

*Leave of Absence**Wednesday, May 27, 2009***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, May 27, 2009*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Marlene Mc Donald, the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South and the hon. Ramesh Maharaj SC, Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, both of whom have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. Mr. Jack Warner, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West has also asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House.

**ELECTRICITY FLUCTUATIONS**

**Mr. Speaker:** As it is obvious to all of you, we are experiencing power fluctuations. We have in train a process by which our electricity supply to this part of the Parliament would be switched over in the course of time in the near future. We have, in fact, a new system which is located in the southern wing and we have already engaged T&TEC to have that switch-over. It is going to be a phased switch-over so that every time we have fluctuations from outside it affects this part of the—well, the Red House as a whole, but the new system will cater for all that. In the event that you have fluctuations the new system will permit us to have a continuous proper supply.

**PETITION****Privy Council Judgment**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition on behalf of the members of the Hindu and Muslim communities of Tumpuna Road, Arima:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that this honourable House will acknowledge the plight of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago of the Hindu and Muslim faiths, and having regard to the judgment of the judicial committee of the Privy Council, Appeal No. 53 of 2008, recommend to the National Awards Committee the posthumous awards requested.

I shall now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read this petition. Thank you.

*Petition read.*

## PAPERS LAID

1. Administrative report of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for the period October, 2004 to September, 2005. [*The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Gary Hunt)*]
2. Administrative report of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for the period October, 2005 to September, 2006. [*Hon. G. Hunt*]
3. Annual report of the Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission for the financial year ended September 30, 2008. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira)*]
4. Report of the Auditor General on the consolidated financial statements of Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for the fifteen months ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
6. Second report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Housing Authority for the nine months ended September 30, 1998. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
7. Second report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Housing Authority for the year ended September 30, 1999. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]

*Papers 3 to 7 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

8. The International Child Abduction Order, 2009. [*The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon)*]

## ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, the Government is in a position to answer 33⅓ per cent of the questions on the Order Paper.

**Dr. Rafeeq:** One question?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes, one question, which is number 89, and I respectfully request that the other two questions be deferred for a period of two weeks.

**Mr. Speaker:** May I remind you that there are also 20 questions for written answer.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am reminded.

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Winston Peters (Mayaro):*

**Lifeguards in Mayaro/Guayaguayare/Manzanilla  
(Details of Plans for)**

- 81.** With respect to Lifeguards in the Mayaro/Guayaguayare/Manzanilla area, could the hon. Minister of Tourism state:
- (a) the number of lifeguards assigned to these areas;
  - (b) whether there are sufficient lifeguards assigned to the existing facilities; and
  - (c) if the answer is negative, please state whether there are plans to increase the intake of lifeguards, the requisite number needed and when will the plan take effect.

**National Social Development Programme – Rio Claro/Mayaro Region  
(Details of Housing Wiring Programme)**

- 88.** With respect to the National Social Development Programme in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region, could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities state:
- (a) the total number of applicants for the House Wiring Programme from September 2007 to date;
  - (b) The number of successful applicants for the given period; and
  - (c) The entire cost of the House Wiring Programme in the region?

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

**Monkey Town Government Primary School  
(Details of Project)**

- 89. Dr. Hamza Rafeeq** (*Caroni Central*) on behalf of Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

With respect to the construction of the Monkey Town Government Primary School, could the Minister state:

- (a) the expected commencement date;
- (b) the anticipated completion date; and
- (c) the estimated cost of the project?

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre):** Mr. Speaker, in response to the question asked, part (a) of the question; the construction of the Monkey Town Government Primary School is expected to commence before the end of August 2009. The anticipated completion date for the project is by the end of November 2010 and the estimated cost of the construction of the school is TT \$26,933,487.

Thank you.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER  
(LEAVE)**

**Attorney General's Appointment**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia):** Thank you, hon. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of this honourable House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the imminent appointment of a new Attorney General.

The matter is definite as it pertains specifically to the reported imminent appointment of Mr. John Jeremie to the office of the Attorney General.

The matter is urgent because reports of the appointment have only come into the public domain today and the House will not sit again until June 2009.

The matter is of public importance because of the unresolved allegations made against Mr. John Jeremie before the Mustill tribunal and the requirement for public confidence in the office of the Attorney General.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have considered this Motion as moved by the hon. Member for Siparia and same does not qualify under Standing Order 12.

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER**

**Attorney General  
(Resignation)**

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago the hon. Attorney General, Sen. the Hon. Bridgid Annisette-George approached me, indicating that having regard to the way the investigations in the Clico matter have been going, that she anticipated that she could find herself in a conflict of interest situation. We agreed at the time to look

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at it and to discuss it in the future. Last week we had a chance to do so and she indicated then that her worst fears were coming to pass and that the anticipated conflict of interest situation was imminent.

Mr. Speaker, it is not that I had any doubt about the Attorney General's ability to handle such a situation. In fact, I remained confident that she was able to put national interests above personal or any other interest. In fact, she so reassured me. But we both recognized that the situation had a tremendous potential for mischief, especially from those who were not sympathetic to the Government; who did not wish the Government well; persons in respect of which there is no shortage in this country.

We thought that in those circumstances, a lot could be made out of a situation which is relatively simple, to the detriment of the individual herself, Sen. Annisette-George and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

In those circumstances, the hon. Attorney General decided to do the honourable thing. Yesterday she submitted her resignation to the Prime Minister. I would like to go on record, as thanking the Attorney General, Sen. Bridgid Annisette-George, for her contributions to the People's National Movement and the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, I would like to salute the Attorney General for doing the honourable thing. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not often you find, in the politics of Trinidad and Tobago that we experience such public spiritedness in circumstances in which it is justified; it is not often we find it. So in my estimation, she has gone very, very high indeed.

Her resignation has not yet been accepted, but it will be on Friday morning, at which time, our High Commissioner to London, John Jeremie, a former Attorney General, will be sworn in as Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**1.45 p.m.**

#### **PRESIDENT'S EMOLUMENTS (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the President's Emoluments Act, Chap. 2:50 ("the Act") to ensure that the pension payable to former holders of the Office of President is reviewed every six years from the date the holder of the office ceased to be President [*The Minister of Works and Transport*]; read the first time.

**BREAKDOWN OF AIR CONDITION**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, let me announce that the air condition has broken down completely, so that there would be a little heat in the House. May I suggest that the heat be related to the air conditioning. [*Interruption*] Hon. Members, I am on my feet. Member for Couva South.

**MINISTER OF FINANCE  
(REVOCAION OF APPOINTMENT)**

[Third Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [March 27, 2009]:

*Be it resolved* that this honourable House express its loss of confidence in Mrs. Karen Nunez-Tesheira as Minister of Finance of Trinidad and Tobago; and call upon the Prime Minister to take steps to have the appointment of the Minister of Finance revoked forthwith.

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Chandresh Sharma** (*Fyzabad*): Mr. Speaker, thank you. Having listened to the Prime Minister's statement a few minutes ago we on this side also salute the Attorney General. She has served well and has done the principled thing. It is rather very unfortunate that your Minister of Finance has not learned that lesson. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Manning:** Precisely the point, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member conveniently omitted the statement that I made "in circumstances that were justified." That is what we expect from hon. Members opposite. It is not the same situation at all.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you very much, Prime Minister. The time has come in this country where we must truly act in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister in presenting his statement indicated that the Attorney General is doing what is in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago, having discovered certain matters as they relate to Clico. Here you have a government Minister benefiting from that particular arrangement, there is no doubt about that; having benefited it is only fitting that the Minister tender her resignation. This is the collective call from nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, local and abroad.

**Mr. Manning:** How many?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Too many. It does not matter. If it is wrong and one person says it is wrong, it is wrong. If a thousand people say it is wrong, it is also wrong.

Let us quickly reflect what has transpired. The DPP is continuing her probe into the Minister's professional conduct. When we look at the learning that obtained in the House during the last Parliament, we saw former ministers, Eric Williams and Franklin Khan having resigned under similar circumstances. So, there is absolutely no difference. You had Franklin Khan and Eric Williams going. Why is the Prime Minister keeping the current Minister of Finance? It is also clear when you look at the reports that have emerged both in the print and electronic press and letters from abroad from persons who are in the know—I will demonstrate that later—that the country has lost faith in the Minister of Finance. There is no question about that. [*Desk thumping*]

One of the most important ministries, of course, is the Ministry of Finance. In addition to that, the Minister continues to represent the Ministry of Finance at high level meetings. Can you imagine the embarrassment this Minister is bringing to Trinidad and Tobago by representing the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago at the IMF and the World Bank? It is very, very sad. This has not happened in the past. Recently, at the Fifth Summit of the Americas, the collective body that attended that conference placed high emphasis on transparency and good conduct in governance. Truly, what the Minister of Finance is doing by staying in office and by the Prime Minister continuing to keep her in office demonstrates that that Summit of the Americas is worth absolutely nothing. Perhaps, for that reason only the Prime Minister had to sign it. Perhaps, the other Prime Ministers and heads of government who attended were of the opinion, based on what was happening, if they want to make this the financial capital of the Caribbean—we are saying that the Caricom countries would benefit from such arrangements—they were not prepared to sign while the Minister of Finance continues to hold that office.

Despite the Minister being tainted, the Minister continues, as I have indicated, to represent us at these global financial institutions. Many persons in the know have indicated that that is not the proper thing to do. You will recognize that there has been ongoing public criticism of the Minister on this matter. When you look at the last 10 or 15 years, the minister who has come under the most criticism for misconduct in public office is the Minister of Finance. I do not recall that happening, even in the Eric Williams or Franklin Khan matter.

The Prime Minister has set the tone on such issues by undertaking an investigation into the Cleaver Heights issue. When we heard that the Prime Minister just indicated that the Attorney General has tendered her resignation, of course, the other information that is circulating—in fact, I got something in my

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mail box this morning. It is that the Attorney General was asked to prosecute the Member for Diego Martin West on that Cleaver Heights issue and the Attorney General refused. Based on that there is a split in the Cabinet and the Attorney General has tendered her resignation. I notice that the Prime Minister has turned his head to pretend not to be hearing me, because oftentimes he jumps up. I will have to repeat that point when I have the Prime Minister's attention.

If based on what has come to public knowledge at this point in time based on the enquiry, that there is no missing \$10 million in the Cleaver Heights project, the persons in the know, the managing director has indicated it is arithmetic failure. If that is so, here you have a minister gone and the Minister of Finance in the person of the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, having collected from Clico, I think \$11.3 million and a painting worth \$1 million, that is enough reason to tender her resignation. The Prime Minister is aware of this. Later on when I talk about the conduct of ministers and what is expected based on all the parliamentary learning that obtains at this time, we would realize that the Minister has breached her conduct in office.

The Integrity in Public Life Act states:

"...A conflict of interest is deemed to arise if a person in public life or any person exercising a public function were to make or participate in the making of a decision in the execution of his office and at the same time knows or ought reasonably to have known, that in the making of the decision, there is an opportunity either directly or indirectly to further his (or her) private interests or that of a member of his family of any other person."

What are the statistics in this case? Here you have the Minister and relatives of the Minister benefiting. Is that not enough evidence? What does this Government want the Opposition to provide to demonstrate that Minister must go? The Prime Minister must act. Later on we will have to ask: Why is the Prime Minister protecting the Minister?

The code of conduct with respect to integrity in public life states:

"Where there is a possible or perceived conflict of interest, a person to whom this Part applies, shall disclose his (or her) interest in accordance with prescribed procedures and disqualify himself (or herself) from any decision-making process."

Here you have the Minister going to Cabinet not declaring that interest and not consulting with the Prime Minister as is required based on the British parliamentary practice and the CPA recommendations. Later, I will point to that in more detail.



The Minister is also clearly in breach of the Prevention of Corruption Act. What I have said in the last minutes is sufficient for the Minister to ask me to sit and to resign. This would bring the end to this debate. The Prime Minister has an obligation as well to demand or command or advise the President to withdraw the appointment of this Minister.

Law students are now laughing as someone who wrote two books on ethics and a career professional person, the Minister should do the honourable thing and resign. When you are an author, you are suggesting to young attorneys-at-law how to conduct themselves in public. There must be professional pride and self-respect as well. That certainly, does not seem to obtain in this particular matter. Since the Motion was first debated after the facts that the Minister is under strong suspicion of guilty on two critical fronts, one, forcibly using insider information to withdraw her money from CL Financial before the public announcement of the taxpayers' bailout.

I think that the Member for Diego Martin North/East argued the last day, how did the Minister benefit. The fact of the matter is that no other person, shareholder or depositor was able to withdraw their money and the Minister withdrew her money. Of course, the Minister used ministerial influence. There were many ordinary shareholders and depositors who were making applications for their money; some for emergencies and other reasons but they could not get it. Here, the Minister was able to get a cheque for over \$11 million and a painting, I think by Leroy Clarke worth in excess of \$1 million, in addition to insurance coverage both for personal insurance and property insurance.

The Minister did not disclose her shareholding in CL Financial which is required of all Cabinet Ministers and is a standard procedure given to all new Ministers upon appointment. It is not that the Minister was not aware of this. Part of the briefing for all Ministers is that they obtain this information. You will recall that in this House the Minister gave a 45-minute explanation and hiding from the issues, giving us all kinds of roundabout stories. It was published in the media at the cost of taxpayers'.

You will recall the Minister asking the press, trying to use ministerial influence, "make sure and publish this thing in its full." Why was the hon. Minister saying this? Because they command \$321 million in PR costs. They can spend this money anyhow they want. They are saying if you do not publish it, you would not get advertisements.

The Minister did not properly address the serious charges made against her. The Minister utilized insider information to seek her interest while ignoring those

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of the public. It is a good correspondent point to make. The HCU matter was on the horizon in the public domain. The Minister had information on that and never acted on it. The Minister was also aware that there were taxpayers, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who were applying to the financial institution to get their money. It could not be accidental that the Minister withdrew her money and her relative, in the person of her sister, also withdrew money and nobody else. How did that happen? The Minister has a sixth sense? It went further. The Minister went further. She ensured that her mother's funds were also withdrawn

I am certain that you are aware of many persons who have money at that particular financial institution and are unable to get it. The public is asking: How is it that the Minister and the Minister's relative were able to withdraw large sums of money? The only conclusion and rightfully so, is that it was based on insider information. At no time did the Minister disclose to her Cabinet colleagues that she was a shareholder in CL Financial. It is very, very clear when we talk about minister's interest—which I will come to in a little while—the Minister breached that as well.

This also puts a clear breach of the integrity legislation. The Minister ought to know and claiming that she inherited these shares from a family member is irrelevant. The Minister cannot come in this House and hide behind saying, "Listen. I inherited these shares from a relative." The fact that you inherited it makes the point that you should have disclosed it. The Prime Minister in a weak response has said that half of the Cabinet has shares in Clico. That is not important. What is important is that the Minister used insider information.

**2.00 p.m.**

What he probably meant is that they have Clico insurance policies. The Prime Minister cannot come with this weak defence and say that half of the Cabinet has shares and he really means insurance policies, which is totally different from shares. Of course, the Prime Minister is sharing that half of Clico is the Minister of Finance.

The Prime Minister sought to gain politically by hosting the President of the United States, Barack Obama. The country has paid a large sum of money. President Obama has been hailed by groups in this country for taking steps in the first 100 days of his administration to strengthen the ethics, lobbying and transparency rules of the Executive branch, which is very important. Some of those groups have the common cause, such as Democracy 21 League of Women Voters to Public Citizen. The organizations have given President Obama great credit for doing same.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, as recently as last month, the New York long time Finance Commission, you would recall, Martha Stewart resigned over conflict of interest allegations. When you look at what is happening with the British Ministers in the British Parliament, you would have seen a number of Ministers having tendered their resignation for similar or less offensive matters. [Interruption] £3,000.

I want to go to some of the responsibilities of the Minister:

“Declaration of Interests

Ministers attending Cabinet or Cabinet committee meetings must, in relation to the matters under discussion, declare any private interests held by them, or members of their immediate family...”

This is the standard we have obtained in this country for many years. How is it changing under the current administration? This gives rise to, or is likely to give rise to, a conflict with their public duties.

“Generally, declarations should be made in all cases where an interest exists which could not be said to be shared with the rest of the community. Any such declarations will be recorded by Cabinet officers.”

This is a practice. In the past, Ministers have had to declare their interests.

“It is then open to the meeting to excuse a minister from the discussion or to agree explicitly to his or her taking part.”

In the Ministry of Finance there are other Ministers of Finance. The only purpose for which the Minister sat in that Cabinet meeting and did not disclose her interests and shareholdings in Clico is to safeguard her own interest. This is crystal clear.

“Once a minister has made Cabinet aware of a particular private interest, it will not normally be necessary to declare that interest in subsequent Cabinet discussions.”

There was an opportunity.

“If a significant time has elapsed since a declaration and the interest is one that might not be well known to colleagues, the minister might declare the interest again...”

The Minister sat in the Cabinet meeting and influenced the Cabinet to arrive at a particular decision and the only beneficiary to that decision to date is the Minister and her relatives; no one else.

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Mr. Speaker, the conduct continues to say:

“It is vital that ministers...do not by their conduct undermine public confidence in them or the government.”

Members on this side have demonstrated, since the Minister’s misconduct in public office, and people are beginning to lose public confidence in this Government.

“• Ministers must be honest in their public dealings and should not intentionally mislead the Parliament or the public.”

When you look at the Minister’s conduct, both of the Cabinet and what the Minister said to the press, by way of press conferences, and what the Minister has disclosed in this Parliament, it certainly demonstrates that the Minister has misled the Parliament and the country by extension.

It goes further.

“• Ministers should ensure that their conduct is defensible, and should consult the Prime Minister when in doubt about the propriety of any course of action.”

These are standard practices that obtain to all Ministers. Even Members of Opposition in Parliaments the world over are familiar with this information as well. Oftentimes they are the government in waiting. One can argue that this Minister is new and may not have known. That is not the case.

“• Ministers are required to divest themselves, or relinquish control, of all shares and similar interests in any company or business involved in the area of their portfolio responsibilities.”

The Minister cannot claim. I did not know this. The Minister knew she had shares; a large number of shares in Clico. There are guidelines as to how to treat with it. The Minister purposely did not do it, to engage in that benefit.

“The transfer of interests to a spouse or dependent family member, or to a nominee or trust, is not an acceptable...”

The Minister could not transfer it to her children, sister or brother. The Government, thus far, has demonstrated that it is a Government of self interest. It is always about how can I as a Government Minister benefit or how can my family members benefit. What you would have seen in many, many ministries is this practice.

“• Ministers are required to make statements of interests in accordance with arrangements...”

That is the standard practice. In many Parliaments, the Prime Minister writes to Ministers outlining these arrangements. It is not unknown.

“Ministers should perform their public duties not influenced by fear or favour—that is, by any expectation that they will benefit...”

from same. The only thing this Minister has done to date is to participate in legislation that benefits herself and members of her family. What can this Minister stand up in this House and say that she has done and the country, the citizens in Fyzabad, Barrackpore or her own country has benefited? There is no evidence of that.

“Ministers should not exercise the influence obtained from their public office, or use official information, to gain improper benefits for themselves or another.”

Again, look at the amount of learning that is available on this matter. The Minister is very much aware that she should not exercise influence obtained from the public office.

Under the arrangement for Ministers of Government, oftentimes what obtains is that Ministers are given responsibility for policy decisions and they are not largely involved in the day-to-day operations. That is to ensure that they have enough time to conduct themselves in a particular way.

I was making the point that:

“Ministers are provided with facilities at the public expense in order that public business may be conducted effectively. Their use of these facilities should be in accordance with this principle. It should not be wasteful...As a general rule, official facilities should be used for official purposes. The distinction between official and personal conduct is not always clear (eg, in relation to the provision...”

of arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance has all these guidelines, so the Minister cannot claim: I am a new Minister and it was not available to me at a given time.

It goes further:

“This doctrine of collective responsibility is the basis on which the system of ministerial government rests. Without it the ministerial system cannot be effective and cannot survive as a method of Government developed to work in accordance with the wishes of the people.”

It goes further to say:

“Decisions made by a Minister about any matter in his portfolio, when it is not within policy already decided by Cabinet, must always be such as could, without doubt, be defended and supported by Cabinet.”

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From what we have heard, the Cabinet cannot defend the action of this Minister. It is clear that the Minister acted in her own self interest.

The guideline continues:

“All major matters of policy, and matters on which there may be doubt regarding the attitude of other members of Cabinet, and all subjects on which there is unresolved difference of opinion between Ministries, should be put before Cabinet. Moreover, should any Minister not agree with an action taken by a fellow Minister without prior consultation with Cabinet, Cabinet will decide whether or not the action should be upheld.”

The Prime Minister had larger responsibility. When this came to his attention, he would have revisited it as he had caused in another situation.

You would recall where a private citizen was able to buy shares at the Home Mortgage Bank and when the public said it was not proper, there was a public outcry and the person had to resell the shares. Of course, the person was able to buy it and make a profit at a later time.

The Minister may, in Parliament or in public speeches, say to the Government and the national community what happened. The Minister has not done such up to today. The first duty of Ministers is to play a full part on reaching decisions of policy matters, which only Cabinet can take. When Cabinet took the decision, based on the influence of the Minister, the Minister had withdrawn that information. The Minister, one can argue, was either dishonest in her dealings with the Cabinet or was very economical with the truth, because there was a responsibility with the Minister to declare. Had the Minister declared, I am certain the Cabinet would have said: You cannot proceed in that direction.

“A Minister is expected to introduce in Cabinet any memorandum that covers a subject within his portfolio and to undertake and discharge business concerning his Portfolio in Parliament.”

That would be in the interest of the people. How did this interest the national community? To date, the only persons who have benefited from it, as indicated, were the Minister and the Minister’s representatives.

I go further to identify:

“Ministers and the public service  
Roles and responsibilities”

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This is the general knowledge that obtains through the CPA and in many Parliaments such as the British Parliament to which we subscribe.

“Ministers decide both the direction and the priorities for their departments. They should not be involved in their departments’ day-to-day operations. In general terms, Ministers are responsible for determining and promoting policy...”

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

What the Government has demonstrated through this Minister is that the policy of this Government is to act in your own interest.

“defending policy decisions, and answering in the House on both policy and operational matters.”

The Minister has breached every rule that obtains this far; every guideline that obtains in all the Parliaments of which we are a part, through the CPA.

As indicated, when a new Cabinet is sworn in, oftentimes guidelines are provided for ministers, parliamentary secretaries and others. I am sure all Ministers and former Ministers on this side would have benefited from it.

“The briefing is usually given to the Minister after appointment.”

You cannot give it before, because they would not have been a Minister.

“In some circumstances, however, it may be appropriate to give this briefing to the Minister between the announcement of the appointment and the appointment ceremony...”

This is done, so that the Minister would have an opportunity to decide if he wants to hold that office. It is an office with a lot of public trust.

With the knowledge of the outgoing Minister, the State services also provide guidelines to all. In many instances you would find the Permanent Secretary also guiding Ministers.

“The written briefing should be tailored to the needs of a new Minister...” I remember in the Panday administration, there were many workshops conducted for parliamentary secretaries and others at that level. We engaged the best minds to make sure that we were conversant and familiar with what obtained. That has been the practice from the days of Prime Minister Eric Williams to the current administration. What has changed? Here is a Government sacrificing its commitment to the national community to facilitate the private interest of a Minister and her relative.

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“The written briefing is the first part of an ongoing process of briefing the new Minister. Its purpose is to give the Minister sufficient information to meet his or her initial requirements.”

This is to make sure they become knowledgeable in the conduct of their office. Oftentimes the briefing is supplemented by further workshops and further guidelines. As time goes by, Parliaments and Cabinets look at what is happening the world over, to make sure that the best practices come to the Government of the day.

**2.15 p.m.**

It goes further:

“Ministers should ensure that staff and advisers in their offices understand the principles governing the Minister's role and the Minister's relationship with public service officials...”

So, in the Ministry, there are public officials who will also guide the Minister.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my understanding is that when the public officials became aware of the matter, they told the Minister that what she did was wrong, and it should be revisited, but the Minister had no interest in that. The Minister was interested in collecting the cheque for \$11 million. How can a Minister take a painting worth a million dollars? How did that become part of the package? Who negotiated that on the Minister's behalf?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know if you have ever visited the home of the Minister on a personal invitation, but you will be shocked if you go to her home and see this painting in her living room, knowing it came through illegal means. That is not proper at all. It continues:

“A Minister may involve political advisers in policy development and other areas of work that might otherwise be performed within the Minister's department...”

Ministers are accountable to the House for ensuring that the departments for which they are responsible carry out their functions properly and efficiently. On occasion, a Minister may be required to account for the actions of a department when errors are made...”

So, I am arguing that if an error was made, there has been no effort by the Minister to correct the error, even when the Minister had no knowledge or involvement in those actions. So, even when that department commits an error,



the Minister has a responsibility, but here the Minister conducted it in her own interest and, to date, has not said to the national community what has happened and how she intends to correct it.

“The question of subsequent action in relation to individual public servants may be a matter for...”

others to take up as well. In this case, it means that the Prime Minister must intervene. We on this side have called on the Prime Minister to take action as well.

**Mr. Manning:** Action on what?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Are you here? Madam Deputy Speaker, it goes further.

“To protect the integrity of the decision-making process...and to maintain public trust in the Executive...”

Government Ministers must conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to their office, and there are guidelines for that. Again, we have indicated that the Minister has not conducted herself in that manner.

“a. in a ministerial capacity, making decisions and determining and promoting policy within particular portfolios;”

So, that is the first requirement. Again, the conduct of the Minister is not in keeping with international standards and best practices. The guideline goes further to talk about a political capacity and a personal capacity, and the Minister's conduct in a personal capacity is also in question here.

“In all these roles and at all times, Ministers are expected to act lawfully and to behave in a way that upholds, and is seen to uphold, the highest ethical standards. Ultimately, Ministers are accountable to the Prime Minister for their behaviour.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is very clear that the Minister misconducted herself in public office and misconducted herself to the extent where she has benefited from financial gain. I think it was the Member for Diego Martin North/East who said how could the Minister benefit. The fact that the Minister got a cheque for \$11 million is a benefit; the fact that the Minister walked away with insurance coverage for both properties and other mortgages is a benefit; and the fact that the Minister has in her possession a painting by LeRoy Clarke worth more than \$1 million is evidence of misconduct.

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In fact, Members of Parliament across the board are required to file their documents with the Integrity Commission. They are required to disclose their assets and interests as required. This also was not declared with the Integrity Commission. The Minister has a history of misconduct and this Minister wrote two books; one on ethics and another on something else.

“Additional requirements apply to Ministers’ interests. Conflicts of interest may arise between Ministers’ personal interests and their public duty because of the influence and power that Ministers exercise, and the information to which they have access, both in the individual performance of their portfolio responsibilities and as members of the Executive.”

So, when Ministers took the oath of office, they agreed to abide by certain rules. Further, as Members of Cabinet, they have agreed to conduct themselves in a particular way, and the Minister has done everything else except that. The Minister has not declared her interests and the Minister benefited directly. The Minister did not stop at her own benefit, but she extended it to members of her family.

It went on further to talk about the types of conflicts of interest. It says “arising from the Minister’s direct financial interests.”—That is the first one, and that is what obtains in the British Parliament as well. For example, a Minister or a member of the Minister's family, the conflict of interest may be direct or indirect. So, the Minister did not stop at her own direct interest, but it went indirectly to members of her family.

“Ministers must consider all types of interest when assessing whether any of their personal interests may conflict with, or be perceived to conflict with, their ministerial responsibilities.”

So, the Minister had adequate time. The Minister misled this House on a previous occasion when she indicated that she was not aware of what was happening at Clico, but there were meetings for over two or three years. In fact, the Governor of the Central Bank indicated that they were meeting with Clico and expressing concerns, so the Minister would have had an interest.

Now, the Minister may argue that she only came on board 18 months ago, but the work at the Ministry continued, and that information would have been passed on to the Minister when she assumed office. Now, in addition, the former Minister is also her Cabinet colleague. So, it is not that it came from another administration. It came from her own administration. So that interest was there. Again, the Minister ignored it and obtained an interest for herself.

“Interests of family...and close associates

A conflict may arise if people close to a Minister, such as a Minister's family...or close associates, might derive, or be perceived as deriving, some personal, financial, or other benefit from a decision or action by the Minister or the government.”

How much clearer can it be? This is very disturbing; this is frightening. This Government acted in the Minister's interest and her Cabinet colleagues must be concerned. I know they have expressed concerns privately to persons who are close to them, but it is evident that the information was available, and the Minister took it upon herself to act in a way that she would benefit. The Minister cannot argue that this information was not available to her. This information has been in the ministry for many years. It continues:

“Ministers must therefore be careful not to use information they access in the course of their official activities in a way that might provide some special benefit to family members...or close associates.”

So, it is not that another Minister had passed that information on to the Minister of Finance, but because the Minister is the Minister of Finance, all that information came to her attention. The Minister used that information to benefit herself and her relatives. It goes on:

“Passing on commercially sensitive information, or encouraging others to trade on the basis of that information, may also breach the insider trading regime...Such a breach may result in a significant fine...”

In some countries or where the Minister is asked to resign, oftentimes, the Minister has to return the benefit. The Minister should have returned that cheque and should wait until the process takes its normal course and where other members of the public should be paid in a similar fashion.

So, out of the Clico fiasco, the only person or persons to benefit was a Minister of Government, and in this case, the Minister of Finance, who had first-hand information and a relative of the Minister of Finance. It continues:

“Similarly, it may not be appropriate for Ministers to participate in decision making on matters affecting family members...or close associates; for example, by:

- a. attempting to intercede on their behalf on some official matter;”

The fact that the Minister intervened, acted and benefited is also a breach.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a very sad day in this Parliament when this information is in the public domain. The national community has lost confidence in the Government and the Minister continues to act on behalf of the citizens and the citizens have no choice in the matter.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The citizens have expressed their disgust and they have lost confidence in this Minister through the mediums available in the current situation which is the press, both print and electronic. There is no election in the air to say that they could vote the Minister out of office. It goes further:

“b. proposing family members for appointments;”

This is a practice that obtains in the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that in this very House—a private citizen was run out of this country. He had to “pack up” with this family and go to the United Kingdom. I am making reference here to the rice issue at the NFM. Today, as fate would have it, that private citizen is now in this House as a Member.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad that you have returned, because I want to pay a small degree of tribute to a development with respect to a Member in this House and, in this instance, it is your good self. We on this side, and I am sure that other Members, were very proud to recognize that a few days ago you were appointed to the higher office of President, even though it was for a short period. [*Desk thumping*] Having been elected in 1991, and having been a Member of the Government since then—for whatever reason you were not a Minister of the Government, and then you did not seek re-election and you returned as a Member of this House, and you have gone to that office. Maybe this is a sign of something to come. There may be another resignation to treat with very soon. If that resignation takes places as is expected, an appointment will have to take place as well.

I was making the point to show how the Government uses its power. You would recall that a former Minister—I do not recall the portfolio that Minister held, but it was the then Member for Arouca. The Member came to this House and said all kinds of ugly things about a shipment of rice, and this engaged a private citizen who had no recourse. Today, that private citizen has returned to this House as the Member for St. Augustine.

The *Hansard* record, based on what the PNM said then obtains. It is unfortunate that there is no recourse to have the record corrected or removed—the lies that

were reported and recorded; the half-truths and the false accusations, et cetera. We know that NFM took action in the High Court in London against the shippers of the rice using expert testimony to prove in their defence that the rice was in good condition when it was purchased and loaded on the vessel. This description was repeated on seven occasions on the claim. The matter was settled out of court in NFM's favour in 1999, and the Government has not seen it fit to report that. NFM then claimed that Vasant Bharath was terminated for a cause, and now they are forced to withdraw that claim and pay cost plus interest some 10 years later.

**2.30 p.m.**

This Parliament must be very, very proud that that private citizen was able to return to this House and have that matter treated with at the highest level. [*Desk thumping*] These are important things to record. When you look at the conduct of this private citizen, now a Member of Parliament, versus what the Minister of Finance has done, and when you compare it with the resignation of the Attorney General, it begs the question, why is the Minister of Finance holding on to this office?

In furtherance of that same statement, a Senator in the other place made the statement, and it says: "The accusations levelled against Bharath"—talking about the Member for St. Augustine as he is now—"were petty and had no basis, no foundation and were simply because somebody did not have his way on the board." Now that the truth has come out and the facts are there, I hope that we would be able to learn something from it.

**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. [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be failing in my duty—As the Prime Minister indicated that the Attorney General should be replaced by a former Attorney General. When you look at the inquiry report as it relates to the CJ matter, it says at page 22:

"There is evidence, the weight of which we are not in a position to assess, that on 8 May 2006 the Attorney-General"—referring here to John Jeremie—"had attempted to use the Chief Magistrate's first statement as a means of pressurizing the Chief Justice to resign. The Attorney General denied this in a further press release."

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This is the finding of the Mustill Report, and today the country is being told by the hon. Prime Minister, this gentleman who conducted himself in this fashion is going to become the next Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. When you look at what obtained, very frightening, they went after the Chief Justice.

**Mr. Imbert:** Standing Order 36(1), relevance.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member is now developing something; I do not know where he is going with it; he could become relevant in the next sentence.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** This Minister has a habit of engaging in premature many things; he has to learn. The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is that statements made in this House, in the context of the Minister of Finance refusing to resign and the appointment of this Attorney General, seems to suggest something, which is very frightening, because this Government has a habit of going after the messengers.

When you look at the replies of the Ministers, as it relates to this matter, it is always personal; it is never anything of substance; it is always going after the personal lifestyle or the personal dealings of people; nothing to do with what is at hand; it is always about a personal attack. That is why I introduced the private citizen, Vasant Bharath then, and the Member of Parliament, Vasant Bharath today.

When you look at the Attorney General then, coming back again, going after the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North, the national eyes have not stopped seeing what transpired at the home of the Leader of the Opposition then, when 23 police officers went to his house and the country cried. I happened to go that house and saw it for myself. This was under the then Attorney General.

It is frightening that the Leader of Government Business defends it. Today it is Members on this side, tomorrow it would be others. The understanding we have on this side is that the current Attorney General tendered her resignation because she refused to prosecute the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West; it has nothing to do with any other matter. Of course, the Prime Minister has given one side of the story, and if that is so, and here is an Attorney General—I make the point and I am making the connection because I know there would be a cry just now—coming to go after the messengers of those who expose the Government's failures, expose the Government's corruptions and expose when Government Ministers act in their own interest. That is the point I am making.

When you look at the history of persons whom they have gone after, it seems as if a particular group in this country is going to be the victims for a long time. When you look at the matters that have come up under the watch of the Attorney General as well, it means—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, this is a substantive Motion about the conduct of the Minister of Finance, it has nothing to do with the Attorney General. I ask you to look at Standing Order 36(1) again, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** I have looked at it before, and as I said, I do not see the Member is being irrelevant at all; he is drawing a comparison. Please continue.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In researching for this particular matter, I looked at what obtained at the House of Commons, in the Code of Conduct. The most recent version of the Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Ministers in the House of Commons was agreed to by that House in 2002, and for the purposes of today's contribution, this is relatively new still. The purpose of the code of conduct is:

"...to provide a framework within which acceptable conduct may be judged."

It sets out the public duties undertaken by Ministers and how the Ministers should conduct themselves, as it relates to personal conduct, it requires observance of certain general rules identified by the committee on Standards in Public Life, and this relates to all of us, Members on both sides.

It goes further, because Ministers can easily misuse this particular information that comes to their attention as it relates to holding office. When we look at what obtained based on these guidelines, again it shows that the Minister of Finance has breached her office, and certainly has to tender her resignation, or the Prime Minister has to revoke, or cause to be revoked her appointment.

I go further and I wish to make the point as it relates to what obtains today under the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for making sure that other ministries have moneys to run the affairs of that ministry: to pay public servants, to purchase goods and services and to attend to the needs of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This Minister of Finance, having caused moneys to go elsewhere; the ministries also report to the Minister of Finance as well, and when it comes to the attention of the Minister of Finance that proper discharge of duties, as it relates to funds, does not take place, there is a requirement to act. When you look at the conduct of the Minister, it certainly begs the question, because current groups that

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are observing and celebrating Indian Arrival Day, have gotten a total of \$750,000 and 58 groups receiving that \$750,000 averages between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per group.

What is very frightening, and which was shared with me only yesterday, as the East Indian community in Trinidad and Tobago celebrates 164 years, based on the population of the East Indian community in Trinidad and Tobago and \$750,000, it means to say the Minister of Finance is saying that the East Indian is worth less than \$1.64, because that is all the money they are getting to observe Indian Arrival Day celebrations. It is very strange that the Member for St. Joseph laughs at it, perhaps because he wants an excuse for holding the office he holds.

When you look at the Ministry of Finance causing moneys to go to other groups, it shows the imbalance of it in the first instance, but more than that, it shows something else; it shows where the Government has an interest. I want to ask the Minister of Finance, in the discharge of her duties, not only as it relates to her involvement in Clico, and having benefited from it; how it is that year after year, the groups that observe and celebrate Indian Arrival Day are short-changed, are treated with contempt? Why are you allowing this to continue?

I report on the guidelines again. The most likely grounds for review of a Minister's decision are that in making the decision in question, did the Minister act outside the scope of power or discretion; did not understand the applicable law; did not make up his or her mind on the matter that he or she is called upon by law to determine?

In this instance, what was the Minister's intervention as it relates to the Clico matter? Was it there to find out how the Government, and through the Cabinet, can add that the national community that is affected will benefit? Or, in this instance, from what we have seen, what has been in the public domain, the Minister's action thus far, has benefited only herself and her relatives.

The Minister is required to take into account all considerations, all advice and all the knowledge that obtained at that point in time. Our understanding is that, at the ministry all that information and all the guidelines were available. The Minister had a moral obligation, and the oath of office demanded that the Minister report to the Cabinet of her interest in the matter, declare her interest in the matter, and also to excuse herself from any decision making.

In this context, the Minister has failed to take account of the information; has failed to act intelligently as it relates to the knowledge and the guidelines for the conduct in office of Ministers of Government. The Minister did not act in a fair



manner, because the Minister's action was not fair to the shareholders and the depositors, because they have not benefited to date. They are still waiting and they have not been able to access their funds, whilst the Minister has been able to access her funds and a large sum of money.

Mr. Speaker, the learning goes further to say that the Minister being a Member of Cabinet had a responsibility and the Cabinet also had a responsibility, and also the legal advisor to the Cabinet, the Attorney General had a responsibility. When the Prime Minister indicated that the Attorney General was tendering her resignation because one of the reasons advanced was that the Attorney General declared that it might be somehow related to CL Financial, well the learning says that the Attorney General has a responsibility to advise, but the Attorney General in this instance, could not advise, because the Minister of Finance did not declare her interest. So, at that time the Attorney General could not advise because the Minister did not declare her interest.

Secondly, when it came to the attention of the Attorney General, the Government must tell us what advice the Attorney General gave, because the Attorney General must also advise after the event as well. The Attorney General must say, look, what took place then, what transpired is illegal, is not in keeping with the best practices, is not in keeping with the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, here we have the Attorney General and we do not know if the Attorney General gave any advice, and if the advice was given—In fact, it says, if the Attorney General forms the view that the matter arose from the Minister's duties, the Attorney General should submit to the Cabinet her opinion on same. The Attorney General has the advice of independent attorneys as well. This Government has a habit of hiring expensive lawyers to go after Opposition Members and to go after those who oppose their misconduct in Government, and we have seen this time and time again; millions and millions of dollars being spent.

What recourse do citizens have resulting from the action of the Minister who is causing them suffering? They are very clear that the Minister could be sued. Of course, if the Minister is sued the Government pays; again, the taxpayers pay. The Minister cannot be sued or—I am not sure—could be sued in a private capacity; hardly likely.

**2.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, Member's conflict of interest has been in our domain for a long period of time. The first thing it talks about as it relates to Minister's interest, his assets includes any trust in respect of which a member of the Executive or parliamentary secretary or junior Minister has herself, himself or family as beneficiary.

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Secondly, it talks about Ministers have in their employ, paid for by taxpayers, ministerial advisers—and this means a person other than a public servant who occupies a position in the office of a Minister and who provides policy, programme or financial advice to that Minister on issues relating to his or her powers, duties and functions as a Minister, whether or not the advice is provided on a full-time or part-time basis or whether or not the person is entitled to any package or compensation for that advice.

Our understanding is that the Minister has advisers paid for by taxpayers who advised the Minister that that particular approach—not declaring her interest in the Clico matter and obtaining the benefits immediately—was wrong and illegal and we would want the Government to tell this House and to lay in this Chamber what was that advice? The advice that was given before the event and the advice that came after the event.

Also, the ministerial staff refers to persons other than public servants who work on behalf of a Minister. At that ministry there are a number of persons who engage on a private basis in addition to public servants. Again, our understanding is that some persons gave an opinion that the Minister's conduct was in breach of office and was not in keeping with the high standards set for conduct of Ministers as it relates to the personal involvement. Again, Members of the Opposition here have laid out all the evidence, all the knowledge that obtains at this point as it relates—certainly there is much more available and I am sure others may suggest some of it.

I want to go to managing conflicts of interest, because when conflicts arise there are ways to treat with them and the purpose and rules of this. It said:

“More and better rules on conflicts of interest for holders of public office”—meaning Ministers of Government—“should—at least in theory—lead to more trust, greater accountability, more integrity and less unethical behaviour/corruption.”

Again, this information has been in the Government's domain for the longest while.

“New rules should also provide a tool for identifying and resolving potential conflicts of interest, as well as:

- increase public confidence in the government;”

What the Minister has done has really caused a loss of confidence in herself, in her ministry and in the Government. The rules also demonstrate a high level of integrity of the vast majority of government officials who are required to practise;

prevent conflict of interest from arising because official activities would be subject to public scrutiny. The Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago is discharging its duties. This is not a personal move against the Minister of Finance. We are colleagues of the same House. The Minister has miscondacted herself in public office, has benefited from it and the learning and industry standards as it relates to ministerial conduct the world over is that the Minister must resign or the appointment must be revoked by the Prime Minister.

It should cause persons whose financial finances would come up in the public domain to be treated with so that there are facilities; and part of it was for the Minister to declare her interest and excuse herself from any decision-making or to obtain the guidelines of the Chairman of the Cabinet—in this case, the Prime Minister—but none of it obtained.

The British Parliament in recent times has had some situation similar to the misconduct in public office or allegations of misconduct. In every one of those instances in the last couple of weeks the Ministers who were identified for allegations of misconduct or benefiting from the office they held, tendered their resignation or asked to be excused from public office until matters were resolved. So, in this very Government of the current administration, one Minister of Government, in this case the Attorney General, is saying there is a conflict of interest in which I am involved and as a result I am tendering my resignation. That is what the Prime Minister told us.

How is that different from the Minister of Finance? There is absolutely no difference! In fact, the worst offender is the Minister of Finance because the Minister of Finance has walked away from the CL Group with a cheque for \$11-plus million in addition to the other benefits I have identified and that is enough ground to tender her resignation. That is enough ground to revoke, and when the Members of the Opposition speak here we speak for the majority of citizens and we speak for the majority of the electorate because when you look at the numbers that obtain in the electorate, close to one million people—I think it is 971,000 people—the minority of those voted for the Government and the majority voted against the Government, they voted for the UNC and the COP and we speak for that majority, and the majority is saying that the Minister must go. They have instructed and advised the Opposition to do its duty. When the Opposition comes here and presents the information, the Government's response is to look for red herrings, to look at the personal lives of Members, hoping to embarrass Members here, but that cannot hold at all. [*Interruption*]

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I hear the Minister of Finance trying to say something. I did not hear what she was saying. It is a pity I did not hear it, but I am certain the Minister will say it another time and I will treat with it. *[Interruption]* In fact, before the session started today the Minister engaged with me saying, "I want to talk about you", but what would the Minister want to talk about me; she wants to shoot the messenger. *[Interruption]* The Government has no interest in the truth. The Government has no interest in governing to improve the lives of people. What policy has this Minister of Finance brought to this Parliament that has benefited one citizen today? One can argue, one citizen who has benefited is her sister. Food prices are not lower, the cost of living is not lower, the distribution of the state resources—and I just identified one as it relates to the moneys given to groups for Indian Arrival Day. *[Interruption]*

When you look at the contracts awarded it is always friends and families of Members of Government and this is what the Minister of Finance is busy doing, not acting in the interest of the national community.

One of the learnings that we subscribe to: Ministers of Government and Members of Parliament have a duty to demonstrate leadership. How has this Minister demonstrated leadership? Leadership on a personal level only. The Parliamentary Code of Conduct: Ministers should always be a clear distinction between what they do for themselves, what they do for their constituents and what they do for the country. In this instance what the Minister did has not benefited the country, has not benefited her constituents, has not benefited the national community and has only benefited herself.

Ministers should take personal responsibility for ensuring that their conduct in their office as Ministers benefit the community is an oath of office; they swear to do that, it should not be a burden to taxpayers. Thus far the Minister's conduct has been a burden to taxpayers because the \$11-plus million collected by the Minister, came from where? Members of Parliament should be open. Ministers of Government should be open and transparent as far as possible about the expectations—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). I know this is a substantive motion but the Member keeps saying the Minister collected some \$11 million and implying that she stole some \$11 million from taxpayers. That has to be a breach of Standing Order 36(5).

**Mr. Speaker:** No, I think what the Minister should do, if the Member is saying that the Minister has received \$11 million, she should get up, ask to intervene and I am sure he will give way.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** Thank you. Yes, I was listening with bated breath to what the Member for Fyzabad had to say and I am just asking where is the \$11 million that I have from the taxpayers, I would like to know when I received it?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Certainly! I said \$11 million from CL Financial.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** Even if you said I received it from Clico either way neither makes sense, both are untrue, so I am asking you to substantiate either, firstly, that I received \$11 million from the taxpayers and secondly, now, you are saying Clico?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Minister, you need to tell us, you tell us how much money you got and that would solve the entire thing. [*Crosstalk*] Hold on, hold on.

**Mr. Imbert:** Standing Order 36(5), he is imputing improper motives. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Now please, there is a Standing Order that I have to rule on. [*Crosstalk*] Again, I do not think it is imputing improper motives, but any Member who is contributing following can answer that. The Minister herself can ask the Member to give way and answer it which is what she just did. I do not think it is imputing improper motives.

**Mr. Imbert:** He said she stole \$11 million.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no. Well, I did not hear that!

**Mr. Imbert:** He said that.

**Mr. Speaker:** That?

**Mr. Imbert:** She stole \$11 million from taxpayers.

**Mr. Speaker:** Well, I am subject to correction. [*Crosstalk*] Order! Hon. Member, if it is that what the Member for Diego Martin North/East is saying is correct that you indicated or you said that the Minister stole \$11 million from taxpayers—

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I did not say that!

**Mr. Speaker:** Well, assuming you said that I think you will do the honourable thing and withdraw it, but as I said, honestly I did not hear it, but if you had said it I will ask you to withdraw it.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did not say the Minister stole \$11 million. What I said is that the Minister received \$11-plus

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million. I also said the Minister received a painting by LeRoy Clarke from that outfit. I also said that the Minister received insurance coverage, et cetera.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** Mr. Speaker, again he is saying something that is absolutely not true.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Before you go—

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** I would like him to [*Crosstalk*] LeRoy Clarke. I have no LeRoy Clarke painting. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please; both of you cannot stand at the same time.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** He is making up that. I cannot sit here and listen to things that are absolutely—he is saying that I got a LeRoy Clarke painting, so is he saying that I was given it as a gift or is he saying that I stole it. [*Interruption*] Either one is untrue. I do not have a LeRoy Clarke painting, I was never given any, but if he is saying, which I understand he is saying, that I stole it, clearly that is imputing improper motives and he has to be able to prove that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes. [*Crosstalk*] Order! Order! I did not hear the Member say that you stole it. So, Member, be extremely careful in your language.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Yes, thank you. As I come close to concluding, it is clear that the Opposition is doing its duty; it is clear that the Minister misconducted herself in public office; [*Desk thumping*] it is clear that the Minister used insider information; it is clear that the Minister benefited from the package—only the Minister and her immediate relative, to large sums of money. It is clear that other provisions, according to the Minister—more than that the Opposition is calling for the removal of the Minister by whichever process she chooses to engage; by tendering her resignation or having the Prime Minister revoke it.

We are blessed today that a standard has been set with the resignation of the Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*] For what the Attorney General, as told to us by the Prime Minister, tendered her resignation based on the possibility of conflict of interest as it relates to CL Financial. We do not know what those conflicts of interests are. We have not heard of them, but we were told by persons in the know that the Attorney General refused to prosecute the Member for Diego Martin West in the Cleaver Heights construction matter and it is based on that she has tendered her resignation. But that is not the issue.

**3.00 p.m.**

The fact that a resignation is being treated with; the fact that an Attorney General is to be appointed, who is a horror story as it relates to past conduct, who

has gone after people and people are very, very scared, you could imagine persons in the simple mind, the simple person in the community outside there, seeing what they did to the Attorney General, seeing what they did to Dr. Vijay Naraysingh, seeing what they did to the Opposition Leader and others what obtains now. So, respect for the conduct of the work of our Opposition Member in bringing this, it is nothing personal. The Minister must go. And we want to suggest, do not hide behind how much and whether LeRoy Clarke painted it or John Scott painted it, tender your resignation, do the honourable thing and make sure the Prime Minister revoke it with immediate effect.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of information (Hon. Neil Parsanlal):** Mr. Speaker, before I begin, thank you for the opportunity to speak and on behalf of those of us on this side, to wish the East Indian community a happy Indian Arrival Day, 2009. [*Desk thumping*] It is 164 years that we celebrate today and the East Indian community has contributed significantly to all aspects of life in Trinidad and Tobago, and we join today in congratulating them and wishing them all success as we celebrate Indian Arrival Day. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that when this Motion was first introduced on March 27, 2009, I was not present in the House at the time but I did have the good fortune of viewing the proceedings like so many others via the Parliament Channel. One of things that struck me in the presentation made by the Member for Siparia on that day, and unfortunately, it has been reinforced today, two months later by the contribution from the Member for Fyzabad, is that it is so much easier, or the Members of the Opposition find it so much easier to break down than to build. They find it so much easier to trample than to lift this society. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Rubbish!

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** They find it so much easier to denigrate things than to praise anyone. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Nonsense!

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Mr. Speaker, what strikes me even further—and we hear all kinds of things today—is the culture of victimhood, so easily nurtured by those who see themselves as oppressed and lacking hope. A persecution complex. But, I stand today and offer the experience of the East Indian community as they celebrate Indian Arrival Day, and how the East Indian community has struggled

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and removed themselves, and released themselves from the shackles of that victimhood and persecution complex, to rise to where they are today, and I offer it to the Members opposite. But it is clearly the reason why even their own supporters are rejecting them now.

Mr. Speaker, when I listen to hon. Members of the Opposition on the Front Bench—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Swaratsingh:** Typified by the nonsense—[*Inaudible*]

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Typified, my colleague tells me, by what we heard from the Member for Fyzabad today—I understand the pain of their followers. I understand the pain of those who wish and long for the Opposition to return to its pristine glory, from what we have been told, and engage in debate that is meaningful, debate that will lift our society, debate that will bring life to this Parliament, rather than the character assassination that we engage in.

The Member for Fyzabad gets up in this House and says to the national community that the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is the beneficiary of a LeRoy Clarke painting worth over \$1 million. Mr. Speaker, no evidence to support it, nothing to substantiate it. I do not want to accuse him of lying, that is unparliamentary, but certainly, it is strange to what is happening to the reality. And yet, these Members of the Opposition consider themselves as the alternative government.

**Mr. Swaratsingh:** Where is the evidence with the \$11 million?

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Where is the evidence of the \$11 million appropriated by our colleague, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara? Where is the evidence of that? Where is the evidence of the LeRoy Clarke painting that he spent an inordinate amount of time alluding to? But you see, once you are constituted in a particular way, then that is all you see.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, that has been the tenor of the debate in this House. We have not heard from any Member opposite a single shred of evidence, a single piece of evidence adduced in this House that would suggest that the Minister of Finance has corruptly enriched herself. We have not heard a single piece of evidence that she has corruptly enriched herself during, prior to, or even subsequent to her negotiations with CL Financial. We have not heard anything therefore. Anything! Not a single piece of evidence.

Mr. Speaker, when you examine this Memorandum of Understanding—but before I say that, the Member for Fyzabad talks about those of us who say things



publicly, over public posture and then what we speak about privately, but the national community needs to be aware as well, that there are those on that side, there are those Members on the Opposition Benches who have come to us privately and thanked us. There are Members opposite who have come to the Government and thanked us for saving their own pensions. [*Desk thumping*] Members opposite—and I ask them to deny it—have come to us, as Government, and thanked us for the intervention of the Minister of Finance.

So why would they privately come to us and say, "Thank you, for your intervention. Thank you for saving my pension, the little "cacada" I put aside", and then come here and accuse all of us of all kinds of calumny. It is the hypocrisy we speak about, and that is why when the Cabinet sat and took a decision to save Clico and the CL Financial Group—and I want to make the point, the Minister of Finance did not make this decision on her own. The Cabinet of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago made a statement. [*Desk thumping*] We took a decision to save the small depositors; the little pension funds of members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, I will share with this honourable House and members of the national community, some other documents that speak to what exactly was happening at Clico because none of them on the other side, no Member of the Opposition on that side can escape the blame. They cannot play Caesar's wife in this House with respect to the Clico matter. They cannot do it. They cannot claim that the Minister of Finance knew this from since April 2008, and therefore benefited. Simple logic. If she knew this from since April 2008, then why did she not take out her money before? Why did she not take out her money before if she knew it from since April 2008? Basic logic! Common sense! But common sense we know is not a feature that has been distributed liberally on that side, to quote the Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Speaker, when we examine the MOU, it is this MOU dated January 30, 2009, made between the Minister of Finance, acting for and on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Not acting in her own behalf. All the decisions she took, all the decisions that were made were on behalf of the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and with the instructions of the Cabinet. It is this MOU that we signed, that has prevented hundreds of thousands of small depositors, policyholders and their families from being placed in a position where their hard-earned investments were being jeopardized. [*Desk thumping*] It is this MOU that did it. Did the Minister benefit by signing this MOU?

**Hon. Member:** No.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** She did not. She did not benefit by signing this MOU. It is this MOU that prevented the further dissipation of assets of the CL Financial Group. Did the Minister benefit by signing this MOU? She did not.

**Mr. Swaratsingh:** Trinidad and Tobago did.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Trinidad and Tobago benefited from this. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago benefited from this decision. It is this MOU that allowed the Central Bank to move with the dispatch that it did, to prevent the contagion effect of the CL Financial Group from spreading throughout the financial sector. It is this MOU, signed by the Minister, acting for and on behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] She did not benefit from it at all.

Mr. Speaker, if I may borrow some words from my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, it is not often that he is quoted in this House. He said the Motion of the Member for Siparia is founded on froth or shifting sand. [*Desk thumping*] The Motion is entirely ill-conceived. I never thought the day would come when I would resort to quotes from the Member for Diego Martin North/East, but I am happy to do so today.

In fact, what has emerged from quarters throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, from quarters such as the Bankers Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association, the Chambers of Commerce, the captains of industry throughout Trinidad and Tobago, is the overwhelming vote of confidence in this Government's handling of this particular matter. [*Desk thumping*] captains of industry, all of them, have given the actions of the Minister of Finance, acting on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, a resounding vote of confidence.

Mr. Speaker, I quote from the *Trinidad Express*, January 31, 2009:

"Local economists are giving the Central Bank and Government a thumbs up on their decision to provide financial support for the CL Financial conglomerate and its subsidiaries..."

They said yesterday that without the Central Bank's intervention, the country would have gone without protection from the shock which would follow the collapse of such an influential investment giant."

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Mr. Speaker, there is an article and a subsequent response by Prof. Patrick Watson; and I do not want to get into the to and fro between Prof. Watson and the *Trinidad Guardian*, that is not my issue here today. But in the *Newsday* on February 08, 2009:

"Economist and SALISES Director at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Dr. Patrick Watson has advised Clico investors"—and I quote—"to listen to the Government."

There is too much at the stake and we have to believe that everything will be all right. I believe everything is going to be safe and I hope the Government does not disappoint me."

This is Dr. Patrick Watson speaking. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Who is he?

**Hon. Member:** COP.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** In the *Trinidad Express* on January 31, 2009 and I quote:

"The Bankers Association...is urging depositors in local banks 'not to make hasty decisions' by making withdrawals in light of Government's announcements that it will take control of assets of Clico, the major shareholder of Republic Bank..."

The *Trinidad Guardian* of January 31, 2009:

"The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce has commended the Central Bank and Government for what is described as 'their expeditious intervention into the challenges of CL Financial, Clico and Clico Investment Bank.' In a statement yesterday, the Chamber said the action of the Central Bank and Government was taken 'in order to fully protect the financial interests and well-being of depositors and policyholders, and to bolster the confidence of the public and so preserve the integrity of our financial sectors."

All of them providing and giving a resounding vote of confidence in the hon. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] All of them.

**3.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, this is a difficult passage in our country's history. It is a difficult passage in terms of our country's economic life at this time. This economic passage that we are going through, I posit to this House and the national

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community, has been successfully managed, in the main, by the Governor of the Central Bank and the actions of the Minister of Finance acting for and on behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a fact.

Were it not for the fact that we would be charged with congratulating ourselves on a job well done, I would want to suggest to this House that we suspend the Motion before us about a vote of no confidence, and instead move a resounding vote of confidence in the manner in which the Government has handled this economic crisis. [*Desk thumping*]

My colleagues, the Minister of Works and Transport and, on the last occasion, the Minister of Education, have already, in my opinion, systemically and clinically destroyed the arguments posited by the mover of the Motion, the Member for Siparia; and they have done it much better than I could ever have. So I do not intend to go over in great detail what they have already touched on. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** "Yuh run out of things to say?"

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** "Hold on; hurry dog eat raw meat." What is absolutely clear to me—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** If you want to attack Rowley, do that.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:**—is that no amount of vilification, nothing that they have been able to throw at us, nothing that they could come with, will prevent this Government of the PNM from doing all that is necessary to keep this ship of State sailing smoothly. [*Desk thumping*] I want to remind them of something: It took 30 years for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to remove the PNM from office; it took less than one year for the people to remove them from office. Less than one year the people took to move a vote of no confidence in the UNC. [*Desk thumping*]

So they cannot come to this House and accuse us, as they are accustomed doing, of all kinds of calumny, when clearly in less than one year the people of Trinidad and Tobago decided that they lacked the class, they lacked the calibre and, certainly, they lacked the moral compass that was needed to guide this country safely. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, while I have the greatest respect for the Member for Siparia, in fact, I dare say that she is the best debater on that side that I have heard since I have been in this Parliament. She has scored many firsts in her career, and I congratulate her for that. She is a woman; she is a mother; she is a representative of the people for a lot of years, since 1991, I believe; through the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) first, that is all right now, and then into the UNC. I really want to congratulate her.

I want to offer her, in my humble estimation, just a little advice. In the biblical utopia where the lion and the lamb do, indeed, lie together in harmony, by now she should realize that in the land of the setting sun where she now resides, when the lion and the lamb lie down together, the lamb has to be constantly on the look out for the predator lying next to her. [Laughter] [Crosstalk] I just want to offer that bit of advice. [Laughter]

Clearly the Member for Siparia has been identified as the one to go after the Minister of Finance, as she has tried to with this Motion before us today. Clearly the Member has been handpicked to do what others, not even my good friend, the budding shadow Minister of Finance, could do, and that is to go after the Minister of Finance.

Clearly the Member for Siparia continues to take the bait of those who would lead her down the garden path, which is clearly the case with this Motion. But at every turn, the Member for Siparia ends up with political egg on her face; on every occasion. This action, just like the pre-action protocol letter and the challenges to the President or the matter of the appointment of the Integrity Commissioners, represents yet another case of her being misled, which begs the obvious question: Why? [Interruption]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Because the President failed! The President made a total fool of this country. It is time you get rid of him.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** As someone commenting in the newspaper asked: Why Kamla, why? It is also because she is misled into bringing motions like that into this House, that one of her very own, the Member for Chaguanas, her deputy political leader, he is not here today, was moved to describe her and her actions—and these are not my words, these are not the words of the PNM—as an embarrassment. He has described her as a politically abused woman. [Laughter] I will never be so uncharitable. [Crosstalk]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Standing Order 36(5)!

**Mr. Speaker:** Continue.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is an article that appeared in the *Express*. It is not me, as I said.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The Speaker ruled on that; you cannot quote from—

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** And you read how many letters, Member for Caroni East?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The Speaker will guide you.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Do not come to me and tell me how to do it; I am guided by the Speaker.

The point is made. I wish to assure her that we have the greatest of respect for her. We will never on this side utter those uncharitable words to her.

In her Motion, the Member for Siparia bandied about allegations of misconduct in public office. When the Member for St. Augustine spoke, the accusations were thrown: dereliction of duty; abdications of our responsibilities, and the Member for Fyzabad repeated them.

Mr. Speaker, one of the many valuable pieces of advice I have been given by the constituents of Lopinot/Bon Air West, is that in politics one should always speak the truth. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Ramnath:** "Yuh provide dem with de water dey want?"

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Yes.

**Mr. Ramnath:** There are pockets still demonstrating.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** The second bit of advice is that we should always have a long memory. Once you in politics, make sure "yuh" memory long. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Ramnath:** "How long you in politics?"

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** I am just taking the advice, but I will come to you.

**Mr. Ramnath:** I am just asking.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** The more I listen to the Members opposite, the more I listen to debates in this House, I am guided by the wisdom of my constituents. I say this against the background that it was since 2001 that the Member for Tabaquite, the former Attorney General and Leader of Government Business, the former first buddy of the then Prime Minister, the Member for Couva North, warned the then UNC government about the CL Financial empire; since 2001.

When the Member for Siparia comes to this House and talks about dereliction of duty and failure to act in the country's best interest, she either has a very short memory or, sadly, is a complete stranger to the truth. I do not believe that the latter is true.

When those on the other side accuse the Minister of Finance and, by extension, this Government, of dereliction of duty and failure to act in the country's best interest, they must also answer the question: What did the UNC members do when they had the opportunity to correct the madness? The answer to that is, "nothing"; they did absolutely nothing.

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I am quite sure that the Member for Tabaquite, were he here today, could tell the country many, many stories about his attempts to get his UNC comrades and political leader to deal properly with the CL Financial group.

I do not claim to be Hugo Chavez, to offer a book so that the ratings could go up and become a bestseller, but Selwyn Ryan's book, *Deadlock*, is of particular interest to me, as a student of the politics. Mr. Speaker, chapter 5, pages 97—98 says:

"The financial conglomerate, Colonial Life [CL] Financial, challenged these claims,"—claims that were being made against them—"and argued that it was in fact committed to ensure the well being of the workers in the industries concerned and the people in general. What was good for CL Financial was good for the national interest. Panday justifying his ideological retreat, likewise argued that it would have been foolish for him 'to alienate the business community since they were the ones to bring in the jobs and the investment...'"

That quote could be found in the *Guardian* of September 11, 2001. Mr. Speaker, since then the Member for Tabaquite has been challenging them; challenging his colleagues to look at what CL Financial was doing. They did absolutely nothing.

In moving her Motion, the Member for Siparia, speaking on behalf of her colleagues on that side, said—again, I want to be fair to her—

"Sometimes it is said that if a man cannot be trusted with the government of himself, can he, then be trusted with the government of others? Let history answer this question."

Member for Siparia, if a man cannot be trusted with the government of himself, can he then be trusted with the government of others?

Mr. Speaker, page 222 of the same book states:

"Where members of a political party are perceived by the public to have done wrong, it is the duty of the party to investigate these matters and to give answers to the population. The party must condemn the irregular practices which the member was guilty of and must condemn these irregular practices in the strongest possible terms. That is what is meant by enforcing sanctions against such conduct. Where a member of the party breaks the law or the rules, he must be condemned, instead of being praised, especially where the member said he would do it again."

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I repeat:

"... must be condemned, instead of being praised, especially where the member said he would do it again."

I need to ask the question to this House and to the national community: Which one of them on that side, which member of the UNC on that side, can be trusted with the governance of themselves? Which member on that side, was derelict in his duty, who abdicated his only responsibility to this country? At what profit did it happen?

During the course of the last debate, the Member for Barataria/San Juan alluded to a report and, in interest of full disclosure, I want to bring to the attention of hon. Members the report. The first inkling of that report to the national community came in a Saturday *Express* front page September 22, 2001. There were three headlines on this paper; the first one: "Carlos John's \$14 million loan"; the second one: "Panday's US \$50,000 cheque"; and the third one, "Clico technically insolvent". [*Crosstalk*]

I do not intend to deal with the first two, because, at least, one of those persons is no longer in public life, therefore, I do not want to go down that road. But Saturday, September 22, 2001, says:

"Clico technically insolvent"

This was in 2001.

### **3.30 p.m.**

In fact it was laid in this House on September 21, 2001 and it is the Report on the Operations and Financial Affairs of Colonial Life Insurance Company (Clico) under the Insurance Act 1980 and the related regulations.

Permit me if you will, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the national community to read some excerpts from this report that the Cabinet of the then United National Congress had full access to. They had this report, they looked at it, saw the contents and did absolutely nothing with it.

It says in the background:

In July 1997, the Office of the Supervisor of Insurance submitted a report on the operations of Clico.

It was 1997 when the United National Congress formed the Government.



Mr. Speaker, the first one said the report highlighted the relative inability of the company to satisfy its statutory fund. That is exactly what we are talking about today. It says:

The insistence on the part of the company to pay dividends contrary to law.

Because a company should not pay a dividend if its funds are in deficit. However the company paid dividends in each year except 1992.

The company has consistently failed to submit an acceptable actuarial certificate.

The certificate submitted was not prepared according to the Act, consulting actuaries have repeatedly made this observation, that is, the liabilities of the payer to be understated which *prima facie* makes the deficit in the fund worse than that which immediately meets the eye.

In 4 it says: “The company has been technically insolvent.”

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet of the United National Congress had this report, they had access to this report that had they acted then since 1997, Clico, the CL Financial Group and all its depositors would not have been in the position they are today. Mr. Speaker, they ought not to come to this House and accuse this Government of dereliction of duty when they had this information in their hands. It says:

The company was invited to a meeting in which it agreed to implement measures to address the deficiency in the fund as well as to comply with the Act regarding submission of acceptable actuarial certificates. These matters have not been satisfactorily addressed.

Mr. Speaker, the report addressed the 1996—1997 situation. It says:

Relatively speaking, the situation in the company is the same in that the company continues to transgress the law.

This is a 1997 report saying that the company continues to transgress the law. For example:

The deficit in the 1996 statutory fund has been determined to be \$574.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, they sat on this report, and, if my memory serves me right—how many of them were Members on that Cabinet? I do not want to place blame where it ought not to be. But certainly the Member for Couva South, the Member for Couva North, the Member for Princes Town North, and the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, were all in the House at that point. They cannot now come

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here and play Caesar's wife, they cannot come now like Pontius Pilate and wash their hands of this issue and say it is the Minister of Finance to blame. They cannot do that.

Mr. Speaker, the report, the damning examination, which is an indictment on the performance of the United National Congress when they had the opportunity to correct this mess.

Mr. Speaker, if the report frightens you as much as it frightens me, it gets worse and that is why I wish the Member for Siparia would check, double check and triple check her information before she comes to this House particularly when she accuses Members on this side of mischief in public office.

The entire Cabinet at that time knew of the situation with Clico and the CL Financial Group from the then Prime Minister down, everybody knew and did absolutely nothing, and I would gladly take my seat if one of them who was in the Cabinet at the time would get up and deny it. I would gladly sit so that they could deny it. Member for Couva South, are you denying it? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, the entire Cabinet knew, not only of this report from the Supervisor of Insurance, but they knew via a Cabinet Note that was sent to them submitted by the then Minister of Finance, the hon. Brian Kuei Tung I believe it was. Perhaps the PNM blood was still running through his veins so he felt he had to do the honourable thing and inform the Cabinet of what was going on.

Cabinet Note No. 1865 July 22, 1997 and as you will be aware in the Note to Cabinet the heading says:

The operations and financial affairs of Colonial Life Insurance Company Limited in context of the Insurance Act, 1980 and the Regulations made thereunder.

And the opening sentence of this Cabinet Note says:

The matter for the consideration of the Cabinet is the operations and financial affairs of Clico and its continuing technical insolvency within the provisions of the Insurance Act, 1980 and the regulations made thereunder.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet Note that came on July 22, 1997 told them very clearly that Clico was in trouble. What did they do? The answer unfortunately is absolutely nothing.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet Note says:

The operations of an insurance company must be such as would unquestionably reflect its ability to fulfil the reasonable expectations and guarantees of

policyholders or potential policyholders. If this position is not sustained, the Supervisor of Insurance may institute intervention proceedings into the affairs of that company.

The Minister of Finance came to the Cabinet begging the Cabinet please intervene, do something about Clico, do something about the CL Financial Group. Do you know what they did? This Note came to the Cabinet on July 22 1997, and on July 24, two days later, the Cabinet Note was withdrawn. It never saw the light of day and yet still these hon. gentlemen come to this House and the Member for Siparia and argue or attempt to paint this Government in such a picture that we are failing the people.

One Member said that we had deliberately allowed Clico to fail. I believe it was—was it you Member for St. Augustine, or your colleague to the right? Do you remember? *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You had seven years why you did not do something about it?

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** He sits there and, Mr. Speaker, it is gall you know, it is gall. He sits there and now wants to challenge. This is the Member of Parliament for Caroni East who accuses this Government of deliberately causing Clico to fail. He sat there, he was a Member of the Senate at the time and he prevailed on this, presided over this, did absolutely nothing and comes to this House and accuses us of deliberately causing Clico to fail. The Cabinet Note is here you know, No. 1865 July 22, 1997. Your Cabinet, and you did absolutely nothing with it.

Mr. Speaker, armed with the information, they did absolutely nothing. They buried their heads in the sand, refused to treat with it, but because of their nonintervention we now have a point of reference to ask when faced with the same situation how did the two Governments perform?

On the one hand you had the Government of the UNC getting a report, Cabinet Note and ignoring everything in its entirety and deliberately allowing this matter to be swept under the carpet. What did the PNM do? What did the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the incumbent Cabinet do?

We signed an MOU, we closed the Clico Investment Bank, as a result of that we have seen FCB's acquisition of CCMB and more than that, that what we had done is guarantee all the third party deposits. In other words, what this Government has done is save the deposits and the Insurance Report says it you know.

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Clico had 67,114 insurance policies in 1997, 11 to 12 years later surely that would have grown. What this Government did when we were presented with the same situation they encountered, we saved the lives, the existence of hundreds of thousands of small depositors in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Fyzabad said only one person benefitted from this and he pointed to the Minister of Finance. Nothing could be further from the truth. When you look at the reach of the CL Financial Group which was 25 per cent of GDP, this was too big to fail and the person charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the CL Financial Group was too big to fail was the hon. Minister of Finance and it was an assignment she undertook for and on behalf of the Government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and for that action she has been vilified, taken up and down the country accused of all kinds of things by the Members opposite.

But we understand, Mr. Speaker, and I said it in the House on the last occasion, when the PNM points to the moon those on the other side only see our finger. Chalk and cheese and that is why we on this side reject this Motion entirely and call on the Member for Siparia—as she is here clad as usual in exquisite garments, regal splendour—to apologize for wasting valuable parliamentary time. [*Desk thumping*] Wasting the Parliament’s time when the Member sat in a Cabinet faced with the Cabinet Note, No. 1865 of July 22, 1997 that spoke to the technical insolvency of Clico and did absolutely nothing to save the hundreds of thousands of depositors. She did nothing to save their money. The Government of which you were a part was prepared at the time to allow Clico to fail, and one wonders why.

### **3.45 p.m.**

One wonders why nothing was going to be done to Clico. Is it because as was said in a previous time that when the CL Financial operative said “jump”, people asked: “How high?” Or when they said “Miami” or “Toronto”, people asked which flight? Were they then just jumping to the tunes of the pied piper CL Financial at the time and that is why nothing could have been done? Is that why the *Express* report could say “CL repaying \$14 million loan for a government minister” at the time? Is that what I see? It is right here, a Camini Marajh story: “CL repaying \$14 million loan for Carlos John”. Is that why? Is that why?

In 1997 when they had the opportunity to protect the depositors of Trinidad and Tobago, they did absolutely nothing! [*Desk thumping*] Is this why? Is this why? Yet still, they come to this House and play holier than thou.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Information has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Minister speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues on both sides of the House and promise that I will not take the whole 30 minutes. I am acutely aware of the surroundings, so I will be a little kinder today than usual and not speak for my full 30 minutes.

It is important for us to understand; it is important for this country to understand that when Members opposite come to this House and accuse the People's National Movement of all kinds of misdemeanours, that they must come here with the proof of it. As I have indicated, they have adduced absolutely nothing; they have adduced absolutely no evidence to support the claims that they have made.

Again, in her contribution, the Member for Siparia raised, as I said, all kinds of things, but I want to be kind to the Member for Siparia, so I am not going to take her down that road. The issues before us today are very, very clear. The Members of the Opposition have brought this Motion indicating to this House that the Minister of Finance should be condemned because she corruptly enriched herself through actions in the CL Financial matter. We have pointed out very, very clearly that they have adduced no evidence. The Member for Fyzabad spoke at length, for 75 minutes, and said absolutely nothing. He adduced no evidence to say to the national community that the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara has a LeRoy Clarke painting. He could find no evidence because there is none. He could find no evidence to say that she benefited from \$11-odd million from the CL Financial group. He could produce no evidence because there has been no evidence.

The evidence in this matter is this, that when faced with the situation of the CL Financial group, the government of the United National Congress sat on their haunches and did absolutely nothing. They were prepared to allow the thing to persist; allow the situation to go on. I see the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla nodding his head and I am sure he agrees with me, because he, too, was part of that administration that would have allowed people from Cumuto/Manzanilla, the poor farmers up there, to lose the little pension they had.

**Hon. Member:** Wicked.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Wicked people! You see? And he presided over that, and the people from Fyzabad, it did not matter if they lost their pensions; it did not matter to them at the time. Yet they come to this House and cry crocodile tears about what would have happened.

The facts are abundantly clear. When the People's National Movement was faced with the situation, we acted and we acted with dispatch; we acted in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is in keeping with our mandate, in keeping with our own motto, that we will continue to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago because we continue to care. That is why I have absolutely no hesitation whatsoever, none whatsoever, in dismissing, rejecting categorically, the Motion presented by the Member for Siparia and instead, moving a vote of absolute confidence in the handling of the CL Financial matter in the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla—

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that it is too hot and that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, June 03, 2009, on which day we are going to complete the Proceeds of Crime (Amdt.) Bill and we are going to complete the Financial Intelligence Unit Bill and we are going to take the vote on both of those Bills on that day.

**Mr. Speaker:** Again, hon. Members, let me apologize for the electricity supply. Information has come that it would not be fixed in the short time and Members are, in fact, complaining of the heat. So, hopefully, when we meet on the next occasion on June 03, 2009, I am almost certain by that time the situation will be rectified. Before I put the Motion for the adjournment, I think the Member for Siparia would like to say something. Greetings on Indian Arrival Day?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** I will permit it.

#### Indian Arrival Day Greetings

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this side of the House we would like to extend our greetings to the national community and especially to those of the Indo-Trinidadian/Tobagonian community on the occasion of the 164<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Indian arrival.

We would like to say that it is a national holiday and, therefore, we would expect that all Members of this House and of the national community, will participate in those events in celebration of the achievements of the Indo-Trinidadian/Tobagonian community, in terms of equality of distribution, but in terms of equality of acceptance and recognition of all the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, normally I would have spoken first, but I decided to defer to the distinguished Member for Siparia. Ladies first—

**Hon. Members:** Afterthought.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am not wearing the proper attire. [*Interruption*]

Yes, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the People's National Movement, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we wish to wish the East Indian community our best wishes for a very happy and successful celebration of Indian Arrival Day. As the Member for Siparia has pointed out, it is the 164th Anniversary of the arrival of East Indians as indentured immigrants to Trinidad and Tobago and the East Indian community has made a very significant contribution to the development of Trinidad and Tobago in all aspects of national life.

Before I take my seat, I simply wish to remind the hon. Member for Couva North that it was the PNM that made the Arrival Day a national holiday.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** No, no. Arrival Day?

**Mr. B. Panday:** Like the distribution of housing, and so on.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning):** Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to join my voice on behalf of the Government, the People's National Movement and the people of Trinidad and Tobago in extending happy Arrival Day greetings to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is no secret that it was the government that I had the pleasure to lead that introduced this as a national holiday, putting it on the 30<sup>th</sup> May in honour of the arrival of the first East Indians in our country.

I think that we preferred the all-inclusive approach of Arrival Day rather than the sectoral approach of Indian Arrival Day, because we believe that in a society as multi-racial as this one, that we should conduct our business at all times in a manner where no group feels excluded from the celebrations that we have. It was

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for that reason that I, too, was very pleased in 1985 to be a member of the Cabinet that named Emancipation Day a holiday and was very careful not to call it African Emancipation Day. Indeed, we took on that occasion, the all-inclusive approach of Emancipation Day so that all citizens could participate, even though it was significant in the lives of the African community. We named it in such a way that all citizens could participate.

So, on this occasion, I extend happy Arrival Day greetings to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and, particularly, to our East Indian brothers and sisters who form a very essential part of the national tapestry.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** I, too, would like to join with Members in wishing the Indian community a very happy Indian Arrival Day celebration on Saturday. I am sure that not only the East Indian community, but all the people of Trinidad and Tobago should embrace Indian Arrival Day and participate in the celebrations.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 3.57 p.m.*