry under the Office of the Prime Minister. The total amount under Head 13:005, Office of the Prime Minister, multi-sectoral and other services, the 2008 estimate was for \$43.5 million. The revised estimate which means this supplementary is \$87.6 million. It is more than double, more than 100 per cent increase. Let us find out where this money is going. When we go to the estimates we see the breakdown, OPM, 005 multi-sectoral and other services; 06, general public services; Item (f), public buildings; 005, reconstruction of the Prime Minister's residence. In the 2008 estimates, it was only \$8.5 million that was appropriated last year when we did the major budget for restoration and reconstruction. The 2008 revised estimate is being appropriated for \$75.9 million.

This came to us at 1.30 p.m. We were not supposed to see this. Do you know what I was told? The Prime Minister said that he would speak and so I ask. I understand that the firm Terra Forma that does landscaping has now been instructed by the Prime Minister that he wants a rose garden just like the one that President Bush has at the White House. I do not know if it is true. People tell you things. Is that true? I hope that is not true. The people do not have a house and they cannot afford to buy food. We are going with \$75.9 million more into this fund.

I have been told that they have been instructed to put in the residence—the hon. Prime Minister would like to have a cascading waterfall. There are people who work there. People speak. I do not now if it is true. The Prime Minister will tell us if it is true. I am asking a question because if it is true it is disturbing. If it is not true, brush it aside.

I was told of the rose garden and the cascading waterfall. Through you Sir, if you want to see cascading waterfall, you should come to Penal and central when the floods hit Trinidad and Tobago. You would see plenty cascading waterfall. You do not need to pay Terra Forma or anybody else to establish this.

When we pick up the original estimate of expenditure for fiscal 2008, it gives you the estimate spent in the previous year. We see in fiscal 2007, \$171.7 million

appropriated and the revised estimate at the end was \$171.7 million for reconstruction of the Prime Minister's residence. Today, we are approving for this further \$75.9 million which would bring it to a total of \$247.6 million. That is what we know about. There are future projects that we do not know about.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East talked about the public debt, the Consolidated Fund, surpluses and excesses. I will spend a few minutes on that. We can talk a bit on surpluses and the public accounts of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is not the first time that the Government has come to this House and otherwise boasted about surpluses. The Minister of Finance is on record in this House as of January 18, 2008, saying that not on one occasion was there a deficit under the PNM and then reminded the House of what they had spent and ended with a surplus. The then minister, Dr. Rowley, Member for Diego Martin West who was sitting there talked about surpluses. Both of them gave different numbers of what the surplus was supposed to be. In 2007, Dr. Rowley said that the surplus was \$.268 billion. The Minister said that the surplus in 2007 was \$71.6 million. I do not know which one is correct. They are both on the *Hansard* record for the Minister of Finance on January 2008 and Dr. Rowley, if not on that same day, but on the *Hansard*. They gave those amounts for the surplus of 2007.

Several questions arise. Mr. Speaker, through you I ask them. First of all, no sources are given by any of them as to from where these surpluses or deficits came. Secondly, from where do these numbers come? The Minister gave a surplus of the following:

Year	\$Million
2003	775
2004	211.5
2005	2,414
2006	1,528
2007	71.6

That was on January 18, 2008. Those are surpluses the Minister quoted but no source was ever given.

I would like to know how these surpluses are calculated and by whom. I have searched the published accounts—that is all we can do—the documents that are public accounts. That is all we can use. Unless there is insider information that we do not have access to, then please tell us. When we looked at the public accounts

of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Auditor General's reports of Trinidad and Tobago, there is nothing about these surpluses.

The Minister went further to say that under the UNC we were in deficit; the PNM came and all these surpluses were being recorded. Is there some secret file somewhere which contains these surpluses under the PNM and the deficits under the UNC? They are completely contrary to the published accounts. *[Interruption]* They are from the Central Bank Report. Very well. They come from the Central Bank Report which are totally contrary to what come out of the Auditor General's report. Which one do we believe? *[Interruption]* Explain it to us. If it is different accounting, then tell us. I can only rely on the records. The Auditor General is the duly authorized legal authority to write and report and lay in the Parliament the accounts of Trinidad and Tobago. These, as contained there do not support the assertions that are made about surpluses.

I take the numbers given to us by the Auditor General's report and if the Central Bank Report is different, then you tell us. We are told that under the UNC we were in deficit every year. Nothing is further from the truth. In 1996, a surplus was recorded in the Auditor General's report, 2000, on page 7 of \$536.3. In 1997, there was a deficit of \$271.4 million. In 1998, there was a deficit of \$5.58 million. In 1999, there was a surplus of \$767.6 million; in 2000, \$1.9 billion; 2001, \$54.1 million. For three straight years there were surpluses under the UNC. To say that every year that the UNC was there, there was a deficit is not true.

Under the PNM regime, the Minister said that not on one occasion was there a deficit. These are the records from the Auditor General's reports. From the first year of the PNM being in government, these are the following deficits:

Year	Amount (\$)
2002	921.4 million
2003	969.8 million
2004	1.6 billion
2005	829.8 million
2006	1.6 billion
2007	1.072 billion

8.00 p.m.

Every single year under the PNM, the Auditor General reported a deficit and under the UNC for four out of six years, we recorded a surplus. Three straight

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

years before the PNM came in we left it in surplus according to the report. So where is the Minister of Finance getting the information from? Share it with us please. Where are the surpluses coming from? They are not to be found in the audited public accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. These numbers represent the deficits in the accounts.

The Member again spoke about the Consolidated Fund and public accounts and so on. This money is in the Consolidated Fund and will be wasted. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, when we checked the audited public accounts, for every single year under the PNM, the Consolidated Fund was running in deficit? When they boast that they can pay the foreign debt with HSF, they are not acknowledging, according to the public accounts, that as at 2006, there was a deficit of \$1.6 billion in the Fund. In 2002, it was \$921.4 million; in 2003, \$969.8 million; in 2004, \$1.6 billion; in 2005, \$829.8 million; in 2006, \$1.6 billion and so on—deficits in the Consolidated Fund. It is here.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members. On page 110 of the 2007 Volume I, Audited Public Accounts for the financial year 2007, we see the balance for 2006 and 2007. At the 2007 balance, the shortfall is \$4.6 billion. Then we come to September 30, 2007, we see the position there, a shortfall in the Consolidated Fund of \$5.7 billion. We are dealing with \$3.9 billion that we are taking out of the Consolidated Fund. I do not know what the status of the Fund is now. Is it still in deficit as we see here from the Auditor General's reports? When you take the \$3.9 million, where are you going to be leaving it?

Mr. Manning: Since that, what was the oil price?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Tell us if the Consolidated Fund now stands at a higher amount. We can only go with what we have. I know that for every single year since the PNM has been in office, it has been in deficit, as has been the expenses and revenue in terms of deficits there.

The Member spoke about the public debt. I am seeing the Consolidated Fund in this deficit every single year under the PNM from the Auditor General's reports on the accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

I come now to the public debt. We see the same kind of boasts about the public debt that were made today and on different occasions and when we look at it, we see that in 2003, it stood at \$20.3 billion. At the end of 2007, the public debt was \$21 billion. Where is the change? How has it come down? You take percentages, but you cannot take apples as a percentage of oranges. A whole book is written on how to lie with statistics. Here we are in real money, 2003, \$20.3 billion was the public debt and, in 2007, again from the public accounts, it was \$21.4 billion. Where is the change?

My colleague likes to tell us about the Central Bank. I have a Central Bank report on this one. They have told us the total debt. In 1994, central government total debt was \$16 billion; in 1995, it was \$16.1; in 1996, it was \$17.2 billion; in 1997, \$17.2 billion; in 1998, \$18.9 billion, in 1999, \$18.3 billion; in 2000, \$19.1 and in 2001, \$19.5.

Let us go on to the UNC—\$19.5 billion we left it at. In 2002, it was \$20.1 billion; 2003, \$20.9 billion; 2004, \$20.3 billion; 2005, \$20.4 billion; 2006, \$20.7 billion and 2007, \$22.5 billion. So how does it come down? Where has it come down? [*Interruption*] The public debt stands at \$22.5 billion. Therefore, to say that your fund can pay off all this public debt is a different issue. The Central Bank data takes into account the domestic debt and the foreign debt and gives the breakdown with respect to debts.

We started off talking about being economical with the truth. These are hard facts. This is the data. These are facts and facts are stubborn things and will not go away, as my colleague likes to say.

Here we are then, when we come to what is happening, it is very clear, not only from the Notes to the Finance Committee that this money is being appropriated for expenditure within fiscal 2008, but it is very clear on their own statement that it is for additional future expenditure which we know nothing about.

I have already looked at the Constitution and it is my interpretation that we cannot be doing this in this manner. I ask. Where in the law are they authorized so to do? When we come to the actual items of expenditure, I have discussed that with the office of the Prime Minister where the increases are, but there are interesting increases.

Let us see where the money is going. We come to the Ministry of Finance. There is a revised appropriation here of \$490 million that is to go to the EMBD. The EMBD, in 2006, had appropriations and spent \$245 million. Revised 2007 it was \$326 million. Estimates in 2008 were \$350 million. Today it is \$490 million. This brings money from 2006 to the present time to \$1.4 billion in the hands of the company.

I know that my colleagues have spoken about these special purpose companies, so I will not go into them, except to talk about the amount of moneys being put in the hands of these companies and the concerns raised in respect of management and expenditure.

We come now to the Infrastructure Development Fund, Head 701, under the Ministry of Planning and Development. I have a problem because I have the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, then we have two lots of appropriation for the same item, but different amounts.

Under Head 21, Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, there are items for something called an Accelerated Housing Programme. No appropriation was made for it in the original 2008 budget. This is one of the examples where you can do it by supplementary appropriation. You made none, but now you want to go and spend or have already spent it in this financial year—\$320 million for something called an Accelerated Housing Programme. When I look at another head, which also had an Accelerated Housing Programme, where is it really taking place? Which is the real Ministry? Will they both be doing the same thing?

You have to look at Head 36. That is under Head 31. You have Accelerated Housing Programme, \$320 million and then under Head 36, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, there is an item 004 Social Infrastructure; 08 Housing and Settlements; 280, Accelerated Housing Programme, \$1.1 billion from the IDF.

How is this happening? How can you have the same programme under two? You can have it, but who will be running these programmes and how will they work? It is a total of \$1.1 billion plus the \$320 million that you have under the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment.

We see under local government a lot of money being put from the IDF which was not there before. That is one of the revisions and they are coming here from \$30 million. Local government has now gone in revised estimate under the IDF—we are not talking about the rest of the budget, only the IDF—to \$150.5 million.

I see them here, for some strange items that were not there before. They are: development of rural communities, urban redevelopment, upgrade of community infrastructure in south and southeast Trinidad; all these items that were originally under the Ministry of Planning and Development and are now being removed completely and put under the Ministry of Local Government.

We may speculate why. It may be that we have a Local Government election coming up or it may well be that the Minister of Local Government may be a

better manager than the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment, so you took all these projects out and put them where they will be better managed and reach the people. We wait to see what will happen.

Those are the items. There are others. For example under this IDF, not a cent more has gone to national security where we thought some emphasis would have gone when they were doing the revised allocations. I see under Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources where there are so many problems with food and the price of food they have decreased the amount from \$57 million to \$20 million.

This one is totally unacceptable. Under the Ministry of National Security, the original estimate was \$60 million. Do you know what it is now? It means that you did not spend the money; you did not do the projects you promised when you brought the big budget and gave the Ministry all this money saying that you were doing all these great things to fight crime. It has gone from \$60 million to \$4.5 million. Are you serious? Where is the implementation?

When the Member for Tobago West talked about being grateful that we had some implementation because 25 per cent development is great, what about the other 75 per cent? Here we are from \$60 million for the Ministry of National Security to \$4 million. With the greatest issue in the minds of citizens being crime, they drop it to \$4.5 million.

They dropped some others. THA got nothing. That is all right. You also dropped agriculture, another area of major concern, from \$57 million to \$20 million. You have not dropped public utilities. It was \$44 and remained that way, so no increase in spite of our problems with water and so on. Then you have other increases and decreases—Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, zero increase; Ministry of Health, nothing in the revised estimates. Basically there is very little being done. Where are our priorities when you talk about having the money and being entitled to spend it and having your priorities? We have to question those priorities. The citizens are questioning those priorities in terms of crime, food prices and the infrastructure.

8.15 p.m.

Here it is, we are spending the moneys in certain areas and in other areas they are left out. There is something called equity, sharing and the distribution of the wealth of the country. Therefore, we are saying firstly that it is illegal to use this Supplementary Appropriation Bill to take moneys out of the Consolidated Fund for future projects.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Secondly, in terms of where moneys have actually been appropriated, fine go ahead, do those projects, we are happy for any development we can get, but we are very concerned. Nothing! You have dropped for crime and agriculture; two areas of major concern in this country.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning): Madam Deputy Speaker, it was not my intention at all to intervene in this debate this evening. As you know, I sit here and I listen very carefully to what is said on both sides. Perhaps, because I have been in this Parliament for a very long time, I yearn for good contributions from whichever side they come.

When the Member for Siparia rose this evening I thought, that as someone with considerable experience in this Parliament, I would have looked forward to a contribution that would have stimulated me. To say that I was disappointed in some elements of the contribution, would be to put it lightly, not because the Member for Siparia is not eloquent, she is quite eloquent; and not because the Member for Siparia did not have a cogent argument, the argument was very cogent. The Member for Siparia insisted on making statements in this honourable House, which she knows have no basis in fact. I would have remained silent, but the particular issue that caused me to rise to my feet is one that has been addressed in this Parliament ad nauseam, but it is quite clear that the very distinguished Member for Siparia is either unwilling or unable to accept to hear the argument.

To tell this Parliament that Trinidad and Tobago is doing well because of high oil prices, that was what she said, is really to completely misrepresent the facts of the case. The production of Venezuela is two and one-half billion barrels per day. The production of Mexico is 2.9 million barrels per day; Nigeria, 2.4/2.5 million barrels per day; Iran, 4 million barrels per day; Saudi Arabia, 11 million barrels per day; and Trinidad and Tobago, 115,000 barrels per day. The Member for Siparia talked about oil. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: And gas.

Hon. P. Manning: I am coming to it. The Member for Siparia talked about oil and, therefore, when you are talking about countries that have benefitted as a result of high oil prices, Trinidad and Tobago is not to be counted among that number. Look at the production of those countries in relation to our own production. Look at it; 115,000 barrels per day and falling. There was a time

when our production was 240,000 barrels per day in 1978. That is no longer so. It has declined and more and more we are earning less and less from oil. I would be the first to admit that the rise in the oil prices internationally has indeed enhanced our revenue position, but to give the impression that it is high oil prices that has put us in a position to embark upon as ambitious a development programme on which Trinidad and Tobago has embarked, is to misrepresent those facts almost completely. I take issue with the Member for Siparia who has been in this Parliament long enough to have known better.

I want to ask the Member for Siparia. What was the gas production in Trinidad and Tobago in 1991? How many ammonia plants did Trinidad and Tobago have in 1991, when the PNM came back in the government, a government of which she was a part; the National Alliance for Reconstruction Government between 1986—1991? How many ammonia plants were there? How many methanol plants were there? How much LNG did Trinidad and Tobago export in 1991? That is the question, because they give the impression it is happenstance. They give the impression that the policy of the PNM has absolutely nothing to do with it, but that we happen to be beneficiaries of an international situation over which we had absolutely no control. That is what they are trying to say. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In 1991, there were about three ammonia plants in the country. Today there are 10. In 1991, there were no more than three or four methanol plants in the country. Today there are seven and two of them are the largest in the world; all of that, and they did not build themselves. Those plants did not construct themselves, nor did people just look at Trinidad and Tobago and like us and decide to come and construct gas plants here. It was because of the climate that existed in Trinidad and Tobago for investments; the very propitious climate that makes the country an attractive destination for investment dollars. That is the reality of it. The climate is a function of government policy. It is not a function purely of international prices in the international market, over which, at that time we had no control. I am very careful to say that at that time we had no control.

I travelled to Germany in 1993 and I interfaced with a company called Fritz Werner. We signed a memorandum of understanding for the construction of four plants. All four have been constructed. That happened in 1993. All four have been constructed ammonia plants. Prior to that, they did not exist. If today the price that we get for gas, that goes into ammonia manufacture, is among the highest of all our gas prices, that is to say—higher than the price we get for LNG, and that is a fact—Trinidad and Tobago is able to benefit from it, only because of policies

pursued in our first incarnation between 1991—1995, where we pursued a policy to attract these investments. We went out of our way. Ask yourself the question. How many ammonia plants were built between 1986—1991? The answer is none. How many methanol plants were built between 1986—1991? The answer is none and there is a reason for it. The reason is that hon. Members opposite, several of them, were part of that government, including the Member for Siparia who took the view—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Partap: The price was low.

Hon. P. Manning: The price was low? Read the NAR manifesto of 1986.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I was not part of that. [*Interruption*]

Hon. P. Manning: You were not part of it? Are you now disclaiming maternity? What are you doing my lady? You were very much involved in it. We were—maternity—very much involved in it. They had a twisted view of PNM policy and they took the position—listen to what the NAR manifesto said—that the mega projects on which the PNM was embarked in the energy sector were sunset industries. I know where it came from. It came from the finest minds. They were sunset industries and the bright boys of the NAR, with the superior cerebral capacity—that was how it was described—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Fine minds.

Hon. P. Manning: That was improved upon. Fine minds? That was minor. It was a cerebral capacity. I think that is how it was described. They said that the NAR, with these new and exciting ideas as they call them, would move away from the paradigm that the PNM had pursued of developing mega projects and instead would develop, in the energy sector, new subsectors; the viability of which would be based on the domestic market. That was what they had in the manifesto. Correct or not correct?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, why is it the Government finds so much difficulty in giving the population the price of gas at times, when you can stand here and say that the price of gas given to ammonia was different? Is it not right to give the population some idea? Why is it being hidden all the time by saying that it would be competitive when you give the answer?

Hon. P. Manning: I am going to get back to where I was, but let me spend a minute to answer the hon. Member for Caroni East. That question goes to the root of state enterprises and the role that state enterprises plays. A state enterprise is subjected to certain considerations of disclosure in the Parliament that private

companies are not subjected to. What in fact you are saying is anybody who enters into commercial transactions with state enterprises which, in the business community, are secret transactions; if as a result of parliamentary requirements, state enterprises are mandated to make these secret arrangements public, then the advantage that would have been gained by those who are part and parcel of those arrangements is an advantage which would disappear. They would find a place like Trinidad and Tobago unattractive in which to invest. That is the reality of it and you know it. That is so. *[Interruption]* Find out how.

Experience in government is something that you cannot pay for and if I give you a point of view, I give you on the basis of my own experience. My own experience is that it is not in your interest to do that. These are private arrangements that are secret between two parties and if one party discloses elements of it, then normally what that does is that it terminates it. In fact, the minute you start to enter into these discussions, you sign a non-disclosure agreement. That is the reality of it. The lawyers on that side should know it.

It was NAR's policy to develop new subsectors in the energy sector, the viability of which would be based on the domestic market. To say something like that is to signal that you have no idea at all about the energy sector; a market of 1.3 million people.

It is not like China, where the market is 1,300 million, a thousand times the size of Trinidad and Tobago. It is not like the United States, where the market is 300 million people. It is not like the United Kingdom, where the market is 65 or 70 million. It is not like Nigeria, where the market is 150 million people—1.3 million people. How much production of an ammonia plant; a world-scale ammonia plant, does Trinidad and Tobago consume? That is less than half of 1 per cent for the whole of Trinidad and Tobago. We have 10 of them in the country now.

What are you doing to develop new subsectors? What subsectors are there? We sat and waited between 1986—1991 to see what were these new subsectors. Mercifully they realized their error by 1989. It took them three years to realize their error, but it was too late to recover. By the time we got back into government, it took us one year to re-establish the contact we had prior to demitting office in 1995 and we were able to take up where we left off in 1986, to continue the development of Trinidad and Tobago on the basis of the development of our natural gas resources. It is a fact. For the Member for Siparia to come and say that it was high prices, she did not say gas, she said oil.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Oil and gas.

Hon. P. Manning: Okay, I would consider oil and gas. To say that it is high prices for oil and gas that have resulted in the fortunate revenue position in which we find ourselves, is to dismiss out-of-hand the fact that there was a People's National Movement, there was policy and there was vision, is to dismiss it and we would have none of that. It was the vision for national development. Our vision is that we will make Trinidad and Tobago into a modern industrial state, the basis of which will be natural gas exports, based on ammonia/methanol, iron and steel and aluminium and plastics. That is it.

8.30 p.m.

Since 1975 we decided that. We pursued that, but when they came in they did not do it the first time and they did not do it the second time. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me make it clear that if today Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing an enhanced revenue position, it is much more a function of the policy positions adopted by the PNM than it is the question of purely high prices which existed in the international marketplace. [*Desk thumping*] Folks, you all have to listen to me tonight. You do not say those things in this Parliament when I sit here. Do not say them, because they are not true. [*Interruption*]

If we did not export LNG, to what extent would we have benefited from those prices? Member for Caroni East, it was a policy position of 1992; a complete reversal of the PNM's policy in that year when prior to that—I was very much guilty of it. I was one of those persons who adopted the position that you do not export natural gas or any additional value added to it. Therefore, LNG did not form part of the PNM's policy. I have said it before in this Parliament and I am saying it again tonight.

In 1992, three ministers from the then government visited Amoco in Houston, Texas, and I had a presentation from them. What emerged from that visit on the basis of their seismic surveys was that we have far more natural gas than we thought we had, and unless we took steps to develop that gas, we would end up with a phenomenon called stranded gas. That is to say gas that cannot be developed because no market exists. There was a reduction in the exploration programme at a time when our oil production was declining and it was something that we could not have afforded. If, therefore, you wanted to stimulate oil production, you had to embark on an enhanced exploration programme, because gas was being found to a far greater extent than oil, and unless we took decisions that would allow for a market output for the gas that was discovered, there would have been no exploration and oil production would have disappeared. That is the reality.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on that basis, a reversal came and I was proud to be a part of it. We reversed a decision of many years standing where we agreed to allow natural gas to be exported in liquefied form. It was a clear policy decision. Today, our natural gas production is about 4.2 billion cubic feet per day; 2.5 of that is exported by way of LNG. In fact, because of the oil prices today, if we did not take the 1992 decision, we would not have been able to benefit from any export of natural gas. So, it is not prices; it is more a function of the Government's policy. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me say something else. We started the LNG trains, and we were unable to complete them before we demitted office in 1995. The negotiations went on for Train 1 after we demitted office. When we returned to office, we found the negotiations for Trains 1, 2 and 3 far advanced that our ability to significantly influence the terms of those arrangements was effectively circumscribed. We could not do anything about it then, because it was too far gone.

Today, we have four trains and we negotiated Train 4. When one looks at the revenues to Trinidad and Tobago from Train 4 and when one compares them to the revenues of Trains 1, 2 and 3, one would find that Trinidad and Tobago is benefitting to a far greater extent from exports from Train 4 in Atlantic LNG in Point Fortin than from Trains 1, 2 and 3. What that means now is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has to sit and ask itself the question: What do we do? Is that acceptable to us?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is it Trains 1, 2, and 3 put together?

Hon. P. Manning: I am not able to make that point, because I have not added them up. The revenues from Train 4 far outweigh the revenues from any one of those. [*Interruption*] It is the negotiated arrangements. All I am saying is since that is so, and since the considerations that existed when Trains 1, 2 and 3 were negotiated and put in place, perhaps the time has come for Trinidad and Tobago to reconsider those arrangements. All I would say is that the Prime Minister proposes very shortly to travel to Spain and England—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: It is not a Repsol!

Hon. P. Manning:—and we are going to talk with Repsol, British Gas and BP. That is all I would say about that. It is not fortune only, but it is a policy. In the same way, if we have a squatting problem that has emerged in this country in a big way, it is policy that has led to that in many instances, and a policy of which hon. Members opposite must share some blame.

I remember at the Corinth Train Line, a former Member of Parliament, Mr. John Humphrey—what constituency was he from?

Hon. Member: St. Augustine.

Hon. P. Manning:—told people to go down on the line in my own constituency and do not listen to me. He said that they are squatting there and they all have developed prescriptive rights. Do you understand? Who stays and who goes was not a matter for us, but a matter for him. If we have to be guided by Members opposite that is what they are saying. It was a matter for him. He told them do not leave and Manning cannot move them from there and so on. When he was saying that, we were trying to say to people that the conditions under which they are living are unacceptable to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and that they were living in substandard conditions and our aspirations for them are for a standing of living much higher than that. [*Interruption*] Listen, you had your chance. Why are you getting so jumpy? Sit and relax and enjoy the ride, okay. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Do not go and tell the people that they have a right to stay in the squalor in which they are living, and no parliamentary representative and no government could tell them anything about moving from there and so forth.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a credit to the sagacity of our citizens that they did not listen to him nor did they listen to the Member for Tabaquite who comes now and tells them the same thing. We met with the people and there were big meetings and so on, but the minute the Member for Tabaquite heard that the meeting was taking place he came after us. He paid one or two persons and started trouble on the line. It went on for five minutes, but it did not take them long to realize that if they look at the Member for Tabaquite and the Member for San Fernando East, whom would you believe is really a non-issue. [*Desk thumping*]

I suspect the Member for Siparia would like to agree with me, but she is unable—as opposed to the Member for Chaguanas West—to submit at this time and at this forum, but that is the fact. They rejected out of hand what the Member for Tabaquite has been trying to do there. I am pleased to report to this honourable House at this time, that in my own constituency where there are a number of squatters, area by area we have been removing squatters from there and putting them in the new development of Tarodale Gardens. [*Desk thumping*]

In other words, in one fell swoop, we are moving them from conditions of underdevelopment to First World status. Do you know what they are doing now? The ladies are washing their hair during the day and drying it in the front veranda of their homes with the breeze. That is what they are doing in Tarodale Gardens.

[*Interruption*] Hurry dog eats raw meat. Sit down! Why are you getting so jumpy? We have the entire night to talk about it. [*Interruption*] Name constituency by constituency and I am going to tell you—that is what we have done in San Fernando East and there is where a lot of the squatting is. The squatting was a function of some of the activities of those Members on the other side, because they told people to go and squat in San Fernando East. Do you know why San Fernando East? They were trying to bring about significant demographic changes in the country. That is what they were doing. That is voter padding. They were trying to bring about significant demographic changes in the country and I was aware of it.

Why are they so jumpy? We are building houses today in PNM constituencies, in UNC constituencies and in constituencies that are on the border. In other words, where we have allocated houses has nothing to do with political affiliation, but it has to do with supply and demand and it has to do with need. [*Desk thumping*]

When the Member for Siparia gets up here and gives the impression that so many persons want houses—they are bad-talking us all over the place—do you know why that is so? There are 126,000 applications and there are 20,000 houses. What do you expect? It is aiding and abetting by hon. Members opposite. Do not come to this Parliament with any sanctimonious behaviour to give the impression that you are like Caesar's wife. If Caesar's wife sees you she would turn her back. It is not above suspicion. They are guilty of doing that and then they come to this Parliament and give impressions that are entirely incorrect—the PNM is guilty of this and that.

They went and influenced people, but it is a supply and demand. We cannot build houses fast enough. We knew it before we came into Government and we committed ourselves to 10,000 houses a year, 8,000 in the public sector; 2,000 in the private sector. That was the commitment. It is \$1.5 billion a year to be able to do that. That is a lot of money to be able to do that. Now that we have reached full employment in this country, we have other problems associated with that. We have to watch it and decide how best to do it without heating much of the economy. It is a question of supply and demand. It is going to continue for a while, so people are going to be interviewed by the TTMF and they are going to have to wait, because the houses are not there.

In fact, we have been building at a rate even faster than the ability of the public utilities to service the houses. In some instances, there is no electricity and there are instances of people going into houses without electricity and water. That is the reality. We are building them so fast that the public utilities have been unable to keep pace with them. That is the reality. These are the problems of a country that has embarked on an ambitious development rate and programmes. That is the problem.

It is not that we are saying that it is perfect, and it would never be. We could always say to do this instead of that, because different people would have different priorities, but our priorities are clearly established. We said that we will build houses and we are building them fast. Presently, there are houses built and people are not occupying them because they are not yet completed. They do not have water and they do not have electricity and, therefore, for some it looks like the houses are there and nobody is getting them. The houses are there but they are not available. That is what hon. Members should be saying instead of going and giving people the impression that the wicked PNM Government has houses and they do not want to give it to them.

If you want to win us, win us fair and square. Win us on policy and on the ability to implement. Win us this way. [*Interruption*] Any day of the week you are going to get licks. Name the day of the week and I am going to tell you how much licks—[*Laughter*] Do not worry about that. Who squats and who lives where is a matter for the court. They are saying that and they passed a law in 1997 to regularize squatters, and that is a matter for the court. So, if somebody goes to squat in a place, what you must do is take them to court, and Members opposite are telling them to go and squat in contravention of a law. There is a law. It has happened in San Fernando East.

After having spent money to construct houses at Tarodale Hills and money to relocate people and give them incentives to move—you help them break down their houses; you give them a truck to help them move; and you give them special arrangements for their children to go to school and so forth—the minute you clear the place out, they go and tell people to go and squat there. So, when people go there and squat, what do you expect the Government to do? Shall we leave them and go to court? You all know that is the problem. That is one of the issues today in Zimbabwe, South Africa. That is an issue that is causing serious problems. We are not unaware of these international developments.

So, we see the problems that those things cause elsewhere, do you think we are going to let that develop here. We are not letting it happen and Members—

8.45 p.m.

Mr. Partap: You are breaking down the houses.

Hon. P. Manning: We just cleared the place—[*Interruption*] Listen to me, man, you had your chance, so you could talk if you want—and somebody moves in there to build, what should we do? Tell me what we should do! Leave them? It is—especially when you all tell them to go and do it—irresponsibility in the extreme.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Prime Minister, in the same way that in San Fernando East you were able to get alternative accommodation and provide alternative accommodation, as you admitted, why is it that there is this difficulty then not to be able to provide this alternative arrangement for other constituencies?

Hon. P. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, Rome was not built in one day. [*Desk thumping*] The policy is to do it over the entire country; everybody is going to be relocated; that is the idea. Meanwhile our responsibility is to contain the expansion of squatting communities; that is our responsibility. Do not encourage it. Let me tell you what happens when you encourage it. For people to get a house all they now do is go and squat, because that is what they are telling them to do. If you go and squat, that is to say you go and break the law.

What we are now being told is that they must now be given priority for housing over people who never broke any law. You have equity in this matter too; there are considerations of equity. Do not go and do those things. That is what you all are doing and then coming to the Parliament and giving all kinds of impressions. That is not so.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We are not encouraging squatting. Not at all. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. P. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Caroni East— and you see this 15 and 20 years, let me tell you something about this 15 and 20 years. Everybody who squats comes and tells you that. You know what people forget? There is now a thing called "Google Earth". You know what Google Earth is? I want to show you Google Earth map of my own constituency, I do not know when they did it. It shows the Brian Lara Stadium under construction; it shows Tarodale Hills under construction; it shows the new swimming pool in Cocoyea Village, we just opened that.

All of that in a photograph that I got off Google Earth. You should see the map of my constituency, who is in place and who is not in place is easily found out by us. So, when people come and tell you that they are there for 25 years, all you do is pull your aerial map and you can see it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I know national security doing it.

Hon. P. Manning: You do not want it to be in national security, you could do it on your own. You go home tonight and do it for your constituency. You know how to do it? In other words, technology has overtaken the strategy of hon. Members opposite. You could now see it. [*Desk thumping*] Do not come with that.

The Member for Siparia must have gotten a document that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago now wants a rose garden at the Prime Minister's residence

like the one in the White House. That is "dotish" talk. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago now wants a rose garden at the residence he occupies for the time being like the one in the White House.

Mr. Partap: That is not true?

Hon. P. Manning: No, that is not true. Does that surprise you? Terra Forma is a company that has a landscaping contractual arrangement to deal with the residence of the Prime Minister. Before we moved into that residence, a plan was agreed to and has been implemented. Now that we are there, there are additional requirements especially for the privacy of different parts of that compound, designed as it has been for official entertainment. Terra Forma therefore had been asked to put forth a proposal in this regard and they put forth a proposal that completely misunderstands the purpose for which the soliciting of the proposal was intended. It is a proposal of Terra Forma.

What the Member for Siparia did not know and could not have known, is that at 10.00 a.m. tomorrow we have a meeting with Terra Forma, where we will formally reject the proposal they have put forward and give them new guidelines. You see, somebody dropped some document on your desk and you want to—The Member did not say that a document came into her possession that suggests this, she said the Prime Minister wants a rose garden in the Prime Minister's residence similar to the one they have at the White House.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I invited all Members of the Opposition, through the Member for Tabaquite, to visit the Prime Minister's residence and Diplomatic Centre.

Mr. Warner: When?

Hon. P. Manning: Any time you are ready. "Ramesh never tell you that?" Sorry, the Member for Tabaquite. I bet you the Member for Chaguanas knows.

Mr. Warner: No.

Hon. P. Manning: "You breaksing for your partner." I have extended an invitation to all hon. Members opposite and I will do it again. I will do it publicly this time, because I did it privately and they did not know, somebody did not talk, so I will do it publicly now. I extend an invitation to all hon. Members to visit the Prime Minister's residence and Diplomatic Centre. [*Desk thumping*] So when you talk in the future—[*Interruption*] You want to go tonight? "Leh we go tonight; afterwards, let's go, okay?" Bring Caroni East with you, please, if he would go anywhere with you that is. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Do not worry we were in Germany together.

Hon. P. Manning: Germany together? Well, bring St. Augustine with you too.

Mr. Warner: "I coming by myself."

Hon. P. Manning: "You coming by yourself?" I will treat you well, I promise you that. [*Interruption*] You are coming to be educated then, is it? But I have extended that invitation so that much of the misinformation fed to them when they talk about the residence and diplomatic centre in future, they will be talking so from a basis of fact and not foolishness.

So, the invitation is open whenever you wish to come, please let us know. Then nobody will get up in this House and say, that the Prime Minister wants a cascading waterfall in his yard; that is "dotish" talk. There is a water feature in the residence, you know. You would like the design. The design of the residence and diplomatic centre is a very advanced design, and it was designed for official entertainment.

Trinidad and Tobago is assuming new prominence in the Caribbean, in the Western Hemisphere and in the world. [*Desk thumping*] Really, it is how you see your own country and what you make of the country of which you are a part. Next year, as you know, we are going to host the Fifth Summit of the Americas, that is 34 nations, and it is expected that the new president of the United States will make his first overseas visit to that meeting in Trinidad and Tobago on April 17 and 18 next year. [*Desk thumping*]

In November, we have the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, 54 countries are going to be there. All of these heads of state are coming to Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is growing in importance in the region and in the world; that is a reality. It is difficult for some of them to accept it, but that is indeed so. Next year Trinidad and Tobago will host the first Caribbean Games— [*Desk thumping*]—at a time when athletes have distinguished themselves at the Olympics. That is going to be a world event next year.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Prime Minister as you are on that, we have Carifesta Games. Why is it necessary to have a Carifesta and a Caricom Games. Is this your idea? We understand it is your idea. What is it you are trying to do? There is a Carifesta and a Caricom Games. Something is wrong. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. P. Manning: I am sorry, I was not aware that there was a Carifesta Games, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] You mean Hampton Games?

Mr. Imbert: No, Carifta he means, Carifta.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I will get it for you. You see you know it well.

Hon. P. Manning: Carifta Games. No, no, I was assisted by my colleague here. Carifta Games are entirely different; yes, it is junior games. *[Interruption]* Well, Sir forgive me, I probably have a misunderstanding of it. I attended Carifta Games in Tobago, so I have an idea of what it is. What you are seeing is an entirely different ball game. This is the first Caribbean Games, and athletics is one of the main areas in which we will be involved, at a time when Caribbean athletes have distinguished themselves to such an extent at the Olympics in Beijing: the Jamaicans, the Bahamians, the Dutch Antilles, Trinidad and Tobago. So when those games come next year that is a world event, and we will see to it that the athletics are competing in a world event. That is the importance Trinidad and Tobago is beginning to assume in the international community.

There are obligations that go with it. The Member for Chaguanas West knows that well and understands what that means, even if he would not be forthright with us and say so in this forum, but he would say it privately, I am sure. That is reality. I do not know if you know, one country coming to the 5th Summit of the Americas next year is coming with 29 executive aircraft, which means we have to do something at Piarco about executive aircraft and how we receive them and so on. We have to put it in place.

Mr. Warner: Which airport?

Hon. P. Manning: Piarco, the south terminal. We have a south and a north terminal, we can use the south terminal and convert that to executive jet travel, and to cargo and also military use. We could do that, so there is a plan. We are not fishing; that is where Trinidad and Tobago has gone.

So, hon. Members opposite can continue to see Trinidad and Tobago as a penny/ha'penny operation if they wish, but we have a different vision. We have a vision of developed country status by 2020 and moving in that direction very, very fast. When the budget is presented on Monday, I am sure the Minister of Finance will have many surprises for you all, but in the debate my colleagues are going to get up and you are going to see.

I was talking to the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; we have gone much further in science, technology and tertiary education than we thought we would have reached by this time. We set ourselves a target of 60 per cent of the secondary school graduates accessing tertiary education by 2015. When we came in it was 11 per cent; it is now already 35 per cent, 36 per cent and we are checking the facts. *[Desk thumping]*

Three years ago, we did two things, we cut the taxes for the non-oil sector to 25 per cent, and we said free tertiary education. The thing has snowballed as indeed our economy has snowballed as a result of the tax cut. So, if today we have higher revenues from Value Added Tax; if today we have higher revenues from corporation taxes, it is not by happenstance, it is by policy, and we are in a position to write the textbooks. I could tell you. Three years ago when we took the decision to cut the tax rate to 25 per cent, we calculated that on a straight arrangement we would have experienced in that year a reduction of \$1.5 billion in revenue and therefore we had to do it at a certain time when we did things with oil taxes and so on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to report to this honourable House that in that particular year the reduction in taxes that we experienced was nil, in fact it went up, because of better compliance and an increase in economic activity to the point where our tax revenues went up instead of went down. That is the reality. That is what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago under the Government of the People's National Movement. Those are the facts, and Members opposite could decry us as much as they want. The facts as you say are very stubborn things, they do not go away. You check those facts. In the budget debate we will have a lot to say, but for the time being I just thought I should use this opportunity to set the record straight.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before I begin my contribution specifically on this Motion to deal with the supplementary appropriation, I would like to make some comments on some of the statements made, in particular by the Member of Parliament for Siparia. I need to do this because it is important to correct the records of this honourable House, and certainly to ensure that the national community, whether unintentionally or otherwise is not misled.

The first thing I would like to speak to are the comments and statements at length by the Member of Parliament for Siparia with regard to Tobago, and making the statement that no allocations were made under the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) for Tobago, which is the matter before us.

9.00 p.m.

I would like to inform the honourable House, Madam Deputy Speaker, that no resources are allocated to Tobago under the IDF. It is my understanding that a legal opinion was obtained, and based on that legal opinion that a decision was made. However, funds for capital expenditure are made for Tobago, but not under the IDF, but under the Consolidated Fund for the provisions for the Tobago House of Assembly.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

When I speak to that I want to mention that in making the allocation for Tobago—in fact I met with the Chief Secretary just a few days ago and I certainly will say that the meeting was a very good meeting, a very pleasant meeting in terms of dealing with the issue of budget allocations for Tobago. Why I say that is that you may be aware of, Member of Parliament for Siparia, through you, Mr. Speaker, that a few years ago a decision was made by a dispute resolution tribunal with regard to the allocation to Tobago, and a decision was made that whatever the budget was for the year that a minimum of 4.03 per cent is to be allocated to Tobago.

So, if the budget went up, the amount allocated to Tobago, of course, would go up, because it would be a percentage of that total budget. So, Tobago gets every year a minimum of 4.03 per cent of the national budget. I want to say too, those moneys—whatever unused moneys and there are always unused moneys every year—are not returned to the Consolidated Fund. By virtue of the arrangement, whatever moneys are unused those moneys remain with the Tobago House of Assembly, so they have a considerable build-up of surplus.

In addition to the allocation made to Tobago under the Tobago House of Assembly under the Consolidated Fund, by that formula that was arrived at, there are a number of large projects in Tobago that come under the line ministries from the Central Government. There are five major capital projects which do not form part of that 4.03 per cent which is allocated to Tobago and the surplus is not returned to the Consolidated Fund, it remains as part of the surplus funds for Tobago. These projects are—and I think I have four of them—the Cove Project that we mentioned, I believe it comes under the Ministry of Public Utilities; the Pipeline Project—and I think the amount is over \$60 million—comes under the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries; Vanguard Hotel, over \$50 million, again, under the relevant ministry—I believe the Ministry of Tourism—the Scarborough Hospital, the completion of the Scarborough Hospital, over \$20 million under the Ministry of Health. *[Interruption]* When we mentioned the pipeline—

Mr. Imbert: It is \$65 million.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: It is \$65 million? In any event the point I am making is this—so to come to this honourable House and give the impression that somehow Tobago is being starved of funds, somehow Tobago was being neglected; I cannot leave the national community with such an impression. In fact, the opposite is true. Tobago was well taken care of, the Member for Tobago East spoke on that matter and the arrangement that is in place did not happen since I

have come into Government; it has not happened since I became the Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara.

So, it really surprises me that the Member of Parliament for Siparia is not aware of those facts. Certainly, I would be surprised with myself if a year or two years from now that I, having heard this, and I am sure it is not the first time the Member of Parliament saw the estimates—because there are several budgets and I am sure the Member has contributed to them. So, it surprises me that the Member is unaware of that. In the event that the Member was unaware—I give her the benefit of that—I want to correct that for the benefit of the national community and those members of the national community from Tobago.

So I move on now, because the Member asked specifically for me to answer a question and I am pleased to answer the question. Mr. Speaker, this is the second time that I was asked the question. Perhaps on the first occasion it was from, I believe, the Member of Parliament for Caroni East, but I will answer it again. The question that was posed to me by the Member of Parliament for Siparia, and I am sure that the Member was there on that occasion, [*Interruption*] but perhaps the Member forgot; I only want to be kind and to be gracious and say that the Member has forgotten, but the issue is with regard to the Auditor General's publication of the public accounts, and the impression that is being given using that as the basis for determining the strength and the health of the economy, using those facts to say that on that basis we have been running a deficit, and using the Auditor General's report.

What the Member for Siparia is not telling this House, and I give her the benefit that she perhaps does not know though I have said it before, is that the Auditor General only looks at moneys deposited in the Consolidated Fund. The point about that is, it does not include—and I do not have the whole list but I have some—the unemployment fund, because those moneys go directly to those funds, they do not pass through the Consolidated Fund, \$3.7 billion; the Green Fund, over \$1 billion and the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$2 billion. With regard to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, although it passes through the Consolidated Fund it is treated as a debit, so it is subtracted from, so to speak, the funds in the Consolidated Fund, so it is treated as a debit against the Consolidated Fund.

As we said this afternoon, and although it is not before us, because it is not appropriated, it is a charge on the Consolidated Fund, the transfer to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund by way of a charge is, I believe, \$4.7 billion for this fiscal year. So, what do we rely on to determine whether we are running a deficit or whether we have a surplus in a particular fiscal year? We rely on the Central Bank records, because those records are complete. And when the Member chose to

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. K. NUNEZ-TESTEIRA]

Friday, September 19, 2008

speaking about deficit and surplus, and the Member did quote from something I did say on another occasion, I believe it was the first supplementary appropriation since I have been Minister of Finance in January. First, this administration, before this present administration, this Government and this PNM Government have always run a surplus. This PNM Government.

However, when they were in Government, as my record showed, there were three years in which they ran at a deficit. Three years! That is not the Auditor General's report I am dealing with; I am dealing with Central Bank Report. Three years in which they ran a deficit. I have not really come here this evening to speak to that. I just want to, before I move on, because I need to correct some things that were said. It is not right to leave those unchallenged in the House, because to do so would leave it as though it were in fact true.

One of the things that the Member for Siparia mentioned is Lehman Brothers; there were a number of other huge financial institutions that have crashed in the United States in serious difficulties as a result of the subprime mortgage crisis. But the point that was being made I believe, was when Lehman Brothers was mentioned was with regard to Central Bank, and the concern that the Member for Siparia expressed with regard to the concern as to whether in fact the Central Bank had invested funds in Lehman Brothers and perhaps others, and therefore was concerned as to how it is going to impact on our financial position.

The Member may not have read the briefing to the media—all the media houses—giving a statement on, and this is the heading: “The implications of recent developments in international financial markets for Trinidad and Tobago.” This ministry, and this Government is a responsive government and it is a responsible government. So, immediately we issued a statement, and I want to include in this statement, the information was provided to us by the Central Bank. This is to ease the fears and concerns of the national community and that of the Member of Parliament for Siparia. In the statement and I quote:

“The Central Bank is still examining how these developments”—meaning the financial crisis—“could impact on the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. The Governor of the bank has informed me that the bank has no holdings of paper by any of these institutions. The very small proportion of banks’ foreign assets that were being managed by these institutions are ring fenced since they are not on the balance sheets of these institutions. The Central Bank is now in touch with the commercial banks and the insurance companies to clarify whether these institutions had any direct exposures to the failed investment banks. Our preliminary indication is that it is minimal.”

So, I want to not make light of what is happening in the international market, but I just want to say that gives any measure of comfort to the other side, and certainly to the national community, in specific reference to the issue raised and the question raised by the Member of Parliament for Siparia. No, Lehman Brothers, we have no investments in Lehman Brothers and that comes from the Central Bank.

The other point that I wish to raise, and it really concerns a comment that was made, not only from the Member of Parliament for Siparia but also the Member of Parliament for Caroni East, and while one does not want to appear to be splitting hairs over what occurred on the financial committee when we had our meeting, a meeting which I chaired this week, I do want to say that—and I want to be careful how I say this, because I admit, I think the Member for Chaguanas West said to us, we are babies or something to that effect—

Mr. Warner: Neophytes.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: I think you said babies too, though, [*Inaudible*] That too, right. Babies in Parliament—and I do not have any problem with that at all because it is true. [*Interruption*] We are babies in the sense that we are here 10 months. It is remarkable, it is amazing but it is true, but the reason I made that point is this, [*Interruption*] the other side has been here a longer time and the other side has sat and been Members of financial committee meetings, so they are well aware of the proceed and process of this House, that I am quite sure of.

I have a record of the minutes of that meeting. In the minutes of that meeting the Member of Parliament for Siparia made a lot of heavy weather over the fact that at 1.30 p.m. “this is when we got these estimates”. But what the Member of Parliament for Siparia is not saying to you is this—this is the first point—when we were asked to present those estimates, I gave an undertaking and the minutes did say, Monday, but I will continue, hopefully, being as honest and transparent. I do believe I gave an undertaking which was not recorded in the minutes that by Friday, and by Friday the minutes were given. That was the undertaking that was given verbally and that was the undertaking that was honoured. [*Desk thumping*]

But more than that, my understanding is—and I admit I am the neophyte—and from several other meetings, that the normal procedure is that those estimates are given and presented on the very day of the budget—

Hon. Member: And they got it in front.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:—and they got it in front, so this is the point. So, to come into this honourable House and to give the impression, it is 1.30 p.m.;

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. K. NUNEZ-TESTEIRA]

Friday, September 19, 2008

anyone listening in the national community would get the impression that they have been done wrong and we were unfair. That is the kind of mischief that is difficult for me to understand—being as you say a neophyte—because one of the things you are doing is taking advantage—I say it—of my newness and the newness of this side. That is what it is. It is taking advantage of the fact that you hope that I do not know, and if I do not know I cannot challenge it. [*Interruption*] That, I think, is not something to be admired, and I want to be careful, I am using my words carefully. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of thing that I have to say; the Member of Parliament who is my colleague, disappoints me.

9.15 p.m.

When I say disappoint, because there were many things in today's contribution—and I do agree with the Prime Minister, that the Member of Parliament is an eloquent speaker. I agree with that because one must be gracious in these matters, but one of the difficulties of listening is—I do not know if I want to say sticking to technicalities and then using those technicalities in my respectful opinion to mislead this honourable House. Why do I say this? Let me first start by really focusing on the purpose for which we are here this evening and it is the Supplementary Appropriation Bill, and this is what the Motion is about. In fact, it was almost as if the Member of Parliament for Siparia read my mind because I actually looked and said, but this is how I would have to approach this whole Motion.

The first thing that I was going to look at was the basis for the appropriation. The Member of Parliament spoke on it and mentioned section 113 of the Constitution, but section 113(3) of the Constitution makes provision for supplementary appropriations. So there is provision in the legislation, should the need arise, for one to come back to the House for supplementary appropriation. When I looked back again, as the Member of Parliament for Siparia did herself, we looked back and saw that coming for supplementary appropriations—and I would go through the reasoning for it—is not something unusual for the other side because as I had mentioned on that occasion—at that time in the former debate you did not agree with me—I had to bring the information to this honourable House, and having brought the information for the honourable House, we discovered that nearly every year that they were in office, that they went for supplementary appropriation. Nothing is wrong with that. At the time when the debate was being heard in January, one got the impression that something was wrong, something irresponsible, imprudent in having to do so, but we cleared that up. I am seeing the Member for Caroni Central agreeing that, of course, there is no difficulty with that.

The reason why one has to go for a supplementary appropriation if I may with your leave, Mr. Speaker, is because when one is setting the budget for the fiscal year, one is doing it on the basis of a projection, what you project the revenues to be for that particular fiscal year. As we know and the Prime Minister so eloquently stated, our economy is more a gas-based than an oil-based, but it is an energy-based economy. Therefore, the basis of determining your revenue, we used a combination of the oil and gas prices; what is projected to be the oil and gas price for that particular fiscal year. We do not do it by plucking a figure out of the air, by plucking something out of a hat. We do it by using a formula which I know the other side should be familiar with because it was used by your good selves, except for one other inclusion which I will deal with. How do you arrive therefore, at that figure, at the budget price? We used these factors which the other side is aware of:

- projected prices from the International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook;
- OPEC trends; OPEC has a medium-term forecast; and
- we used their planning price used by the local oil companies. We also used the West Texas intermediate price which is used, based on the quality of the crude oil because that can vary.

So all of those factors, that is the oil price, we used together with the factors for the gas price. We used the Henry Hub gas price. We also used the export gas which is the gas directly exported from Atlantic LNG, and then we used the domestic gas price. So we used all of those prices and we added something in addition. We used an 11-year moving average and we did that by legislation. Why did we do that? In fact, the provision for that is under section 11(3) of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Why do we use an 11-year average? We used that to arrive at the ceiling price. In other words, you can go beneath that, but you cannot go above the ceiling price. So we used all of those factors and we calculated using a 11-year moving average. Why did we use an moving average? Because we know that the price of oil and gas—and we have seen it this fiscal year—is a commodity that is very volatile, so we try to smooth the price by using this moving average. This is by law under the legislation that this PNM administration passed.

So, I have gone through all that detail merely to make the point that in arriving at the budget price at the beginning of the fiscal year as we are going to be doing when we present the budget on Monday, we do not do it by vaps or by guesstimate, we do it using very clearly-thought-out factors and using a proper

method of calculation. As we know, things this year, at least for those who are in the energy industry and economies that are energy based, we did remarkably well. I would not go over what the Prime Minister, the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East had to say because he has said it well and I think it is clear that the fact that we have an energy-based economy and we are the largest exporter globally of methanol, urea and all the other figures that I know that we are all aware of, did not happen by chance.

The fact of the matter is, because of all those decisions, our economy is an energy-based economy by and large, and as a result of which the prices as we are well aware this year—and I heard one of the Members on the other side, I think it was the Member for Caroni East speaking about reaching about 140 and now it is down to 95. That even speaks to the level of volatility in the price of oil. In fact, I have some figures here and I am looking for them now, to give you an indication of the kind of movement that one experienced this year in terms of the movement in oil and gas, and it is truly remarkable. I think anybody who followed it on the television, watched Bloomberg or whatever they chose to, would have realized that it was a phenomenal movement. The point being from that, therefore, is that this year we saw the movement and the price of both oil and gas moving in a very upward movement and that to a large extent, contributed to the excellent performance of our economy. I am speaking to that in the sense of saying why it is we started off at one price in determining the budget and where we have ended up at the end of the fiscal year, the excellent performance of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I have figures here. When we look at it and we see a year-on-year change from the last year, we saw from January 2008, nearly 70 per cent change in the price of oil. In January 2008, it was 22 per cent in gas. In May, it was 95 per cent in oil and, in gas it was 48 per cent. In June, nearly 96.8 per cent in oil and in gas it was 72.5 per cent. All that merely speaks to, is the fact that the price of oil and gas went, if we are to speak in vernacular, through the roof. But that was not the only reason that the revenue streams were even far more impressive than even we had hoped—the oil and gas, also the fact of our tax revenue collection and in particular VAT. Our VAT collection was over \$1 billion more than we had projected. That spoke really to the buoyancy of the market and the economy, but it also spoke to the improvements in the system of tax collection.

On the last occasion, I spoke about the enforcement action that was taken and the establishment of a one-stop shop for registration. The point about it is that because of that implementation programme by the Board of Inland Revenue, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago was a far more impressive performance than

even we had anticipated. So, it was a combination of the price of oil and gas; it was a combination of our tax revenue collection.

Another reason was tax amnesty. We had a tax amnesty this year and there was a provision—in fact the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister in the 2007/2008 he proposed:

“...that there be an amnesty for tax penalties and interest on late filing of income and corporation tax returns. This amnesty is proposed because the Government believes that the tax liability to be collected, far outweighs the penalties and it will also encourage taxpayer compliance.”

In fact, the Prime Minister was right. From that effort we got over \$560 million in additional revenue.

Central Bank—there are other reasons, but these are the four basic reasons why we did even better than we expected. Why our revenues were so great at the end of the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2007/2008, and that is the Central Bank. We were asked about Lehman Brothers and whether we had invested in Lehman Brothers. I am pleased to tell this honourable House that in the 2007/2008 budget, the projected equity profits from the Central Bank was \$550 million. During this fiscal year, the Central Bank’s actual equity profits turn out to be \$1,655.3 million. That is an impressive performance by any standards.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have given the several reasons why this economy has done so well and in particular, in relation to the Appropriation Bill that is before us, the reasons why at the end of the fourth quarter, we have come now and ask for a supplementary appropriation of \$3.9 billion to be deposited into the Infrastructure Development Fund. I should add that while this is not before us, the revenue generated, net of expenditure at the end of fiscal year 2007/2008, is really \$7.9 billion. Over \$4 billion has been put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East explain it is by law that we must put a minimum of 60 per cent of the surplus revenues as we have done every year, and as the point has been made, on some occasions even more than the 60 per cent.

So approximately over \$4 billion additional funds have been deposited into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, but it is not before us here because it is a charge on the Consolidated Fund. What is before us here is the Infrastructural Development Fund, the \$3.9 billion that has been deposited there. What is the alternative? I heard the Member for Siparia say, “You are coming right at the end to come with these revenues.” We know that when we look at the revenues for the year, first quarter, second quarter and third quarter, we have an opportunity to

look at actual expenditure. At the end of the fourth quarter, what is your choice? If you do not appropriate that revenue from the Consolidated Fund by the end of the fiscal year, which in this case, is September 30, 2008, what is the alternative to that?

The alternative to that is that those moneys are to go back to the Central Bank reserves accounts, and the difficulty with that is if one were to do that, in order to continue the Government's infrastructural development plan, in order to continue to develop the country, the roads, the bridges and the drainage that we speak about; all those capital expenditures, if we were to take those moneys and treat them as surpluses and put them back into the Consolidated Fund, they would go into the Central Bank reserves and the only way we could access those funds is by deficit financing. That is how we could access them and to do that would be irresponsible because that would aggravate the inflation, a concern for all of us both on this side and the national community. So if one were to do that, we would be aggravating it.

In fact, we came to this honourable House with the Treasury Bonds Bill and for the very reason that we wanted to take some of the liquidity out of the system, put that money into a sterilized account in order to dampen the liquidity which is one of the main causes of inflation. So, what the hon. Member for Siparia is saying to us, is that the economy did much better and I gave all the reasons and we come to the fourth quarter. We have a surplus—it is really \$7.9 billion, but \$4 billion goes into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—now of \$3.9 billion. What the Member of Parliament for Siparia is saying to us, take that and put it to the Central Bank reserves, and when you want to—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar.: No, I did not say that. I said the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Nunez-Testheira: But you see the difficulty about what the Member of Parliament for Siparia—and I am glad she mentioned the HSF because that is one of the things, but I have to mention it now. I was hoping to use that when I was contributing to the debate. Because in fact, one of the things that was very impressive when we were preparing for the—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: I am seeing some bullets.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testheira: I have lots of bullets that is why I can speak about it. We have so many I can speak to this.

9.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that was very impressive was when we looked at our public savings. You have your gross national savings and you have your

public savings; you are really talking about Government savings. When we look at Trinidad and Tobago's savings as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP)—and the source of the information is the International Monetary Fund—it is showing that in 2006 it was 12.5 per cent of GDP; in 2007, 10.1 per cent of GDP. With the excellent performance of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, we anticipate that when we add that to the current accounts surplus, it would end up in the vicinity of 13 per cent of GDP.

If I say that figure *in vacuo*, you would not have a whole appreciation, but you could look at other countries' records. I use Canada, by way of example, because in getting ready I did not have the opportunity to look at all the figures; but I think we could accept Canada, because it is a developed nation, and I am benchmarking against a country that we would accept. When we look at Trinidad and Tobago, and compare Canada's public savings to ours—and I would go through the years: In 2003, for Trinidad and Tobago the public savings, as a percentage of GDP, was 5.3 per cent, for Canada, 2.2 per cent. In 2004, Trinidad and Tobago, 7.4 per cent; Canada 3.1 per cent; 2005, 11.4 per cent; Canada, 4 per cent. In 2006, 12.5 per cent; Canada, 3.7 per cent. The projected figure for 2007 was 10.1 per cent, for Canada, 3.7 per cent.

When you look at the savings profile of this Government—and you say to put more in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—the Government is prudent. The Government takes a balanced approach; we save because it is our responsibility to save. When you look at those figures, there is no doubt that this country and the Government is saving. I am not speaking about the reserves in the Central Bank; that is not counted when I talk about what the public savings are. It does not include the foreign exchange reserves, which are over US \$8.5 billion. I have not counted that when I spoke to this honourable House about our public savings; that is just the Government's public savings. When you look at those figures against what is happening in many of the other countries, it is impressive.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East made the point, and I want to say it again, because it is noteworthy. When the Member for Siparia wanted to split hairs about the question of debt, he made the point about the debt as a percentage of GDP. He spoke about the public sector debt, and he is right, we brought it down from about 50 per cent of GDP by 2007, to about 28 per cent of GDP. The particular point the Member spoke to was our foreign debt. Our foreign debt is about 5.3 per cent of GDP. I explained that the savings, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund on its own, not counting the \$4 billion that we just deposited, when we add it, it is about 11 per cent of GDP. We could pay off all our foreign debt. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Why do you not?

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Because of the nature of the contracts.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Why do you keep borrowing more?

Hon. Member: To keep a profile.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: What have we borrowed? Please! [*Crosstalk*]

My point, therefore, is that I have tried to explain to this honourable House the basis upon which we determine the budget for the particular fiscal year. I believe I have also explained how we ended up at the end of quarter four with that revenue position. What is the option? Do we take that \$3.9 billion and put it into the Central Bank reserves or do we appropriate it in the Infrastructure Development Fund?

I had to say it in the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee, because the Member seemed not to know that there was something called the Infrastructure Development Fund. I had to mention to the Member for Siparia that it was under her administration that the fund was set up. [*Crosstalk*] I did not use all those adjectives that the Member ascribed to me, but I did mention that it appeared to me—[*Interruption*—]but it happens all the time; it seems as though there are so many thing that the Member cannot remember.

I would say that the Infrastructure Development Fund was set up by the UNC administration under the Exchequer and Audit Act, in particular, under section 43(2). The Member for Siparia knows that unused funds—when you allocate funds for a ministry to do its work, at the end of the fiscal year unused funds must be returned to the Consolidated Fund, except there is some provision by law that excludes it; section 43(2) does that. [*Crosstalk*]

It was under their administration that the Infrastructure Development Fund was set up. [*Crosstalk*] That fund was set up for the Public Sector Investment Programme; it was set up for capital expenditure.

One of the things about the fund is that at the end of the fiscal year, according to the provisions of the legislation, it does not have to be returned to the Consolidated Fund; it remains in the Infrastructure Development Fund. You always take a conservative approach fixing your price, determining what your budget is going to be premised on, because oil and gas are volatile, you always go beneath the ceiling; any prudent government would do that. You anticipate, during the fiscal year, that you would do better, you would get more revenues, and it would give you the opportunity to continue your capital development.

It is in that light that those funds which are in the Infrastructure Development Fund can be utilized, can be appropriated, once the revenues for the year exceed the expenditure; you can access it to continue your work. That was the reason the provision was made, so those funds would be able to be accessed to continue the work of the Government. To come here this evening and give the impression that the IDF is some—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, order!

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Member for Siparia, when you were on your feet, you were very clear about not being interrupted; in fact, I heard you say *sotto voce*, but not so *sotto voce*, "Kamla, Kamla, Kamla." [*Desk thumping*] I heard you say that, and I respected you. When you said it I respected you, and I stopped speaking. I do not know if you asked for the Speaker's protection, but without the Speaker's protection, I did not interrupt you.

I have to question why you feel it so important now to interrupt me while I am speaking. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The Member for Diego Martin North/East was engaging me in conversation; there was no intention of interrupting you; so I apologize.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Oh, well, Member for Siparia, you disappoint me. You mean to say that the Member for Diego Martin North/East has that kind of power over you? [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: I am surprised. Member, I am disappointed. [*Laughter*] In any event, as many things that you may do, again, you may do it unintentionally, but unintentionally you are interrupting me by your constant crosstalk. Member, you must not have that power over the Member for— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I may have to interrupt you, hon. Minister. I cannot let this pass, because you may have just admitted something you may live to regret. [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

It has been a long day, and we have a budget to present to this honourable House on Monday. I will leave all the rest of my fire power, so to speak— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: Firepower?

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Yes, firepower, Member for Chaguanas West; as they say, "You did not see anything yet." [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, may I just complete my contribution. Someone told me many years ago at the time when I felt that I was under attack, "You do not throw stones at an empty mango tree." The more you pelt stones at me, it is the more you invigorate and inspire me. [*Desk thumping*]

The time is late. I think that I have tried by best to clear up any misunderstandings that may have been gained by Members in this honourable House and, particularly, the national community.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2008, of the sum of the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2008, be now read a second time.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 70(1), I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole House.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are dealing with Motion No. 1 under Private Business. I think the hon. Member for Siparia will lead.

**MEMBER FOR COUVA NORTH
(SUSPENSION OF)**

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, if I may take a point, *in limine*, with respect to the debate on this Motion.

It is my respectful view that the Speaker recuse himself from the Chair during the course of this debate, since the subject matter will concern actions which took place in the House on the day that the Member was suspended. So I raise that issue with your good self so that, perhaps, the Deputy Speaker may sit in the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker, in particular, does not have a problem with that. I would so recuse myself and invite the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

[*Mr. Speaker exits Chamber*]

9.45 p.m.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the Motion standing in the name of the Opposition through the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite which reads:

Whereas the Member of Parliament for Couva North was suspended from the services of the House on March 29, 2008;

Be it resolved that the suspension of the hon. Member be terminated forthwith.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you may recall on March 28, 2008, the Leader of the Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Basdeo Panday, the Member for Couva North, was suspended from the service of this honourable House by the hon. Speaker, Mr. Sinanan in circumstances which arose from the use of a laptop by Mr. Panday during a sitting of the House on that date.

You may also recall that this laptop, as other laptops—and I do have mine with me today. This was not planned, but I had brought my laptop to repair and it was returned to me today during the sitting. But we were all given laptops if you recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, at the start of this Ninth Parliament following the general election, and so we were all in possession of laptops provided by the Parliament.

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

Thereafter, when we count the time that has elapsed, it brings us now to six months since that suspension took place, and should this Motion be rejected, it would mean that the Leader of the Opposition would have been on suspension for over eight and a half months. That would take us to the end of the session, December 17, the anniversary date from when the session began.

Initially, the Opposition did not file a Motion to terminate Opposition Leader Mr. Panday's suspension, because the Government had indicated that it would not support such a Motion. Consequently, we knew that the same would have been bound to fail since we do not have the majority, but indeed, we form the minority voice in this honourable Chamber.

Subsequently, following upon discussions between the Opposition Chief Whip, the Leader of Government Business and the Prime Minister, the Opposition filed a Motion in July 2008 to have the suspension terminated and this is the Motion that is the subject matter of our debate today.

No priority was given to that Motion at that time in July, instead the Government sought to have the Opposition commit to supporting amendments to the Integrity in Public Life Act which seeks to remove persons from the ambit and scrutiny of that Integrity Act in exchange for the lifting of the Opposition Leader's suspension.

At that time the Opposition Leader clearly indicated that he would not engage in horse-trading, and he would not commit to a weakening in the integrity laws in exchange for Government votes for his reinstatement. Thereafter, this House was adjourned, no resuming date was named at that time and we proceeded on recess and returned in September. That Motion, as I say, is before us. We need to really look at what is happening in terms of the length of time and the circumstances which gave rise to the suspension.

If we follow the chronology of events, you will see that they are as follows:

As I have said before, following the election we were given the computers with a lot of relevant attachments and Internet access and so forth.

On February 25, 2008, the hon. Speaker of the House issued a circular letter to all Members of the House stating that prior to the use of electronic devices in the Parliament, MPs must seek and receive permission from the Speaker for the use of same in the House, and that such use must relate to matters being discussed in the House on that day.

Further, prior to, and after the issue of that circular, both Government and Opposition MPs continued to use their laptops in full view of the Speaker without

being challenged. It is to be noted that while the Speaker was on leave, the Deputy Speaker presided over the proceedings of the House for three sittings after the Speaker issued the circular. The Deputy Speaker has since indicated that some discussions were held with the Chief Whip with respect to that matter. I am not privy to those discussions.

On Friday, March 28, 2008 the House met to debate an Opposition Private Member's motion on the sky-rocketing food prices. However, immediately before the Private Member's motion was about to be raised, the Speaker rose and said as follows:

“Mr. Speaker: Before I put the question, I wish to remind Members of a circular I issued on February 25, concerning the use of electronic devices. Let me read the most important part of it:

‘I also wish to remind you of the rule that is in place for the use of such technology during sittings, that is, Members must seek the permission of the Speaker before using these electronic devices during a sitting.

Secondly, if permission is granted, usage must be confined to refreshing one's mind of speaking notes, or to the making of amendments to notes in response to issues which may have been raised during debate and to which you intend to respond on the date on which the permission was sought.’”

The *Trinidad Express* of Saturday, March 29 2008 which was the following day, in an article entitled: “Shame in the House”, said as follows:

“His statement came as a surprise because since the beginning of the parliamentary term, Panday and other Members of the House on both Opposition and Government Benches have been seen using the laptops.”

The Speaker then addressed the PNM Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Mr. Gary Hunt who had his laptop opened and was actively using it. The Speaker asked whether the hon. Member intended to contribute to the debate. When the Minister answered positively, the Speaker moved on. Minister Hunt, on the prompting of his colleagues immediately shut the laptop down.

The Speaker then asked the Member for Couva North, and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva North, are you contributing in the debate before this House today?”

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

The reporter in the said *Express* article reported the proceedings then as follows:

“Panday ignores Sinanan as his colleagues started an uproar over the question.”

With a dead, stern face and heightened tone, Sinanan pressed again:

“Hon. Member for Couva North...If he is not contributing to the debate today, then he has not asked permission to use his computer for the purpose of contributing in the debate today. So if he is not contributing in the debate today, I am asking—”

Said the visibly upset and angry Sinanan as he was cut off by protesting Opposition Members.”

“**Mr. Speaker:** I am asking you again, hon. Member for Couva North.”

Reporter:

“Sinanan said in a rough tone as Panday shouted back at the top of his voice.”

“**Mr. B. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot say what you want me to say, this is a debate.

Mr. Speaker: No, well in that case,...if you cannot assure me that you are going to contribute in the debate today, you have not sought my permission to use the computer to contribute in today’s proceedings. If it is that you are not going to contribute in the debate today, I am asking you to put away your computer.”

The *Hansard* record shows that Mr. Panday repeated his position as follows:

“**Mr. B. Panday:** I do not know. How do I know until they speak?”

“**Mr. Speaker:** I wish to draw the attention of the House to Standing Order 43(5). I wish to indicate that the Member for Couva North has shown disregard for the authority of the Chair. I am calling upon a Minister to name the Member for Couva North. I am naming the Member for Couva North.”

The Leader of Government Business, the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, promptly rose and moved a motion to have Mr. Panday suspended from service of the House. The question was put to the Parliament, and the Speaker challenged the Opposition at the top of his voice:

“**Mr. Speaker:** Do you want a division? Do you want a division?”

Even as Members were recorded as saying no in response to Mr. Speaker, he continued calling for the division and when the division was conducted, all the

Government MPs voted in support of suspending the Member for Couva North, and all the Opposition Members voted against it. The motion was carried.

At that point, the Speaker then stated:

“Mr. Speaker: The result of the division is 23 Members voted for the suspension of the hon. Member for Couva North and 11 Members voted against. I will ask the hon. Member for Couva North to leave this Chamber and precincts of the House.”

Mr. Panday did not move, the Speaker then advised.

“Mr. Speaker: I will suspend the sitting of the House for 10 minutes to allow the Member for Couva North...to vacate the Chamber and the precincts...”

After 10 minutes, the Speaker returned and Mr. Panday had not left. The Speaker said:

“Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that the hon. Member for Couva North...has refused to leave...as such, recourse to force is necessary.”

The police were then summoned to remove Mr. Panday. The Marshal and the police approached Mr. Panday, they did not remove him and then the Speaker adjourned the House.

On April 04, 2008, at the very next sitting of the House, Mr. Panday, having made his intention known to return to Parliament attempted to enter the Parliament and for the second time in his political life, was confronted by a policeman who blocked him from entering the precincts of the Red House, the home of the Parliament.

In these circumstances, several issues arise, hon. Madam Deputy Speaker. It is our view the Speaker had circumvented the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives by introducing arbitrary rules through his February 25, 2008 circular contrary to the established procedure for amending Standing Orders via the Standing Orders Committee.

In his February 25 circular, the hon. Speaker had indicated caption. “Use of Electronic Technology”. The Speaker said that MPs must get his permission before they use such technology including laptops during sittings. The Speaker also said in that circular and I quote:

“I wish to remind you of the rule that is in place for the use of such technology during sittings.”

These are the same words the Speaker quoted on March 28, before he called the Leader of the Opposition to see if he was going to contribute to the debate.

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

The question is and remains, which rule is the Speaker talking about? The Standing Orders are the rules which govern procedure in the Parliament. There is no Standing Order, rule, or otherwise banning use of laptops except with the permission of the Speaker.

What happens when there is no Standing Order referring to laptop use? Standing Order No. 91(1) which deals with rules in cases not provided for in our Standing Orders provides:

“91(1) In any matter not herein provided for, resort shall be had to the usage and practice of the Commons House of Parliament of Great Britain...”

What this means in effect, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that where our Standing Orders are silent, it tells us that we need to check what the usage and practice of the Commons House of Parliament of Great Britain is, or what the United Kingdom practises.

The following extract from the *Hansard* of the House of Commons Debates of the United Kingdom Parliament is instructive. It says as follows:

“10 Feb 2005:Column 1653

Speaker’s Statement, 12.30 pm

Mr. Speaker:

And I quote the words of that Speaker:

“I have a statement to make about the use of electronic devices by Members in the Chamber. I am aware that a new generation of such devices is being used by Members. My predecessor ruled in 1997 that Members carrying such devices should turn off the audio function before coming into the Parliament...”

I have no objection to instruments that silently prompt Members carrying them. Clearly, many Members use these devices and they serve a useful purpose, provided that they are unobtrusive.”

This is the United Kingdom’s Commons practice, February 10, 2005.

The Member for Couva North at all material times, using that laptop in this Chamber was unobtrusive, there was no sound, no recording, no noise and no disturbance to this House.

Further, when we look at the United Kingdom’s practice, in June 2007, the House of Commons was actively pursuing the use of Blackberries and laptops in the Commons for the purpose of allowing MPs the flexibility of multitasking and as part of the modernization of the proceedings of the Commons.

According to a mail online article captioned: MPs can log on to laptops as they sit in the Commons—this was in June 2007, and I quote from that report:

“MPs are to be allowed to use their blackberries or laptops to send email and texts in the Commons Chamber, Jack Straw has revealed.

The Commons leader said politicians should be able to multitask by dealing with correspondence during debates. Mr. Straw said many traditions of the Commons are the stuff of Alice in Wonderland.

A report by the Modernization Committee chaired by Mr. Straw found that MPs spend just 14 per cent of their time in the Chamber and if they are banned from using their hand-held devices and mobile phones, MPs will be told they could use the equipment if it is in silent mode to cause minimum disruption.”

10.00 p.m.

That is the UK Parliament; MPs can use these devices. In the House of Commons which is, as they say, the mother of all Parliaments, there is nothing about getting the permission of the Speaker and in our rules and in the rules of the UK, there is nothing about banning the use of a laptop without first saying, “permission, Sir”, to the Speaker. There is nothing.

So can the Speaker then make a rule of the House all on his own by way of a circular to MPs, as the hon. Speaker of this House did? Can he do that? Does the Speaker have the right to unilaterally make rules of this nature or is it the Standing Orders Committee which must do so? The Speaker has used the existing Standing Orders to enforce his ruling but, clearly, if he has no right to make these rules, then what would be enforced is an error and would have usurped the authority of the Standing Orders Committee as well as would have improperly penalized an elected MP, the Opposition Leader, the Member for Couva North. In our view, that constitutes an assault on the democracy.

The answer is clearly no, that the Speaker cannot arbitrarily make up rules; he cannot do so unilaterally. It is for the House Committee first and thereafter for the House itself. The Standing Orders provide the procedure to change or make a new rule. Standing Order 71 provides that there shall be a Standing Orders Committee of the House, and Standing Order 73 provides that that committee shall have the duty of considering from time to time all such matters relating to Standing Orders as may be referred to it by the House.

What this means is that when there is need for a rule, then it is the Standing Orders Committee to deliberate, then it sends it to the House for approval and it is

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

the House who would then vote and create any new rule, and new Standing Order. This has never happened. There was no new rule referred to the Standing Orders Committee; none was brought by the Standing Orders committee for the consideration of the House and no approval was given by the House. In fact, the Speaker well knew there was no rule about laptop use in the House because the Speaker has, in his possession, a new draft set of Standing Orders and in that there is a recommendation for MPs to get permission. But that is not the rule; that is not the Standing Order that is prevailing; that was in draft form and that draft has never come; never been approved by this House or by the Standing Orders Committee.

In the circumstances, we are of the view that the Speaker acted outside his powers, outside his jurisdiction and, therefore, what transpired on that day was illegal and every action that flowed there from would also be illegal. If we look at the commentaries, it was revealed that the Speaker's behaviour was pre-planned and that he came to the House prepared to teach a lesson. He claimed, however, that it was intended to focus on Mr. Hunt although it was clear from previous sessions that the one who was using the laptop continuously and continually during the sitting was the Member for Couva North. The *Saturday Express* of March 29, 2008, headlined "Boot for Bas" writes it this way:

"Sinanan said the member who he observed using the computer and whom he had planned 'to teach a lesson yesterday' was (Sport Minister) 'Gary Hunt, not Mr. Panday'. Sinanan said yesterday Hunt was the first one to whom he addressed his statements about the use of the laptop. Hunt promptly closed his computer but Sinanan noted, 'Mr. Panday decided to defy the Chair'."

It bears repeating that when asked whether he was going to use the laptop or not, Mr. Panday was clear. He could not say as it depended on what Government Members said. It was a point he referred to in a subsequent interview at which he advised that he had in his laptop a database of all PNM promises made over the years, clearly suggesting that the laptop was being used in the course of the debate. The Opposition Leader said when he was asked the same question, he did not know if he was going to speak until he heard what the Government had to say. It was then that the Speaker moved against him. I quote Mr. Panday's words:

"'I am entitled to have my computer', Panday said, adding that he had all the false promises the PNM had made over the years. 'It's all on my computer' he said because he could not walk with all the documents with this information."

That was the *Saturday Express* of March 29, 2008. This article also revealed another factor; that even Mr. Panday did not know for how long he was to be

suspended. Mr. Panday is reported to have indicated he will return to the Parliament at the next sitting and with his laptop.

In that same article, “Boot for Bas”, in an interview with the Speaker, that interview confirmed the Speaker’s intention that the suspension be for the rest of the session. The Speaker said that Mr. Panday was suspended under the Standing Order relevant for defying the Speaker. In the interview the Speaker advised as follows:

“Panday was suspended for defying the Speaker, who ruled against the unauthorised use of laptops. Told that Panday had been using the laptop consistently over the past few months, Sinanan explained that he had sent out a circular, dated February 25, reminding MPs that they must seek his permission to use electronic devices and that such use must relate to matters being discussed in the Parliament on that day.’ Yesterday was the first time that Sinanan was in the Chair since the circular was sent out and therefore his first opportunity to enforce it.”

However, one esteemed Senior Counsel, Kenneth Lalla, in an interview with the *Newsday* newspaper, March 30, 2008, was of the view that:

“The Speaker was unclear in his statements in the Parliament and therefore there was ambiguity in regard to the length of the suspension. Lalla concluded that the suspension must last for the single sitting.”

And quotations coming out of that report.

Thereafter, the action against Mr. Panday in all the commentaries were highlighted. An *Express* story said:

“Explaining the ruling, the Speaker asked rhetorically, ‘what would prevent 41 members from using laptops during the sitting? One doesn’t know if they are looking at pornography or chatting on-line.’”

Ludicrous action against Mr. Panday being justified to say that if you are using this laptop—and these are the Speaker’s words; I quoted from the *Express* article:

“‘One doesn’t know if they are looking at pornography or chatting on line’. He said May’s *Parliamentary Practice* very explicitly stated that MPs could not use electronic equipment as an aide-memoire when addressing the House.”

Well, I have yet to see that.

“Noting that a purpose of the debate was to have one on one discussion among members of the House, Sinanan said: ‘The computer is not a member of Parliament’.

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

Further, although he claimed it was irrelevant, the Speaker himself raised an alleged statement by Mr. Panday, that he did not intend to speak in the Chamber and having raised it unaided, he swiftly sought to downplay its importance by claiming:

“...that is irrelevant since that was not part of my consideration (in not allowing him to use the laptop),”

That was the *Saturday Express* newspaper of March 29, 2008.

It should be noted as well that when told the UNC MPs had said they planned to go to the House the next week with their laptops and use them, the Speaker warned thus—I quote again from the *Saturday Express* article of March 29, 2008:

“‘If they intend to carry it to this absurdity, I will put my foot down.’ Stating that the same rule that applies for Hunt and Panday will be applied to all of them, he said, it would be impossible for all of them to be using the laptop at the same time to participate in a debate in the same day. He quoted Standing Order 43(5) which talks about suspending members who ‘persistently and willfully obstruct the business of the House’ and ‘disregards the authority of the Chair.’”

These are the commentaries, and it is curious when we look at those words, the choice of reference as Standing Order 43(5), which allows for the Speaker’s actions, it provides:

“If a Member shows disregard for authority of the Chair, or abuses the rules of the House by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business of the House or otherwise, the Speaker shall...then call upon a Minister to move...”

Did Mr. Panday persistently and wilfully obstruct the business of the House? Why did the Speaker refer to this part of the clause rather than the catch-all phrase or otherwise? The fact is that Mr. Panday had been using his computer continuously in the Parliament since the start of the proceedings.

When questioned about his refusal to move when ordered to do so, Mr. Panday contradicted the Speaker stating that there was no written rule that MPs could not use a computer in the Parliament.

The *Saturday Express* report of March 29, 2008, headlined; “Bas vows to return”, stated and I quote as follows:

“Panday dismissed the Speaker's ruling that the use of the computer must be relevant to the debate, asking, ‘How is he going to know whether it is relevant to the debate. Is he going to send a policeman to see what I am looking at?’

He said the Standing Order under which the Speaker adjourned the House ‘said nothing about computers’.

Panday said the Speaker believed that he was a ‘schoolmaster and the Opposition MPs were ‘little children’.

‘Everytime I go inside (the chamber) I must put my hand on my forehead like that and say ‘permission please’, Panday said, pressing his index finger against his forehead. ‘But we are not going to tolerate that. The issue is not about computers. It is about Panday. And that he (Sinanan) wants to have absolute and total control to ensure that the Opposition does not carry out its work, which is criticising the PNM. And he is not going to get away with it.’”

Mr. Panday went further and he warned that he was prepared to go to jail if that was necessary and he stated he was concerned that the Speaker was arbitrarily expressing rules for the governing of the House which were not included in the Standing Orders despite the existence of the Standing Orders Committee. Mr. Panday was of the view that the Speaker was beginning to flex his muscles and questioned what the next rule would be and how the freedom to participate in debates in the House would be adversely affected by whittling away rights.

Of import are the comments by former Speakers of the House who suggested that the matter could have been resolved by the Speaker in a different manner. So you have the former Speakers’ views as well. Clearly, the Speaker adopted an adversarial role and there are those of us of the view that it was an unbecoming role; that in doing so he allowed the matter to escalate to one of substantial precedent and to the denial of democratic rights of the electorate who voted for Mr. Panday to represent them in Parliament. That suspension remains in place to date and we are asking for it to be lifted.

I have given the chronology of the facts for the record and the commentaries and the discussions with respect to this and now I say as follows:

Firstly, it is very clear that the action taken by the hon. Speaker on that day was premised on a rule that was unilaterally made by the Speaker himself, by way of that circular—that letter.

It is also very clear that there is no established precedent or rule or Standing Order in Trinidad and Tobago which bans the use of these laptops without the permission of the Speaker.

Thirdly, where our Standing Orders are silent, we look at the British practice, and I have given the quotations from there too. As I said before and I want to

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, September 19, 2008

repeat, because this is very important: if it is that the actions which followed subsequent on the use of Mr. Panday having his laptop open on his desk; if it is that his suspension was based, was premised, was triggered by a circular which purported to be a rule or a Standing Order, when there was no such rule, no such Standing Order, then it is very clear that the suspension of Basdeo Panday, the Member for Couva North, the duly elected Opposition Leader, was illegal and outside the powers of the hon. Speaker.

With that having happened, everything that followed thereafter, would have been outside the powers and outside the jurisdiction and, therefore, also illegal. I have heard the comment which is that, "this trivial thing about this laptop; that is trivial" and so on. It may be trivial to some; it may be trivial to those whom it suits to say that this talking about laptop is trivial, but it cannot be trivial to anyone in a democratic country such as ours, where you have a constitutional office of Opposition Leader, duly elected, being kept outside of the Parliament for eight months. That cannot be trivial.

So whilst you say the laptop issue in the opening, in your view, is trivial, there can be no triviality in keeping out of the Parliament the duly elected Leader of the Opposition. That is our whole constitutional basis and the structure of the Constitution. You have a Prime Minister; you have a duly elected Leader of the Opposition. That is the whole structure of the foundation of the democracy and of the Parliament. Therefore, to say that it is trivial is to admit that having suspended him and keeping him out of the House for so long is also trivial, then nothing could be further from the truth.

I have been advised by the hon. Member for Couva North to say as follows: That he will make no deals with respect to his reinstatement in this Parliament for the termination of his suspension. He has asked me to indicate that where a rule or a law is wrong, then one has a duty to stand up to that wrong law; to disobey that wrong law and stand the consequences, because that is the only way that the nation may know that the law is wrong in the first place.

The hon. Leader has asked me to advise that it is not he who should apologize, because the entire action was premised on illegal action on the part of the Speaker.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has asked me and advised me to say that it is not he who should apologize but that it should be the Speaker who should apologize for bringing the Parliament into disrepute, into ridicule, internationally and locally.

Therefore, the hon. Leader has said further that we are no longer in the days of slavery and indentureship when law is unjust and rules are unjust, that we must bow down and obey the rule and the law of the “massa”. We are no longer in those days. He is of the view that there is nothing that he is to apologize for because that was wrong in the first instance.

Further, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has indicated that if anyone should apologize, it should be the Speaker. He will make no deals for his reinstatement. Further, we set the facts; those are the facts and, therefore, I beg to move this Motion with respect to the reinstatement and termination of the suspension.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Motion requires a seconder.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq(*Caroni Central*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the Motion and, without prejudice, I beg to reserve my right to speak at a later stage in the debate.

Question proposed.

10.15 p.m.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning): Madam Deputy Speaker, the political party to which I belong and which for the time being, I have the honour to lead, is noted for its discipline. In any meeting of the People’s National Movement, we follow certain conventions. Nobody is allowed, for example, to sit and speak except the chairman of the meeting. The chairman alone does that. If anybody in a PNM meeting wishes to speak, he or she must stand in his place to speak. That is the convention in the People’s National Movement. It is part of the discipline for which the PNM has now become well known. In speaking in a party meeting, the first thing we do is address the Chair. That is the convention of the PNM.

In so doing, we know that there are many forms in doing this. In different jurisdictions, places and fora it is done in different ways. In the PNM, we use the parliamentary form of address. We refer to the chairman as Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairman. In so doing, nobody believes that in taking that approach one is being subservient, or that one is in any way less than whoever he or she believes himself or herself to be. Indeed, what we do is subject ourselves to the authority of the chair.

It matters not who we are; what position you might hold in the society; what position you might hold in the party; how much money we might have or how much money we may not have or what our station in life might be; it has nothing to do with that; nor does it have to do with who is sitting in the chair.

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[HON. P. MANNING]

Friday, September 19, 2008

It matters not if the person sitting in the chair is 15 years old; whether the person is female or male; whether the person is of one ethnic grouping or another; whether or not the person is degreed or articulate. Whoever sits in the chair is the chairman of that meeting and is worthy of the respect of all members who participate in the meeting. What the PNM teaches us is that you respect whosoever is set in authority.

Madam Deputy Speaker, against that background the incident that took place in Parliament involving the Member for Couva North has nothing to do with laptop computers. The Member for Siparia could have spared us much time this evening by getting to the issue and not trying to create a smokescreen and raise issues that are completely irrelevant to the matter that faced this House on that fateful day.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition and Member for Couva North who knows better, sat in his place and defied the authority of the Speaker, contrary to the rules of this Parliament and began to speak to the Speaker in what all of us saw as a very disrespectful manner. He may have disagreed with the ruling of the Speaker; he is free to disagree and take issue with the Speaker's ruling. He is free to question what the Speaker says. He is not free to disrespect whom so ever is set in authority. He is not free to do that. The minute you do that, then the basis for good order breaks down, disappears and you run the risk of chaos breaking out in the particular forum in which that disrespect is tolerated and that authority structure is disrespected and allowed to fall into disrepute. For us on this side it has nothing to do with computers. It has nothing to do with the ruling of any parliament any where else in the world. It has to do with the attitude of the Member for Couva North.

When that attitude was drawn to his attention by the hon. Speaker, he perpetuated it by remaining seated in his chair and speaking in a manner which was, if I have to put the best face on it, disrespectful. I have been in this Parliament for a long time. I know the Member for Couva North very well. I know when the Member for Couva North is just being difficult as indeed he was on that day and downright disrespectful. The one thing that we must remember—I urge hon. Members opposite to consider carefully what we have to say on this matter—is that this Parliament is broadcasted live and the national community is free to see it. It is also broadcasted live on the Internet around the world and people tune in to this Parliament.

People see the way we conduct our business and of course, based on how we conduct our business, people who may be alien to us and our way of life and

practices will look at what we do and come to a conclusion as to who we are. If somebody could sit on his chair and decide that “I doh care who the Speaker is; the Speaker has no authority over me; I am the Leader of the Opposition; I’m the leader of the UNC; I’m the Member for Couva North; I could do what I like in this Parliament,” the day we decide to accept that would be the day when we set ourselves on a road to chaos, confusion and anarchy.

What I found particularly distasteful about the incident—because I was present—was the manner and attitude of the Member for Couva North having been drawn to his attention, he decided to be what we describe in the society as wrong and strong. In other words, I am more upset than you for trying to give me the impression that I operated outside of the accepted norms of this or any self-respecting parliament. To continue it, in my respectful view, the Speaker of this Parliament on that day had no choice.

I am sure that I speak for all my colleagues. None of us wishes to be associated with any parliament that will allow members to behave in that manner and escape unscathed. None of us supports that. Therefore, as a team, we agreed to move a motion to have the particular Member named. It is not our intention to disenfranchise him or his constituents in Couva North on whose behalf he operates. We say that there are rules of this Parliament. This is a self-respecting parliament and there are rules. If having been disrespectful to the Speaker, we allow the Member to return just return to the Parliament, then what we have done is endorse the disrespect; the method of operation; we have agreed and become a party to it and all of us are to be condemned. It is not just the Member for Couva North, but all of us would then have to be condemned.

All that we say is that since you behave in that manner, all you have to do is to apologize to the Chair whom you disrespected. The disrespect of course, was a disrespect to the honourable House so apologize to the Members of the House. If the Member for Couva North and the Member for Siparia—I am surprised at what the Member for Siparia read out for the Member for Couva North who told her he would not make any deal. Nobody was making any deal with the Member for Couva North. We wish no deals with him. The Government does not need any deals with the Member for Couva North to conduct the nation’s business. “We doh need it. What deals we want? “We doh want any deals.” We want respect. We want this House and the Chair to be respected because this is a serious Parliament. That is what we want. We want to be part of a parliament that sees itself in a particular way and conducts its business in a particular way, that it would gain the respect of those on whose behalf we are here to operate. That is what we want.

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[HON. P. MANNING]

Friday, September 19, 2008

Therefore, we say to the Member for Couva North, if you apologize to the Speaker and the House we are prepared to lift the ban. We are prepared to readmit you to Parliament if you apologize which means that you would have acknowledged that you did not act in the best manner in the highest standards and highest traditions of Westminster. “You didn’t do that.” You erred in the matter and you are sorry about it and there is some commitment not to act in that way again. We would accept that from the Member for Couva North.

For the Member for Siparia to tell us now that I make no deals—nobody wants any deals with anybody; I make no deals—and trying to give the impression that it is a laptop. The laptop has nothing to do with the matter. A laptop computer has nothing to do with the reasons for the suspension of the Member for Couva North from this honourable House on that day. It has nothing to do with it. It has everything to do with his attitude. It has everything to do with the behaviour of someone who knows better, because he was a prime minister of this country. He has been the Leader of the Opposition for as long as you and I can remember. If school children looking at this Parliament say, “That is how a prime minister operates; that is how the former prime minister gets on and gets away with that.” What is it? It is a question of standards for one and different standards for the next. The same standards apply to all of us.

If I were sitting here and a Member on this side behaved in that way, such a Member would have to answer to a committee of the PNM. The PNM will not tolerate that. We had that kind of thing here before. The PNM will not tolerate it. We will not take it from our Members and we see no reason we must take that from anybody opposite. The fact of the matter is that nobody is above the law. Nobody is. The rules are made for all of us. All of us must be prepared. If we want to sit in this Chamber, then there are certain standards of behaviour to which we must be prepared to subscribe. If we are not prepared to subscribe to those standards of behaviour, then “doh” sit here. Go somewhere else and sit. If within their party that is the way they want to operate, then it is for them; not a matter for us. It is entirely a matter for you all.

Our position on this matter is that if the hon. Member for Couva North is prepared to apologize to the Chair and the House, we are prepared to readmit him. If he does not, then, it is his action that prevents him from representing his constituency in this honourable House.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I take a different view from the hon. Prime Minister. The hon. Prime Minister began using the analogy of the PNM and the way in which the PNM allegedly conducts its business. There are very many reports.

Mr. Manning: Which you will never know.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I have no desire to know—in terms of the conduct of meetings and the Chair of a PNM meeting. That is all well and good. Like with every analogy, whilst there may be similarities there are also differences. In my respectful view, the differences far outweigh the similarities.

Apart from the hon. Speaker sitting in the Chair, the composition of the Parliament is far different from the composition of the PNM. The analogy starts to break down once you put the two together. Whilst they are in house as one family in the PNM and hold their meetings, it is a different thing. This is the Parliament where you have different sides, an opposition and a government elected where philosophies and policies may be different. That analogy will not hold in terms of the conduct of those meetings. In those meetings you will expect not just for you to have respect for the Chair but you will know that the Chair also respects you. You see it works both ways. You respect the Chair and that authority in your PNM meetings but you do that in the trust that the Chair respects you.

10.30 p.m.

It works both ways. You respect the Chair and that authority in your PNM meetings and you do that in the trust that the Chair respects you. That is the fundamental difference with that kind of meeting and what happens in Parliament.

We have expressed this view on many occasions and others have expressed it. This ruling came on the heels of the first suspension of the leader where in incidents related in the previous year, in spite of a court ruling, the hon. Member was kept out of the Parliament and where the Court of Appeal overturned the conviction. It has to be taken in context. Trust and respect must be on both sides. The analogy does not hold.

Secondly, we have seen the general conduct of the Speaker in protecting the Government, in seeking to use the Parliament in certain ways to protect the Government and to prevent the Opposition from presenting its views. We have seen, for example, where the Speaker alters the wording of questions and motions. *[Interruption]*

I am saying trust must be on both sides and that it comes from a pattern of behaviour and action. On this side, I cannot say that we have that trust and confidence that the hon. Member for San Fernando East may have. We have seen the altering of leave applications to raise matters of definite urgent public importance. These are amended.

Mr. Imbert: That may be standard practice.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Hon. Member, we are talking about trust on both sides. Whether or not this can be done, we are not of the view that trust has been developed.

We have seen the unlawful intervening in the proceedings of the seventh meeting of the Public Accounts Committee on July 25, 2008; attempts to block the meeting from being broadcast live. We have seen a different attitude when it comes to dealing with Government Members as opposed to Opposition Members.

This is the context in which this has transpired which culminated in the attempt to enforce an unjust or illegal rule that never existed. To say it is not about a laptop is to bury your head in the sand. If it were not that laptop that was open on the desk that day, none of that would have happened and none of the rest of events would have transpired. It is like asking what comes first: the chicken or the egg? In this case, it was clearly the laptop that came first and the rest followed.

The hon. Member said no one is above the law and I agree. That is why if your law is unjust, if your law is illegal, it is not a law. That is what we are saying on this side. The rule that was followed by the Speaker through the circular was not a law. It is not about being above the law. It was not a rule in the first place.

When the hon. Prime Minister asked what deals, maybe the Prime Minister knew differently, but our information is that if we supported the amendments to the Integrity in Public Life Act to remove people from the scrutiny of that Act, they would give us the votes to reinstate the leader. That is the deal that we were told about. Whether it came from the Prime Minister or from the Member for Diego Martin North/East I cannot say. When we talked about deals, I think that was what they were talking about.

You may be disappointed or not disappointed, but that is not the issue. I have been advised by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North, and I have placed it on record because he is not here. He has been prevented from being here to defend himself or to state his case. That is why I took the time, contrary to the disappointment of the Member for San Fernando East, to put his voice across.

I have been asked so to do as a Member of the UNC. These are his wishes. I think it is totally within my duty and my pathway that I should put his voice and words before the Parliament.

I repeat: My honourable leader has indicated that he will not apologize. He has indicated the reason he will not apologize. He has indicated that he is of the

view, as we are, that the rule which led to his suspension eventually was wrong in law and, therefore, he would not follow at any point in time what he sees and what we see as a law that is wrong. To begin with, that is illegal.

In terms of the other issues raised by the hon. Prime Minister, all I can do is to repeat that the Leader of the Opposition said that he will make no deals and will make no apology as a condition for his reinstatement in the Parliament.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, since the Member for Siparia has constantly alleged that the Government was trying to cut a deal, I invoke Standing Order 34(2) and use my right to conclude this debate.

I want to say categorically that this Government at no time sought to make any deal with the Opposition for the reinstatement of the Member for Couva North. This is a total untruth and the constant repetition of that allegation on the part of the Member for Siparia is clearly calculated to bring discredit upon the Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister has made the point that at the core of this matter is the behaviour of the Member for Couva North and the disrespect of the Member for the Chair. When you look at the words uttered by the Member for Siparia where she indicated that the hon. Member had been briefed by the Member for Couva North and was mandated to tell this Parliament that rather than the Member for Couva North apologizing, it is the Speaker who should apologize and that the days of slavery were over, clearly the Member for Couva North has continued his disrespect for the Chair.

The other point that needs to be made, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that a lot of the information that the hon. Member for Siparia put into this Parliament tonight is simply wrong, as is her wont.

The Member is famous for stating things that are not true with a straight face; notorious, I think. Member for Diego Martin Central, you are correct. The Member for Siparia is notorious for making statements that are inaccurate and untrue, with a straight face.

I want to put on record—and it is easily verifiable if you check the website of the House of Commons and look for the recent rulings of the Speaker, there was one not too long ago, either in 2006 or 2007; it is easily available; you just Google the use of electronic devices in the House of Commons, rulings of the Speaker, and there is one where the Speaker has ruled that the use of computers as a prompt during debates will not be allowed.

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 19, 2008

The Members of the House Committee, the UNC Members that is, in the personae of the Member for Chaguanas West and the Member for Tabaquite are well aware of that. That ruling of the Speaker of the House of Commons, to use the terminology of the Member for Siparia, the mother of this Parliament, has been made available to the UNC.

I am not disappointed in the Member for Siparia as the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara said tonight; I am just not surprised. I am not surprised that, having made available to the UNC the fact that laptops are not available to the UK Parliament, the hon. Member would, in the face of that reality, come into this Parliament and say that in the UK Parliament there is no rule against laptops.

Where are you living? It is dishonesty. As I said, the Member for Siparia makes these statements with a straight face.

Another statement made by the Member for Siparia was that the Speaker is not entitled to make rules for the good order of this Parliament. That also is not true. If one examines Standing Order 92 of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, it reads as follows:

- “(1) The Speaker shall have the power to regulate the conduct of business in all matters not provided for in these Standing Orders.
- (2) The decision in all cases for which these Standing Orders do not provide, shall lie within the discretion of the Speaker, and shall not be open to challenge.
- (3) The Speaker shall be responsible for the management and general administration of the Chamber.”

This Standing Order has been in existence since I became a Member of this House in 1971. For 17 years and before that, it has been known by all parliamentarians that the Speaker has the power to regulate the conduct of business in all matters not provided for in the Standing Orders and that his decisions in such matters are not open to challenge. Yet the Member for Siparia would have us believe otherwise; would have us believe that the Speaker is not empowered to regulate the business of this House in matters not covered by the Standing Orders.

The other untruth uttered by the Member is that it is the House Committee that has the authority to decide in matters such as laptops. That is also not true. Standing Order 74, Madam Deputy Speaker, clearly outlines the powers of the House Committee. It says as follows—and the Member for Siparia knows this: the Member is well versed in the Standing Orders. I am not surprised that she would try to hoodwink the House and by extension the national population. I shall read Standing Order 74.

“The House Committee shall have the duty of considering and advising the Speaker on all matters connected with the comfort and convenience of Members of the House...”

Clearly, therefore, the House Committee has no authority except to advise the Speaker and the Speaker has the authority to accept, reject or modify the advice given to him by the House Committee. The House Committee cannot arrogate unto itself powers that belong to the Speaker. It is here in black and white. You do not have to have a command of the English language to understand that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 33(4).

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think he can continue.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: 33(4) is where he is quoting. I am talking about the Standing Orders Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You did mention something about the House Committee.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: At no time did I speak of the House Committee. I said the Standing Orders Committee of the House.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, again, the Member for Siparia—you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. A leopard does not change its spots. Even while I am speaking, you are getting up and speaking untruths. I took notes. You said it is for the House Committee to determine whether Members should be allowed to use laptops. Those were your words. Check the *Hansard*.

The hon. Member spoke both of the House Committee and the Standing Orders Committee and with respect to the House Committee she uttered the untruth that it can regulate the matters of this House for the comfort and convenience of Members. Even when I am speaking the hon. Member is getting up with this penchant for uttering untruths. It is absurd!

We need to put into the record what really happened that day. The hon. Member has been very convenient with the facts. On that day, the Member for Couva North disobeyed an instruction from the Chair. That is what happened.

10.45 p.m.

The Member for Couva North disobeyed it, not once but more than once. The Speaker instructed the Member for Couva North to put away his laptop. That was an instruction coming from the Chair. In this place, I am afraid that you have to

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 19, 2008

comply and complain. It is not complain and not comply. You cannot make up your own rules. If the Speaker, utilizing the authority vested in him, orders a Member to take his seat, to stop speaking, to put away something or to stop doing something, I am afraid you have to comply. The Speaker instructed the Member for Couva North to put away his laptop. The Member for Couva North said: “No.” He told him again. “Please, put away your laptop.” He said. “No.” The Speaker then invoked Standing Order 43(3), which reads as follows:

“The Speaker...shall order any Member to withdraw immediately from the House during the remainder of the day’s sitting...

(a) where the conduct of such Member is grossly disorderly;”

The Member Couva North ignored the further instruction from the Chair. The Speaker then invoked Standing Order 43(5).

“If a Member shows disregard for the authority of the Chair,...”

We were all here. Everybody was here. You must not pretend. The Member for Couva North disregarded the authority of the Chair. If you look at the television record of what occurred on that day—it is not whether you agreed with the ruling of the Speaker or not; that is not the issue.

The Prime Minister made the point; the issue is not about whether the Speaker was correct to say: I do not think you should use a laptop. That is not it. The Speaker gave an instruction and the Member for Couva North disobeyed the instruction once, twice, three times. The Speaker then invoked Standing Order 43(5).

“If a Member shows disregard for the authority of the Chair,...by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business of the House or otherwise, the Speaker shall direct the attention of the House thereto, mentioning by name the Member concerned, the Speaker shall then call upon a Minister to move ‘That Mr.....be suspended from the service of the House’,”

Again, the Member for Couva North, seeking confrontation, wanting a bacchanal, refused to withdraw from the House. Having violated Standing Order 43(3) and 43(5); refusing to respect the authority of the Chair, the Speaker then invoked Standing Order 43(9) and (10). Standing Order 43(10) states very clearly:

“If any Member, who is ordered to withdraw or who is suspended under this Standing Order, refuses at any time to obey the direction of the Speaker to withdraw from the House and its precincts, the Speaker shall call the attention of the House to the fact that recourse to force is necessary in order to compel obedience to his direction,...”

That happened, I was here. The Speaker indicated that recourse to force is required. The Member for Couva North refused to move. Standing Order 43(10) goes on to say.

“and the Member named by him as having so refused to obey his direction shall thereupon, without further question put be suspended from the service of the House during the remainder of the Session.”

It is all here in black and white. The Speaker gave an instruction and the Member for Couva North disregarded it on a number of occasions. He continued wilfully, openly and defiantly defying the authority of the Chair. He refused to comply with the Speaker’s directions. He showed complete contempt for the Presiding Officer in this House. The Standing Orders are clear. It does not matter who it is; whether it is the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister or anybody in this Parliament. Once you wilfully and persistently refuse to obey and recognize the authority of the Speaker, a number of Standing Orders would be invoked, culminating in Standing Order 43(10). Standing Order 43(10) is clear, unambiguous and unequivocal which states if you do that, you would be suspended for the remainder of the session.

That is why when the Member for Siparia referred to an alleged commentary from Mr. Lalla SC, that the Speaker was unclear in his ruling and thus the suspension was only for one day, I have to wonder. I can only assume Mr. Lalla was misquoting, because anybody can access these Standing Orders. They are available on the Parliament’s website. People should not say things they do not know about.

Let me repeat, the problem here is not the use of electronic devices. Some Parliaments allow them, others do not. We have no practice in this Parliament. Until the Speaker decided to start to introduce some sort of system, we had no practice with respect to the use of electronic devices. We had none. The Speaker decided, using his power under Standing Order 92 of power vested in him by this Parliament, to introduce regulation of the use of electronic devices. In so doing, he was not doing anything different from the mother of this Parliament, because in the United Kingdom Parliament, the use of laptops is not allowed in Chamber. He was not doing anything out of the ordinary. He sent around a circular and asked Members to comply. The Member for Couva North decided that he was not complying and the ultimate result is what has happened here.

I remember when ANR Robinson was Prime Minister and there was an issue between himself and the then Speaker, Mr. Nizam Mohammed. I remember Nizam Mohammed telling Prime Minister Robinson: “Take your seat!” Prime Minister, as

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 19, 2008

bad as he wanted to be, sat one time. I remember that clearly. He sat down. The Speaker, Mr. Nizam Mohammed, told Prime Minister ANR Robinson: "I am speaking, sit down!" He sat down. I said to myself: "That is a brave man." He was the Speaker at the time. He was in charge of the House and Prime Minister Robinson understood the authority vested in the presiding officer of this Parliament. Clearly the Member for Couva North does not. Clearly, he is of the view that he is superior to the presiding officer. That is why we are saying on this side, that kind of thing has to stop. It has nothing to do with laptops. It has to do with respect for authority and respect for the Chair; the presiding officer of this Parliament. That is why we are saying that if the Member for Couva North recognizes that he has erred and is willing to apologize to the Chair and to this House, we would be quite happy on this side to support his reinstatement, but if he is not willing to admit that he was wrong and not willing to admit that he disrespected the Chair, then we cannot support this Motion.

Question put.

Dr. Rafeeq: Division.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Division.

The House divided: AYES: 10 NOES: 21

AYES

Warner, J.

Persad-Bissessar, Mrs. K.

Gopeesingh, Dr. T.

Bharath, V.

Panday, M.

Peters, W.

Rafeeq, Dr. H.

Partap, H.

Baksh, N.

Sharma, C.

NOES

Imbert, Hon. C.

Manning, Hon. P.

Gopee-Scoon, Hon. P.

Member for Couva North (Suspension of)

Friday, September 19, 2008

Kangaloo, Hon. C.
Abdul-Hamid, Hon. M.
Dumas, Hon. R.
Ross, Hon. J.
Taylor, Hon. P.
Swaratsingh, Hon. K.
Parsanlal, Hon. N.
Mc Donald, Hon. M.
Le Gendre, Hon. E.
Brown, Hon. Dr. A.
Callender, Hon. S.
Cox, Hon. D.
Jeffrey, Hon. F.
Hospedales, Hon. A.
Joseph, R.
Hypolite, N.
Roberts, A.
Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj, Mrs. I.
Motion negatived.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Monday, September 22, 2008 at 2.00 p.m. for the reading of the National Budget.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I put the question in relation to the adjournment, there was one matter to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment by the Member for Tabaquite—[*Interruption*] I know but I still have to indicate—who is not here and therefore the Motion will lapse.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.57 p.m.