

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, January 27, 2017*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, MP, Member for Arouca/Maloney and hon. Daryl Smith, MP, Member for Diego Martin Central have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*The Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2009. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2010. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2011. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2014. [*Hon. C.*

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Imbert] 8. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2015.

[*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 1 to 8 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

9. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

10. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

11. Ministerial Response of the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises on an Inquiry into the Administration and Operations of the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

12. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

13. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Prime Minister to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an

- Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
14. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 15. Response of the Elections and Boundaries Commission to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 16. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 17. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 18. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Tourism to the First Report of the Public

- Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
19. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 20. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 21. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 22. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to the First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Statutory Authorities and Service Commissions (including the THA), on an Inquiry into the Land Settlement Agency in relation to Squatter Regularisation. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

URGENT QUESTIONS**Retention of Issued Firearms
(Decision taken)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Madam Speaker, I will ask everybody's indulgence to ask the question on behalf of the Member for Barataria/San Juan, he is a little bit delayed.

To the Minister of National Security: In view of the Prime Minister's statement on the violent society which we inhabit, and especially the ease with which criminals are able to access firearms, could the Minister of National Security state whether he is willing to allow police officers to retain possession of their issued firearms when they are off-duty, in order to protect both themselves and their fellow citizens?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The issue of the retention of firearms by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service officers is in fact a decision to be taken by the Commissioner of Police and not the Minister of National Security. However, I would surely want to inform the House that the Commissioner of Police does in fact, based on individual assessment, allow certain officers to retain their firearm users' license—their issued firearm, based on an individual assessment.

**Forensic Audit into Pan Trinbago
(Details of)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts: Could the Minister state the firm selected and the terms of reference for the forensic audit into Pan Trinbago?

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. No firm has been selected and no terms of reference have yet been developed.

**National Carnival Commission Board
(Appointment to)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): To the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts: Could the Minister state why no members of Trinbago Unified Calypsonians' Organisation and Pan Trinbago were appointed to the Board of the National Carnival Commission?

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. There is a member of the Trinbago Unified Calypsonians' Organisation and a member of Pan Trinbago on the board of the NCC. [*Interruption*] [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Could Members please conduct themselves with the decorum that Parliament requires.

**Speed Guns
(Details of)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: In light of the high number of road fatalities, could the Minister tell us the brand and model of the speed guns currently being used by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and whether these devices are equipped with the most recent technology?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The brand used right now by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is the LIDAR speed device, which was, in fact, procured in July 2015 under the previous Government at an exorbitant price. Madam Speaker, technology evolves daily, weekly, and therefore in terms of the recent technology,

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one would understand that 2015 to now technology continues to improve. What I can assure the House, however, that this Government is taking a new look at the speed devices and intends to look at recent technology in the purchase of future speed devices.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In response to—I would just like to find out from the hon. Minister, as he said, that we bought these guns at exorbitant prices. Would he agree—because technology develops just like computers—that the price of the very items fall over time?

Madam Speaker: Member, I would not allow that. That is a matter of opinion.

**Strategic Services Agency (Amdt.) Act
(Reasons for Non-Proclamation of)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): To the Attorney General: Given the increase in gang violence this country has witnessed since the beginning of 2017 and the importance this Government placed on the need to expand the Strategic Services Agency for the purpose of intelligence gathering, could the Attorney General inform this House as to the reasons for the non-proclamation of the Strategic Services Agency (Amdt.) Act, 2016?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. During the debate on the Strategic Services Agency (Amdt.) Bill, 2016, an undertaking was provided by me that the Bill would be assented to when the regulations for both the Interception of Communications Act, which is Act No. 11 of 2020, and the regulations for the Strategic Services Agency Act, which is Act No. 24 of 1995 were in fact ready. I am very pleased to inform that those regulations are near complete. They will be taken to the LRC and then taken to Cabinet for approval. I would just underscore that since the proclamation of those particular parent laws, that is the 1995 SSA Act and the 2010 Interception of Communications Act, the country had no regulations at all. So, we are curing a

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lacuna in one case from 1995 come forward, and in another case from 2010 come forward, pursuant to the undertaking given to the Parliament.

**Chaguanas Central Business District
(Joint Police/Army Foot Patrols)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): To the Minister of National Security: In light of the recent shootings which took place in close proximity to the Chaguanas Police Station, could the Minister indicate whether he intends to implement 24-hour joint Police/Army foot patrols in the central business district of Chaguanas?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Joint Army patrols are currently being conducted in the Chaguanas area in terms of the Enterprise area where, on the basis of threat assessment, the Commissioner of Police, and supported by the Chief of Defence Staff, feels that that is where the concentration of joint patrols should be at this point in time. However, there are random joint patrols conducted in the inner cities in Chaguanas, in the business sector, and there are also standard police patrols in the inner cities at this point in time, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Government is in a position to answer five of the six written questions today. They will be circulated later in the proceedings, and we are seeking a deferral of the two oral questions for one week.

Madam Speaker: Leave is granted. If you could identify the five questions of the six, please?

Hon. C. Imbert: The questions that will be circulated today are 8, 13—the answers—14, 15, 16, 17, and No. 18 will be circulated within the next two weeks.

Hon. Member: So, it is six out of seven you are answering?

Hon. C. Imbert: Six out of seven. I just want to clarify they will get them later in the proceedings. The ones I have spoken about.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Housing Units Distributed (Details of)

8. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister provide the names and application dates for the sixty-two (62) recipients of Housing Development Corporation housing units distributed on September 10, 2016 in San Fernando?

Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (Contractors Payment Details)

13. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister provide the payment details to contractors of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission during the period October 2015 to December 1, 2016 including the:

- a) contractor name;
- b) total amount paid;
- c) payment date; and
- d) services provided?

Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (Contractor Payment Details)

14. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister provide the payment details to contractors of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation during the period October 2015 to December 1, 2016 including the:

- a) contractor name;
- b) total amount paid;
- c) payment date; and
- d) services provided?

**Water and Sewerage Authority
(Contractors Payment Details)**

15. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister provide the payment details to contractors of the Water and Sewerage Authority during the period October 2015 to December 1, 2016 including the:

- a) contractor name;
- b) total amount paid;
- c) payment date; and
- d) services provided?

**Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago
(Contractors Payment Details)**

16. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities: Could the Minister provide the payment details to contractors of the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago during the period October 2015 to December 1, 2016 including the:

- a) contractor name;
- b) total amount paid;
- c) payment date; and

- d) services provided?

**Solid Waste Management Company Limited
(Contractors Payment Details)**

- 17. Mr. Ganga Singh** (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister provide the payment details to contractors of the Solid Waste Management Company Limited during the period October 2015 to December 1, 2016 including the:

- a) contractor name;
b) total amount paid;
c) payment date; and
d) services provided?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Job Losses and Jobs Created
(Details of)**

- 29.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance state:
- (a) the number of job losses from April 2016; (b) the number of jobs created from September 2015; and
- (c) the sectors most affected by job losses from April 2016? [*Mr. Rodney Charles*]

**Cruise Ship Arrivals in Tobago
(Details of)**

- 37.** Could the hon. Minister of Tourism provide the figures for cruise ship arrivals in Tobago from July to December 2016 providing:
- (a) total cruise vessel calls;

- (b) total cruise passengers; and
- (c) a comparison of these figures for the same period last year? [*Miss Ramona Ramdial*]

**UNEMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
(GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO GUIDE COUNTRY)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name.

Be it resolved that this House take note of the rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty, and deteriorating living standards through the imposition of a wage restraint/freeze policy on the working people; and
Be it further resolved that this House condemn the Government for its failure to deal with the current unemployment challenges and to present a clear and cogent economic plan to guide the country through these challenges.

Madam Speaker, this is a very important Motion in the context of where Trinidad and Tobago is today, and based on what was promised to the people of this country via the PNM Government prior to the general election of 2015.

Madam Speaker, the successful operation of a modern economy is based on a significant majority of the adult citizens earning income they need to survive through the work that they do. It is labour force who produced the goods and services which comprise the modern economy. These workers also generate the majority of taxation that allows governments to play their economic role, including providing income to those who do not work. And progressive governments, Madam Speaker, go the extra mile to secure jobs and to create jobs to ensure that there is economic growth and development of the society.

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And, Madam Speaker, before I go further into the crux of today's Motion, and taking into consideration this Motion will focus on the well-being and welfare of worker, and by extension citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and also the well-being and the future of the trade union movement and so on, in this country, I want to take the opportunity here this afternoon to congratulate the President of the Public Services Association, [*Desk thumping*] comrade Watson Duke who has now been elected to the very distinguished position of being the minority leader in the Tobago House of Assembly, as the political leader of the People's Democratic Party, and I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate the people of Tobago for upholding the principles of democracy and their overall commitment to the well-being of the country [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I have allowed you some leeway, and therefore now if we can stick to the subject of your Motion.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I would be guided. Madam Speaker, as I said, when a government is elected into office, the electorate and the citizens of the country, they have given that government the mandate to address issues of the stability of the economy, the diversification of the economy, health, education, infrastructural development, national security, and I could go on and on, based on the manifesto that they would have gone to the electorate and campaigned on.

But, Madam Speaker, in 17 months the Government of Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, through its economic policies, or should I say, its failed economic policies, have failed to create really one new single job in Trinidad and Tobago.

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[*Desk thumping*] And I say so, because those on the other side may attempt to tell you and to tell Trinidad and Tobago that there is not enough economic data and supporting evidence to give credibility or credence to the issue of rising unemployment levels in this country. And just to enter into the records here this afternoon, I want to say and read into the record that CNC3 on the 29th August, 2016, aired a report through its newscast which focused on the issue of the labour force bulleting for the first quarter of 2016 showed an increase in unemployment, 5,000 fewer people were employed than the last year. The bulletin was released by the Central Statistical Office, and the information contained in the bulletin was based on data collected in the continuous sample survey of the population during the period January to March 2016:

And, the unemployment rate for Trinidad and Tobago increased from 3.5 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2015 to 3.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2016.

And, Madam Speaker, in the *Trinidad Business Guardian* of Wednesday the 13th April, 2016, and I am reading directly from that article, “Central Bank estimates 5,000 job lost”—and it goes on to say, and indicate:

“As many as 5,000 workers may have lost their jobs since the fourth quarter of 2015, the Central Bank estimates.”

Madam Speaker, it further elaborated by indicating:

“It said early indicators suggest a worsening of conditions in the sectors of the economy...affected by the downturn in the energy sector.

Anecdotal evidence from newspaper reports and public notices suggests that between September of 2015 and March of 2016, 29 companies announced

job cuts which displaced close to"—over—"3,000 workers, but some industry"—sources—"indicate that the figure could be"—in excess of—"5,000 persons, the Central Bank said.

The bank"—indicated in this article that—"the unemployment rate"—would further—"increase...domestic real GDP...to contract"—beyond—"two per cent due to declines in the energy and non-energy sectors. The"—bank—"forecast is for year-on-year inflation"—to increase beyond—"six per cent due to impact of the widening of the VAT base on food prices."

—where VAT was restored on 7,000-plus basic food items.

And, Madam Speaker, additionally, for those on the opposite side, they from time to time have consistently attempted to tell those on this side that when we speak we do not have the evidence. When we speak we do not know what we are talking about. But, they on the other side have a track record of coming into this House and making a number of wild card statements without presenting any form of tangible evidence to support what they have said. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, they have a track record of waving a number of, what I would call blank papers and so on, from time to time and saying, "We have the evidence here, we have evidence there, we have the evidence on a, b, and c", without presenting facts to you, to this House, and to Trinidad and Tobago.

And just for the records, Madam Speaker, I have a bundle of documents from the newspapers of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Holds up documents*] whether it is the *Guardian*, *Trinidad Guardian*, *Newsday*, or *Express*, which focuses on the rising levels of unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago. And just a couple of

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headlines that I would want to read into the record so those on the other side who may want to deny what is being said, they could go and do the appropriate background research and so on—

Hon. Member: Factual.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and facts. Madam Speaker, just to read into the record here a number headlines from articles, one dated the 26th of February, 2016, “Over 1,000 retrenched since September last year. Government to use ten-point plan to address retrenchment”. “Never again Labour Minister to change law”. “Joblessness linked to domestic violence”. “Laid off man hangs self”. “Retrenched workers no word from Prime Minister”, and “Sad day for ArcelorMittal workers”.

And, as I said, Madam Speaker, it is a very thick bundle, in less than 17 months which reflects, really, no plan on the part of the Government of Prime Minister [*Desk thumping*] Dr. Keith Rowley to address the very important issue of job creation in Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, one might as the question again, why job creation is important? Job creation is important to prevent what we would call anarchy or civil unrest, and to ensure that stability is there for not only the current workforce but, what opportunities will exist as it relates to those young persons who are in the secondary school system, the tertiary level education system, and so on, so the potential workforce they want a sense of direction, they want a sense of hope, they want something to aspire to, based on their years in the education system, and all I could say to you, Madam Speaker, and Trinidad and Tobago, that the Government of Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley has also failed

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the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, they may want to tell you, when they get up to reply to this Motion, where is the evidence of what we would call a documented wage restraint policy, or a wage freeze policy. Because, as you know, the Acting Leader of Government Business and the very distinguished Minister of Finance, when he made his very historic statement of zero, zero, zero, at the IMF meeting at the Hyatt Hotel, he was hastily summoned into action, or pressed into action by the Prime Minister, who instructed him to hold a press conference and do the appropriate damage control, and attempt to pacify the workers of Trinidad and Tobago, and their friends within the joint trade union movement and so on, to indicate to the national community, that we have no policy such as a wage restraint, or a wage freeze.

But to understand what unfolded you have to understand the history of the PNM, you have to understand the DNA of the PNM as it relates to how they deal with the working class of Trinidad and Tobago, and I want to say to you that even before—because the Minister of Finance was in the Cabinet of the then Prime Minister and political leader of the PNM, Prime Minister Patrick Manning, and the current Prime Minister was in the Cabinet of Patrick Manning, and when money was flowing through Trinidad and Tobago, when Trinidad and Tobago had revenues abound, aplenty, US \$147 per barrel of oil, and US \$9 per MMBtu of natural gas, they offered the trade union movement zero, zero, zero, [*Desk thumping*] so it is in the DNA, it is in their DNA to offer or undermined what we would call, the principles of free and fair collective bargaining in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk*

thumping]

And, Madam Speaker, I want to say, because they will jump up and say, and indicate in their reply and so on, that we have no such policy, as the Minister of Finance indicated in an article that was written by Anna Ramdass, the *Trinidad Express*, the 3rd of November 2016:

Imbert, we have no policy—and I quote—there is no wage freeze, and he was responding to when social media went into a frenzy with attacks against Imbert and the Government, and trade unionists, including the Public Services Association president, Watson Duke, were upset with Duke calling his own news conference issuing the call to vote against the PNM in the upcoming local government elections at that time, based on their policy.

2.00 p.m.

And as I said, and I will indicate, Madam Speaker, that it was something that was properly choreographed. While it may not have been written in black and white, it was something that was properly choreographed by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet in relation to [*Desk thumping*] this wage freeze or wage restraint, whatever terminology you may want to append to it here this evening.

Madam Speaker, I want to read from *Loop News*, dated the 23rd of November, 2015.

“PM: NGC wage freeze ‘sensible’”

Madam Speaker, quoting from the article:

“Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley says the move by the National Gas

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Company (NGC) to freeze wages for the rest of 2015 and 2016 is a sensible one, given the challenging economic times facing the country's energy sector.”

And it goes on to say that:

“On November 16, the NGC sent out a memo to all staff and subsidiaries informing them of cutbacks.”

And today I want to ask the—well, he seems to be acting a lot, besides being the Acting Leader of Government Business, he is also the Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—whether this wage freeze which was implemented by the new energy tsar at National Gas Company, Mr. Gerry Brooks, and the Board of Directors and the management of NGC, whether this wage freeze which was supposed to last until the end of 2016, whether it is enforced at the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, further to this, as I said, it was properly choreographed in the public domain and also I am of the opinion that it was deliberately done. I want to read from an article written by Mr. Aleem Khan, dated the 4th of November, 2016 of the *Trinidad Express*:

“Although the ‘zero, zero, zero’ offer to public servants by Finance Minister Colm Imbert was just ‘speculative position’, according to Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley yesterday at the post-Cabinet media briefing in Port of Spain, a review of the latest country report by the International Monetary Fund showed that the IMF was long aware of the ‘wage restraint’ by Government”—in relation to the whole question of—“Government's wages and salaries...in fiscal 2017.”

Madam Speaker, it went on to indicate that:

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“...the June-released IMF Country Report No. 16/205”—indicated that the—“IMF executive director for Trinidad...and the IMF senior advisor...praised...T & T...planned ‘introduction of wage and hiring restraint mechanisms’.”

So, Madam Speaker, it is very, very, clear to me that while it is not documented in black and white that there was an unwritten wage restraint policy that was adopted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago since they came into political office, taking the advice of the IMF which the Minister of Finance has indicated on a number of occasions. In his first budget presentation and in his second budget presentation, he indicated that he and the Government had invited the IMF to Trinidad and Tobago to offer advice and direction for the stability of the country and in that regard, Madam Speaker, all I can tell you is that wage restraint, wage freeze, whatever terminology, is a prescription of the IMF and I am of the opinion that this Government is being run by the IMF. [*Desk thumping*] That is the conclusion in relation to what we have seen from this Government over the last 17 months.

At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, I want to further indicate to those on the other side, as I said, that from the point of view of industrial relations and the collective bargaining process, it is very clear that from day one this Government was never about promoting the well-being of the trade union movement of this country. This Government was not about promoting the principles of free and fair collective bargaining—and what I would call independent collective bargaining—Madam Speaker, because as I have indicated previously, that under this Government and based on the pronouncement of the Prime Minister, based on the pronouncement of the Minister of Finance and also based on the utterances of the

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Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister too, that the entire collective bargaining process in Trinidad and Tobago collapsed under this Prime Minister and this Government. [*Desk thumping*] And I say so, Madam Speaker, because when—

Madam Speaker: Member, I just want to ask you to look at the text of your Motion and to keep within the confines of your text. I have given you some leeway but your text is not about the matter you are about to embark upon. So I will ask you to move on and stick to within what is the subject matter of the Motion before us.

Mr. Hinds: Read the Motion again.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And the Member for Laventille West, you concentrate on providing electricity and water to the national community of Trinidad and Tobago. So coming back to the very important issue, Madam Speaker, as I would continue to indicate, that from the point of view of my experience and involvement in this particular process, the Government has failed to address the issue of improving the quality of life and the standard of living of all citizens of this country, because based on the public pronouncements of very important office holders in Trinidad and Tobago, there was no independence to the free and fair collective bargaining process. And when there is no independence and the whole process is stymied—

Madam Speaker: Member, this is not about the collective bargaining process. Please move on.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I am guided, Madam Speaker. I am guided, but in the context of the whole question of improving the quality of life, it is achieved through what I would call collective agreements, whether in terms of the revenue

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that you earn and the revenue streams and as a result of that you address when you acquire more money through the collective bargaining process and collective agreements and so on. Madam Speaker, we improve the standard of living—

Madam Speaker: Member, please move on.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I am coming to the issue of poverty and I am coming to the issue of deteriorating living standards. And there is certainly a link between the whole question of organized labour, poverty and also living standards. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to say to you here this evening that at the end of the day there has been no economic growth or no diversification of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, because, as I said, after 17 months in office and having presented to the national community or signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding with the trade union movement, after two budget presentations, a mid-year review, a 10-point plan for retrenched workers, a historic withdrawal of \$2.5 billion from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, a road show which has raised US \$1 billion for the coffers of Trinidad and Tobago, the fact that a National Tripartite Advisory Council was established, an Economic Development Board was established, Trinidad and Tobago has not experienced what I would call positive economic growth. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has seen its worst or experienced its worst economic growth in 33 years. [*Desk thumping*] And the statistics would indicate that, if you would permit me just to indicate, Madam Speaker, and I am quoting directly from an article headlined:

“Energy economy hits worst slump in 33 years”

Dated the 28th of December, 2016. And, Madam Speaker, in an end of the year—

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Hon. Member: What is your source?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: The *Trinidad Express*, the 28th of December, 2016:

“In an end-of-year review e-mailed on December 20, University of the West Indies (UWI) senior economics lecturer Dr. Roger Hosein said:”—

Hon. Member: “Ohhh!”

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And I quote.

Dr. Moonilal: What about Balgobin? They prefer Balgobin.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I do not know if they prefer Balgobin or Ramkissoon or whoever, but to quote:

“The real economic growth rate in Trinidad and Tobago in 2016 in the first quarter was -5.4 per cent and in the second quarter, -8 per cent. I have roughly estimated based on the various economic facts floating around for the second half of 2016, including platform shutdown, declining production of oil and gas and subdued prices of the same, that the average growth rate in 2016 can fall to as low as -6 per cent. If this scenario unfolds, then 2016 would be the sharpest contraction of the T&T economy since 1983.”

And that is what the workers of Trinidad and Tobago have experienced over the last 17 months.

In fact, Madam Speaker, the contraction of the economy of this country has impacted upon workers in the formal sector and in the informal sector to the point that statistics available at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development—because you should be aware, Madam Speaker, that in order for retrenchments to be formally reported to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development an employer has to be sending home or laying off more than five persons.

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So as a result of that a number of persons, a number of small and medium-size businesses have sent home workers very quietly in Trinidad and Tobago and the Government's inability to kick-start the economy or to grow the economy has seen contractors being denied, what I would call, growth and expansion of their businesses. And as a result of that, contracting firms also—a number of contractors, from the point of view of infrastructural development and so on in this country, have sent home hundreds of workers. I would conclude based on being on the ground, getting advice from a number of contractors and so on in Trinidad and Tobago and small and medium-size businesses, the unemployment figure in terms of persons who have lost their jobs since this Government has come into power stands at approximately 25,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as I indicated to you and to those on the other side, that where is the economic plan to revive Trinidad and Tobago? And as I will continue, and there are some questions that I would like to pose here today to the Minister of Finance as it relates to the role of the Economic Development Advisory Board, what has it brought to the table, this Board which has been chaired by Dr. Terrence Farrell? In fact, the chairman of this Economic Development Advisory Board distanced himself from the last budget presentation [*Desk thumping*] that was presented to Trinidad and Tobago for national development and growth. In fact, the chairman of the Economic Development Advisory Board said, “Not me and the budget”. He distanced himself, and also I want to ask the Minister of Finance as it relates to this particular entity, the Economic Development Advisory Board that was appointed and chaired by Dr. Farrell, what had been this Board's role as it relates to addressing job creation, addressing the growing level of what

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we would call inflation in Trinidad and Tobago and the deteriorating standard of living?

Madam Speaker, I also want to address the issue and ask the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and also today he is—the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development who is not here, but the substantive Leader of Government Business, the Minister of Planning and Development who has the responsibility of being the line Minister for the National Tripartite Advisory Council. The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development when she spoke during the 2017 budget presentation indicated, Madam Speaker, that the National Tripartite Advisory Council, the mandate includes the effective implementation of Vision 2020; to advise the whole question of addressing sustainable national development goals; enhancing productivity levels in all sectors of the economy; creating additional job opportunities; maximizing the use of science and technology; focusing on the needs of the poor, the socially displaced, the most vulnerable in the society; and maintaining industrial peace and nationwide harmony.

I would like to be presented with the evidence really, what is the role of this National Tripartite Advisory Council as it relates to addressing the issues of job creation, inequality in the society and addressing the whole issue? Whether they offered any kind of advice to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago when the national community was on the brink of a crisis, based on what transpired at Petrotrin and in relation to the strike that was averted, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in addition to that, the Government would have indicated that they had a 10-point plan to address the whole question of unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago and to prevent retrenchment. Up till today we have been

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promised—up till today, Madam Speaker, we continue to hear through a number of pronouncements, through the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, that amendments will be brought to this House on the legislative agenda as it relates to amendments to the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, 32 of 1985 and also the supporting pieces of legislation or accompanying pieces of legislation. And up till today that has brought no sense of comfort to the over 25,000 persons who have lost their jobs because of the incompetence and recklessness of this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I also want to ask, because in her continued announcements and interfacing with the trade union movement and the national community of Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development indicated that her Ministry would be taking a lead role to collaborate with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and so on, and the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Mortgage Finance Company of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to bringing comfort and relief to workers who would have lost their jobs, more specifically the 644 at ArcelorMittal.

And today, I want to ask the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to tell the national community how many workers' homes have been saved, whether there has been any restructuring plan to save persons' homes in relation to banks moving in and foreclosing and so on? And what has been the sense of support and guidance and counselling and so on to these traumatized workers and their respective families?

I say so, Madam Speaker, because it has caused a tremendous amount of pain and trauma to a number of families in the constituency of Couva South because ArcelorMittal was geographically located in this constituency. And from

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the point of view I want to relate to three scenarios. I have the information but I do not want to cause any further pain and embarrassment and trauma to these families who have lost their jobs. Because, Madam Speaker, those on the other side must not treat this as a laughing matter. I want to tell you, I want to inform the national community—scenario one.

A worker came, a former ArcelorMittal worker came to the constituency office last Tuesday and broke down. A former quality control supervisor did not know where to turn or who to turn to and he has been forced to sell his home so that he could find the necessary wherewithal to financially support his daughter who is a final year student at the Faculty of Medicine, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. That is the reality of what the PNM has done to families in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And they have brutalized, they have traumatized, they have caused instability to 25,000-plus families in Trinidad and Tobago.

And scenario two: A gentleman came to my office, again, he lives in the community of Carolina, a former ArcelorMittal worker and he indicated to me that up till today—based on, we would have heard from the Minister of Finance that he would have met with the officials of ArcelorMittal and so on as it relates to the status of their pension plan benefits and so on—up till today he has no clue. All he is being asked to do is sign documentation and when he is requesting additional information so that he could plan the well-being of his children's education—his daughter has been accepted to university in Canada—he is simply being told you have to sign the documentation and then you will get the additional information.

Madam Speaker, that is the state of play. They continue to make a number of pronouncement and promises to workers to address their issues, to address their

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concerns and so on, and up till today the 25,000 workers and their families in this country they are up in the air. They have no idea what is happening to them, [*Desk thumping*] because of the incompetence, the lack of a plan, a vision; and the blame has to be squarely laid at the feet of the Prime Minister who mamaguyed the population when he went to the national community, he duped the population by campaigning on, "Let's do this together".

Madam Speaker, he has betrayed the working class. He has betrayed the trade union movement and I want to warn the trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago, do not attempt to be in bed with the PNM—

Hon. Member: Again.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Not again, because if you go back since 1965, since the ISA, since the Industrial Stabilisation Act, the IRA, Bloody Tuesday, the workers at Atlantic LNG in Point Fortin and I could go on and on. The only way that the PNM does deal with workers and the trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago is by brutalizing them, [*Desk thumping*] using the army and the police against them, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member, the word, "brutalizing" I will rule unparliamentary. I am sure you can find another way to say that.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I am guided, but you have to understand my history. I know the PNM as it relates to how they have dealt with the trade union movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please move on. As I say, withdraw "brutalizing". Find another word and continue.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I withdraw. The PNM is the most anti-worker and the most oppressive regime that you will ever find in the political

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history of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why I want to warn—there is an Interim Collective Agreement at the Industrial Court between the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union and the Government and all I want to say, Madam Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Your time has expired.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I beg to move, Madam Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

Madam Speaker: Seconded by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: And I reserve the right to speak.

Question proposed.

2.30 p.m.

The Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries

(Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I think it is necessary to correct the record to deal with the alternative facts that were just placed in this House. When I look at the Motion, it asks the House to look at rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty, deteriorating living standards through the imposition of a wage restraint/freeze policy on the working people, and it asks the Parliament to condemn the Government for its failure to deal with the current unemployment challenges and to present a clear economic plan to guide the country through these challenges.

My own understanding of this Motion is that it dealt with present time. The previous speaker seemed to think it dealt with the past. I think he went back to 1965, but I cannot tell the Member what to say. One of things that I think I need to put on the record, the Member for Couva South, I think, had accused this Government of a wage freeze of offering an increase of zero per cent to workers—that is in the Motion, the imposition of a wage freeze—and had sought to give the impression that the administration of which he was a part in the 2010 to 2015

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period had done no such thing.

Now, before I get into the fact that this administration has not imposed a wage freeze—and it is not speculation, it is fact. [*Desk thumping*] And it is not alternative fact, it is true facts. It is not alternative facts. It is true facts—I think I need to read into the record the facts with respect to the behaviour of the last Government with respect to a wage freeze, because they have accused this Government of seeking to impose wage restraint/freeze policy on the working people and have portrayed themselves like Caesar's wife, as if they would never even contemplate such a thing, and they have said we have foisted brutality on the people, something like that.

So, let us go to the facts and I read from a letter written to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, dated the 22nd of December, 2016, and written by Petrotrin to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. This letter deals with the behaviour of the previous Government with respect to a wage freeze that is pertinent to the allegations made by the hon. Member.

This letter informed the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in December 2016, that in 2014 Petrotrin referred negotiations with the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union for the 2011 to 2015 period to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development as a trade dispute. This triggered a 14-day conciliation period and following the expiry of the conciliation period on the 24th of November, 2014, a further seven-day period commenced during which either the union or the company could have served strike or lockout notice. No notice was served by either party. The matter was referred to the Industrial Court.

During the period, at the court, the union informally indicated their willingness to accept a 10 per cent settlement for the period. However, the

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company on the instructions of the Ministerial Committee of the then People's Partnership Government offered the union for the 2011 to 2015 period, zero per cent in the first year, zero per cent in the second year and zero per cent in the third year. That was in 2014.

So, Madam Speaker, the only Government, the only Government that through its Ministerial Committee—so it is official government policy—instituted a wage freeze policy was the UNC Government, also called the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] Those negotiations and that matter dragged on in the Industrial Court from November 2014 to September 2015, and during that period the union was commanded by the Minister of Finance of the UNC and the junior Minister in that Ministry. The great trade unionist was in the Ministry of Finance. So it was the policy of the Ministry of Finance, of which the Member for Couva South was a Member, a junior Minister, active participant, former trade unionist—it was the policy of the former trade unionist, who was then the junior Minister of Finance, to institute a wage freeze at Petrotrin during the 2014 to 2015 period. That matter remained in the Industrial Court with the Ministerial Committee, a sub-committee of Cabinet, established by the former administration to look at terms and conditions; that matter remained in the Industrial Court for the entire period until the population voted them out of office. The company received instructions from the Ministry of Finance, where the hon. Member was a junior Minister, to stick at zero per cent with the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union. A real wage freeze, not an imaginary wage freeze. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, through you, that is the record of those opposite, and as I quote from the Scottish poem:

“...what a tangled web we weave/when...we practise to deceive.”

Canto XVII.

“What a tangled web we weave/when first we practise to deceive.”

It is hypocrisy of the highest. [*Desk thumping*] That was a real wage freeze instituted by the UNC. In court, in writing, instructions from the Member for Couva South, wage freeze for workers at Petrotrin. I think that is something akin to the word that was deemed to be unparliamentary. That is a form of oppression on the workers of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, and while they did that oppression, they were helping other unions that they thought were friendly to them. That is what they thought. So anyway, Madam Speaker, let us fast-forward to the present time.

What has occurred with the current situation with respect to negotiations between the Petrotrin and the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, instead of that oppressive zero per cent imposed on them by the former Government and maintained right through until September 07, 2015, the workers have already received an interim increase of 5 per cent. That is the empirical evidence. Those are true facts. We have offered and they have accepted an interim settlement of 5 per cent. Madam Speaker, through you, they, hon. Members opposite, imposed a zero per cent policy on the workers at Petrotrin. So if anybody is guilty of a wage freeze, it is the Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration. If anybody. [*Desk thumping*]

So let us move on to the other part of the Motion. The hon. Member for Couva South has a strange way of speaking. He just throws numbers out of the air. One of the numbers he said, as far as he is concerned, he declared to this Parliament, that 25,000 workers have been retrenched, have lost their jobs in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, Madam Speaker, how on earth does he know that?

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We do not operate by “vaps” or guess in this country. There is a retrenchment register established at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development where all retrenchment notices are posted, and as we speak, Madam Speaker, during the last year instead of 25,000 retrenchment notices, the number is 1,008.

Madam Speaker, I am advised by the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development that the total number of retrenchment notices at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development in 2006, 1,008—
[Interruption]

Mr. Al-Rawi: 2016.

Hon. C. Imbert: 2016, sorry. 2016. One thousand and eight retrenchment notices registered at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development in 2016, and yet when one listens to the hon. Member opposite, he shouted out, “I am certain that 25,000 people have lost their jobs in this country over the last year by retrenchment”.

The other matter, Madam Speaker, there was a question asked in the House and answered. It was asked by the Member of Parliament for Naparima, where the Member of Parliament for Naparima asked me to describe the nature of the assistance we have received from the IMF since we took office, and whether it was free or whether we had paid for it. I answered the question, Madam Speaker, not too long ago that the IMF has assisted us with technical assistance with respect to formulating a new fiscal regime for the oil and gas sector with respect to the models that we should look at for a revenue authority, and at no time—because supplementals were asked—has the IMF given us any assistance or advice on wages, salaries, retrenchment, wage restraint, wage freeze of any kind whatsoever. Question asked and answered.

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But the hon. Member for Couva South, completely oblivious to that fact that the question was asked, that the IMF has assisted us with our fiscal regime with respect to looking at revision of the supplementary petroleum tax, with respect to looking at various models one could adopt to have a revenue authority—and that is all—and that there has been no assistance or advice, or any command, or anything of any kind coming from the IMF with respect to wage restraint or wage policy, or anything of that nature, asked and answered, and yet just for theatrical effect, pandering to the gallery, the Member for Couva South gets up and screams that this Government is taking instructions from the IMF on wages. I reject that. It is simply untrue. It is simply histrionics, theatrics. It is simply the usual propaganda from the Members opposite.

The Member for Couva South—we have taken no advice, no instructions, no information, no dialogue—we have had no communication whatsoever on wages with the IMF. I just want to make that clear. Nothing! Nothing going forward, nothing coming back. Absolutely nothing! I want to make that absolutely clear. Now, the Member also—[*Interruption*]*—*that is with respect—Madam Speaker, through you, I have said this before, I will say it again, I will say it 10 times if I have to—to the persons who assisted us with the oil and gas fiscal regime—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Young: Transfer pricing.

Hon. C. Imbert:—and transfer pricing.

Mr. Young: Things that they left undone.

Hon. C. Imbert: Things that you left unattended. Right now we have a gas shortage in this country and that deals with the second Motion. We have a gas shortage in this country. A shortage of natural gas and the last Government spent

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five years—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: 48, Madam Speaker. Irrelevance.

Hon. C. Imbert: How this is irrelevant?

Hon. Member: What Standing Order is that?

Madam Speaker: Please Member, continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you. The only thing irrelevant was that objection because the Motion says:

“BE IT...RESOLVED that this House condemn the Government for its failure...to present a clear...economic plan...”

And the only economic plan that we can possibly have will be based on diversification and strengthening and enhancement of the energy sector. So I am now going to tell you about our plan because we have been asked to speak about our plan. The Member who presented this Motion, he went all over the place. He went San Fernando, he went Toco, he went Galeota and did not deal with his own Motion. Let me deal with the matter in this Motion.

For five years the last Government misled this country and pretended that the only issue that we had was a reduction in supply of natural gas to the Atlantic LNG plant, to the petrochemical industries at Point Lisas and so on. The only problem we had and the only cause of this reduction in supply was maintenance activities. For five years misled the entire country, but do you know what is the hurtful thing about this? Do you know what is the hurtful thing? Those five years were totally wasted. Totally wasted because we have now discovered that the former administration was very well aware of the declining production in natural

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gas. They had been shown the same projections that we have been shown in our first year in Government, they had been shown the graphs, they had been shown the curves, they had received the natural gas master plan which showed that if you do not do something quickly we would soon run out of gas in a couple years. They saw all of that, they did absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing, Madam Speaker. Absolutely nothing.

They had no economic plan. Well, we have an economic plan. We most certainly have an economic plan. We are aware, as hon. Members opposite are obviously blissfully unaware, that this is a gas-based economy, that for quite a while the revenues from petroleum have been weighted more towards revenues from natural gas and natural gas activities than oil activities. In fact, in and around 2013 or 2014, we as a country were aware—they were aware—that one-third of petroleum revenues came from oil and two-thirds of petroleum revenues came from natural gas and natural gas-based activities, and processes coming from natural gas. They knew that and they also knew that oil production was declining very, very rapidly. Under their tenure, oil production declined by 25 per cent. They saw it every year.

They saw oil production going down. They did absolutely nothing [*Desk thumping*] to deal with the infrastructure at Petrotrin. Absolutely nothing to deal with increased production in Trinmar or on land. Nothing! Absolutely nothing, Madam Speaker. Nothing! They did not invest in Petrotrin. They did not give Petrotrin the necessary cash that it required to improve its infrastructure, to increase its drilling programme, its exploration programme to bring more wells into production. They did absolutely nothing. All they did is, took as much money as they could out of the system. They took \$14 billion from the National Gas

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Company. They raided the National Gas Company. Instead of taking that money and using that \$14 billion to complete the Ultra-Low Sulphur Diesel Plant, which is necessary—they could have completed that—they decided that is not important.

They had a bottom of the barrel project where in Trinidad and Tobago we have a situation where every barrel of oil as you process it, you have more and more by-products and the by-products become more and more difficult to refine. You get down to the bottom of the barrel where you have fuel oil which is a product that is produced uncompetitively. They abandoned the bottom of the barrel project, they abandoned the Ultra-Low Sulphur Diesel Plant, they did not invest in Petrotrin to give Petrotrin the necessary funds to allow the company to engage in increased exploration and production of oil, but we are going to do that, Madam Speaker. We are going to that because we are a serious Government.

We have immediately determined that the future of this country in the short to medium term will be—as it has been for the last 100 years—in the energy sector. This is a fact. While we must diversify the economy, while we must move away from dependence on oil and gas because these are declining resources, there is declining production. We in Trinidad and Tobago, we are a mature oil province, so that we have fields in Trinidad and Tobago that are over 100 years old. In fact, hon. Members may not know that the first oil well drilled in the world, in 1857, was drilled in Forest Reserve. Not in Arapahoe, in Forest Reserve in 1857 and it produced oil. It did not produce oil in commercial quantities, but the first productive oil well drilled anywhere in the world was drilled in Trinidad and Tobago.

We have a history of oil production that is 150 years old, Madam Speaker. So for at least the last 50 to 60 years the economy of Trinidad and Tobago has been

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largely dependent on petroleum as the base, as the engine of the economy, and it will continue so for some time. Let us not fool ourselves. Of course, we have diversification initiatives. Of course, we do. We have to diversify into the services sector. One of the areas we are targeting is financial services because that is a rapidly growing sector, not just in the Caribbean region and Latin America, but all the world. So this is why we have as a project to establish an international financial centre in Trinidad and Tobago. We have already entered into negotiations with the Chinese Government about this, so that they can bring an Asian bank.

We have asked the Chinese Government to bring an Asian bank to Trinidad to establish a regional headquarters here in Trinidad and Tobago and provide what is called back office services into Latin America and the rest of the Caribbean, and these discussions are in the embryonic stage. Nothing is on paper yet. There is no commitment, there is no agreement, but the discussions have begun to establish an International Financial Centre here in Trinidad and Tobago, an International Convention Centre here in Trinidad and Tobago because that is a source of revenue for many countries. The entire economy of Orlando, for example, in the United States is built on two things, on theme parks and on conventions. So if any of you who have travelled you see the Convention Centre in Orlando, and the amount of traffic it generates, and the amount of revenue it creates for the city of Orlando. So we see again the siting of an International Convention Centre in Trinidad and Tobago as part of that International Financial Centre project, as a project that has the potential to yield considerable diversification and revenue for Trinidad and Tobago, but I want to stress these discussions are in the embryonic stage.

We are now at the first stage of the bilateral discussions with the

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Government of China, Madam Speaker. But this is where we have to go as we diversify the economy. We have to assist our manufacturers to penetrate new markets. In Central America, some of our manufacturers are being quite successful. The Massy Group, for example, is doing quite well penetrating markets in Costa Rica and other parts of Central America, and we have to assist more and more manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago to do so because the Caribbean region is no longer the market that it used to be. The Caribbean economies are struggling so that our manufacturers have little room to grow within the Caribbean. In fact, the markets may very well be either stagnant or declining within the Caribbean. So the next obvious place for our manufacturers to go is into Central and South America.

So this Government is assisting our manufacturers in order to penetrate through diplomatic initiatives, through incentives programmes, and we will be intensifying all our efforts as we go forward in the next couple years in Trinidad and Tobago. But all of these efforts are diversification and there are many more. These take time. Diversification is a word that you can just say, you know, but it does not mean that you can achieve it just like that. It is not easy to do. So that as we move towards focusing on financial services and other services, as we move towards helping our manufacturers to export into other countries to earn foreign exchange, to become net earners of foreign exchange, to employ more people which is what this Motion is all about, because we must rely upon the private sector as the engine of employment for more people. We cannot rely on the Government because what has happened over the years is that the public sector wage bill has now reached a level where it is very, very difficult to continue to increase the size of the private sector. It has reached a point where the public

sector wage bill is a significant proportion of government revenue.

In fact, the public sector wage bill is close 50 per cent of income from taxation. So that we have to look towards the private sector to encourage the private sector to grow, to invest, to enter new markets, to penetrate new markets and so on, and, of course, we are doing that and we have a significant economic plan where that is concerned, but in the short to medium term let us not fool ourselves. We have to revive the energy sector and this is why we have this initiative with Venezuela, where a number of teams have gone back and forth over the last several months to Venezuela to firm up the arrangements with the Government of Venezuela so that we can access a supply of natural gas from the Dragon Field which is very close to our border. It is just about 15 kilometres away or 15 miles away—19 kilometres away. So we are pushing to finalize that arrangement and the way this Government operates, we delegate authority.

I am not talking out of tales out of school, but my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, is spearheading that effort, that dialogue, that negotiation with the Government of Venezuela and I have every confidence in his ability to do so, together with all the other support elements within the Government. So I am certain that we are going to reach conclusion on that Dragon Field and get that gas from Dragon. Then there is a lot of exploration taking place and there are exploration projects coming in the pipeline, and a lot of the difficulties that we found ourselves in a country in terms of the decline in production—let me give you an understanding of the scope, Madam Speaker.

When the PNM demitted office the production of natural gas in this country was close to 4.2 billion standard cubic feet per day—4.2 billion standard cubic feet per day. When the UNC was thrown out of office the production on natural gas

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down to 3.3 billion standard cubic feet. So you had a decline from 4.2 billion standard cubic feet in 2010 down to 3.3 billion standard cubic feet in 2015. Madam Speaker, it is as if the Members opposite had on blindfolds because the demand in Trinidad and Tobago—we have an industry in Trinidad and Tobago that has been developed based on a supply of close to 4 billion standard cubic feet. So we have an industry, we have existing plants—the four trains at Atlantic LNG, the methanol plants, the urea plants, the ammonia plants and so on, the new Mitsubishi plant which is due to come on stream in a couple years—the demand is about 4 billion standard cubic feet, but they watched the production of natural gas decline from 4.2 billion down to 3.3 billion.

So it stands to us in the PNM to revive the energy sector and to recover that lost production of natural gas and get it back up to 4 billion and 4.2 billion standard cubic feet per day, and, Madam Speaker, we are working assiduously to deal with this. One of problems—and you would have heard bp speak about this recently—was the procrastination and indecision and dithering of the past administration, because we have a gas supply contract for Train 1 of the Atlantic LNG facility which expires in September 2018—they knew that. When they came into Government in May 2010 they were very well aware that the long-term gas supply contract for Train 1 of Atlantic LNG would expire in September 2018. They knew very well that these are weighty matters that need to be settled years before the end date. This is not something you come and you do now for now. But they allowed 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015 to elapse, without getting into any sort of meaningful discussion with bp with respect to the renegotiation of the supply for Atlantic Train 1. Do you know what the result of that is? Oil companies have a 20-year planning horizon and they are not going to invest in infrastructure that

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costs billions of dollars—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original speaking time has expired, you are entitled to 15 more minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Your extension is granted.

3.00 p.m.

Hon. C. Imbert: A company—[*Interruption*] You see, Madam Speaker, I am not going to waste my time responding to the histrionics of the hon. Member for Couva South, I am dealing with the Motion. The Motion deals with an economic plan for Trinidad and Tobago. I have dealt with the wage freeze. They instituted a wage freeze. We have offered the first trade union an interim offer of 5 per cent. So they offered zero, we have an interim offer of five, so I am done with that wage freeze ole talk, that wage freeze phantom that they have created. I am dealing now with economics. And oil companies have a planning horizon of 20 years, they do not go into investments willy-nilly. So we have a project called Angelin which is going to cost bp billions of dollars but bp, like any responsible corporation, is reluctant to proceed with the investment of billions of US dollars in a platform and a facility without the certainty of a long-term gas supply contract. So it falls to this Government to do what they failed to do so that we can get that Angelin project going which will supply another 300 million standard cubic feet of gas which is badly needed by our energy sector.

The petrochemical companies are running, because of their procrastination and indecision and I will have to say sheer incompetence, the Point Lisas companies are running at about 70 per cent of their nameplate capacity. The LNG is down to about 80 per cent or less. So you have all of these plants that simply

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cannot get the feedstock that they require to produce the product and they saw that happening. They had letters written by the petrochemical companies in this Parliament. I have seen a letter written—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Al-Rawi: Jack Warner read it out.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes. Written to the former administration in 2011, telling them that, look, you have to do something about our gas supply and they sat on it and did nothing, and the companies have estimated loss of \$10 billion because of that. *[Interruption]* Correct, correct, correct, quite correct.

So, Madam Speaker, as I said, we are very, very serious, so we are going to conclude that gas agreement. We are going to allow the various investments to take place. We are going to work with the industry in terms of reforming the fiscal regime. It is not just the supplementary petroleum tax that is a problem and let me explain why the supplementary petroleum tax is so critical to this economy. When oil was \$100, the Trinidad and Tobago economy, the Trinidad and Tobago Treasury received on an annual basis \$4 billion in supplementary petroleum tax.

So you take a typical year like 2014, 2013, the Trinidad and Tobago economy, the Ministry of Finance, the Treasury, would receive \$4 billion in supplementary petroleum tax but the tax is based on a threshold of an oil price of \$50. So anytime the price of oil drops below \$50, the supplementary petroleum tax is not applicable. So that we have had a situation here, in the 2015/2016 period, where the price of oil, for most of the year, down to December, was below \$50. So what that meant is that the Trinidad and Tobago economy was losing \$4 billion in revenue from supplementary petroleum tax or SPT as it is called.

Now that the price is inching up, I did not check the price today, but the last time I checked the price, it was over \$53 for the benchmark crude that we look at

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which is West Texas Intermediate. It is actually \$52.88 today. It has been quite volatile over the last month but it broke the 50-dollar barrier some time ago and it has been going up and down: \$52, \$53, \$54 and so on. And would you believe, Madam Speaker, I had a staff meeting yesterday and we had reports from various sectors in the Ministry and Inland Revenue has reported that in January, for the first time, we received \$200 million in supplementary petroleum tax [*Desk thumping*] and that tells you how important that supplementary petroleum tax is. And if that oil price continues to go up, it is going to assist us in no way—in no small measure in terms of dealing with some of the shortfalls in revenue in other areas.

So that it is crucial as a country that we look at our oil and gas fiscal regime because there is a problem with the supplementary petroleum tax as it has been for years. It was designed many, many years ago when the price of oil was about \$25 and it was designed to kick in at \$50. So you might have an event such as a war in the Middle East or some other problem that would cause the price of oil to rise sharply from \$25 to \$50 a barrel in a short space of time without any investment by the oil companies. So the oil companies affected would not do anything different, they would not invest any new money, but because of external events, the price of oil would skyrocket and the SPT was designed to capture that supplementary income, that windfall income. But now, when the price of oil is averaging \$40, \$45, \$50, \$50 is no longer a windfall for the oil companies.

In fact, the oil companies have told us that they make more profits when oil is \$49 because they do not have to pay SPT than when oil is \$51. So that they have asked us now to change the regime and this is the advice we received from the International Monetary Fund—and it makes sense and we have accepted the

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advice—to change the regime away from a threshold price to what is called a profit-based tax. The SPT is currently what is called a revenue based or volume based tax so as soon as you hit \$50, you start to receive a percentage of the income above \$50. They have asked us to change it to profit based.

Because what happens, a lot of the small and medium sized companies cannot pay the SPT at \$51, \$52, \$53, \$54 because the tax take by the Government is considerably more so it affects their ability to invest, it affects their ability to grow. If you go with a profit-based tax, as you are growing, as you make profit, you acquire the ability to pay. You see this is a tax like a tax off the top. It is like the—the best example I could use is like the parliamentary pension contribution, 6 per cent off the top. So it has nothing to do with your income after tax or anything like that, so the supplementary petroleum tax hits you in the same way. It has nothing to do with your income after tax, it is just a tax off the top as you cross \$50. And a lot of countries are moving away from this revenue based and volume based taxation regime towards a profit-based tax. It requires more due diligence because once they tax you on profits, you have to have a much greater audit function and a greater inspectorate, but it has been shown to stimulate investment and this is what we need in this country at this point in time.

So we are reforming the fiscal regime, Madam Speaker, looking specifically at SPT but also at some of the production sharing licenses which were negotiated many years ago and are no longer relevant and need to be renegotiated. So, Madam Speaker, how many more minutes do I have?

Madam Speaker: You will stop by 3.15.02.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, so I have seven minutes.

So, Madam Speaker, the other thing I can report that we have just engaged

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international consultants last week. We engaged international consultants to start to look at the value chain in terms of energy commodity pricing, because there is a view and we need to get rid of this view. It is either yes, it is true or no, it is not true, but there is a view in Trinidad and Tobago that the multinational companies cheat on the declaration of income and the prices of commodities. There is a point of view and it is an allegation and they use a technique called transfer pricing where they sell—and it is no more evident in the sale of LNG. There is an allegation that the persons who produce the LNG, they sell the LNG to an associated company and they sell it at a low price so that the Government gets its profits, its income, based on the sale price of the LNG. So the company here produces it and then sells it to an affiliated company at a low price, not the market price, and therefore Trinidad and Tobago is robbed of income.

There is a strong belief that this is happening. This is what transfer pricing is all about. You sell to subsidiaries, associated companies, affiliated companies and so on and you do not sell the product at the true price, you sell it below market and then they “unsell” the price. In many cases, the cargo never reaches its destination, its original destination, it is diverted in the middle of the ocean and goes off and I will give an example. The Henry Hub price of gas right now is about \$3.30 per MMBtu but the price of gas landed in Japan is about \$7, \$8 as we speak. So that a cargo of LNG sold in Japan, if even considering the freight and the time it takes to get there, is far more profitable to the seller than a cargo sold to the United States.

So I am happy to report that we have engaged international consultants, the Ministry of Finance has engaged them, who will begin now to look at this whole question of the value chain along the pricing of natural gas, the best use of our

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natural gas. Whether the best use is for LNG, whether the best use is for the petrochemical companies because there is a point of view that you get less income from LNG than you get from petrochemical companies. And there is a contrary point of view that even though you may get less in percentage term, you get more in volume from LNG than from the petrochemical companies.

So that these are all of the things we are doing in the Ministry of Finance to build the revenue base, to increase—to strengthen our energy sector, to stabilize our core sources of revenue so that we can maintain employment levels. Because one of the achievements of this administration in the last 15 months, and hon. Members opposite can say whatever they want, but one of the achievements of this administration in the last 15 months is that the vast majority of our citizens have been able to keep their jobs. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] Yes, that is one of the achievements of this Government. The vast majority of our citizens have been able to keep and Madam Speaker, this is in a situation when the country—and I do not think people understand—has lost 92 per cent of its revenue from petroleum.

In 2014, the revenue from petroleum was \$19.3 billion; in 2016, it was \$1.7 billion so it dropped from 19 to less than two—92 per cent decline and yet the country is still operating, the vast majority of persons are still in jobs. That is a tremendous achievement of this PNM administration, [*Desk thumping*] tremendous achievement and I congratulate all of my colleagues, [*Desk thumping*] all of the work that they have done, we work as a team.

So, Madam Speaker, just think about it. What business in this country could survive losing 92 per cent of its revenue? Any business: Neal & Massy, Republic Bank, ANSA McAL, anybody losing 92 per cent of their revenue would shut down, but we have been able to keep this country going. We have been able to

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keep this country going and we are going to focus on the revival of the energy sector as we assist our local businesses to export and penetrate export markets and create jobs and create meaningful jobs and sustain and improve the standard of living of our people and therefore, I reject this Motion. This Motion is ill-conceived, ill-advised, wrong, bad—I just cannot agree with this Motion. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thought I was listening to another Motion, but the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who I know very well, placed me back into a room called 107 in the social sciences building, and I was reminiscing on his presentation on a lecture by Dudley Seers on the Open Petroleum Economy. I do not know what that had to do with this Motion. He spoke extensively. This was really a history of the petroleum economy. Madam Speaker, I just want to ask the question, since my friend on the other side spoke so eloquently about the energy sector, what has the PNM Government done in 18 months that you are there in terms of this sector? [*Desk thumping*] A lot of promises that never materialize.

Madam Speaker, before I get into my substantive presentation—and I am going to deal with the Motion—I want to indicate that when the hon. Member spoke and he finished his theatrics, I thought, in usual style, he was going to throw the paper and walk out of this Chamber. [*Laughter*] But I want to say that in terms of his presentation, we heard quite a lot about wage restraint. He said there was no wage restraint. I wish to read, with your permission, some excerpts from the International Monetary Fund *2016 Article IV Consultation*. It is a *Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Trinidad and Tobago* and on page 3 of that:

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“Statement by Otaviano Canuto, Executive Director for Trinidad and Tobago and Veronica Ramcharan, Senior Advisor to the Executive Director May 20, 2016”

Madam Speaker, this is an excerpt from the statement which proves that Government—meaning this Government—had initiated a number of cuts including to workers and wages prior to May 20th, 2016 when the IMF released this statement, which preceded the statement of wage restraint by the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East in November of 2016. I want to get straight to the point and among the other things that they said:

“Alongside cuts and recurrent spending...”—they spoke about—
 “...increasing excise taxes; the elimination of fuel subsidies and reducing other subsidies and transfers; and the introduction of wage and hiring restraint mechanisms.”

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister, Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, indicated that the figures in terms of retrenchment was incorrectly stated. And what he forgot to mention is that my colleague, the mover of the Motion from Couva South, when he spoke about 25,000 persons who were unemployed, he said unemployed, he did not say retrenched. I want to make it abundantly clear, my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East and I am just going to quote what he said just now:

Madam Speaker, I am dealing with economics and therefore, in economics, we are taught that retrenchment is not the only form of unemployment.

Madam Speaker, with your permission, again, I just want to quote from an *Economic Bulletin*. It is an authorized document of the Central Bank, March 2016, and in that, on Table 15, it is highlighted:

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“Announced Job Cuts in Trinidad and Tobago: September 2015-March 2016”

In that, there is a total of 2,585 persons. Very different to the figure quoted by my colleague where he said that there were 1,008 notices. I just want to indicate, again, when we are dealing with unemployment, the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development came in this very House here, I was present, and she indicated that the figures that she was given and she continued: I suppose those were correct. She said because it is not every instance of retrenchment is reported to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, having said that, I just want to give some data, again, with your permission. This is a Monetary Policy Report, November 2016, of the Central Bank and it talks about retrenchment notices by sectors and the highest sectors for that period of April 2016 to September 2016 were found 34 per cent in petroleum and other mining industries, followed by 25 per cent in manufacturing and so on and so on.

But you know, Madam Speaker, in responding, again, to my colleague, Member for Diego Martin North/East, Minister of Finance, Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and now Leader of the Government Business in the House, he indicated that one of the things that his Government is attempting to do is to assist manufacturers to penetrate markets in the Central and South America. I want to ask the question: how are we going to get foreign exchange if they cannot get foreign exchange to develop their businesses? [*Desk thumping*] And therefore, it is a false argument. You want to help the manufacturers locally, how are you going to help them? They have been begging and asking. Therefore, I come back to the substantive Motion which speaks really about unemployment.

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Madam Speaker, while I thank you for acknowledging me and allowing me to participate in this debate, I want to tell you that it gives me very little pleasure to speak on this Motion. It gives me little pleasure because at this time, many of our citizens are feeling deep pain, grief, hopelessness and stress. Many citizens are finding it difficult to eke out a living. Therefore, when we talk about and when the Motion speaks about unemployment and poverty and declining standard of living and wage freeze, Madam Speaker, I put it to you and to this honourable House and those who are listening, you will not have any of those things being interfered with if you do not have jobs. "How we will talk about wage restraint, yuh have no wuk." Where the wage restraint? "Yuh have no job." What is this effect and impact about unemployment on the standard of living?

Madam Speaker, we have to look at the basket of goods, we have to look at the level of inflation. We have to do the calculations. Ask the housewives and the husbands who go to the groceries, the supermarkets, to the market on Saturdays or other times, and they will tell you the purchasing power of the dollar has fallen drastically. [*Desk thumping*] There is growing poverty, that is what the Motion talks about and Government's failure and therefore, it is important for me to start by talking about unemployment because I want to stay on the Motion. The situation with unemployment is that when we speak about it, we talk about joblessness of people, and that is really among those persons who want to work, who are available to work and who are actively seeking work. All of that that I have just described there amounts to the labour force participation rate.

You know, yesterday, unfortunately, I had to attend one of my colleague's funeral, Harry Dass, the Managing Director of Briko Services and when we attend those services and funeral services like those and then we go to the wake and so

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on, we often go and say what is the correct thing to say when you go: I am here to extend my condolences, I know how you feel. Madam Speaker, you would know you really do not know how it feels until it happens close to you and therefore, when you do not have a job and when you have to look at your wife and your children who are unable to have something to eat, to go to the places that they normally will go, then you understand what this is and that is why I said earlier on that it causes me little satisfaction to have to engage in a debate on a sense of hopelessness.

Madam Speaker, when we talk about unemployment, I have never seen the proliferation—not that I am against, I support entrepreneurship wholeheartedly, but you will see as you drive through the roads and the highways and byways of this country, never before have you seen so many hawkers and peddlers on our streets, getting things cultivated behind their homes and putting out a little stand in front of their homes to sell to eke out a living. That is what I am talking about: jobs and joblessness.

And therefore, there are many types of unemployment that we can go into and since my friend spoke about the treaties which I say on energy and energy sector, we would have done—I am sure he would have read. He is someone who does quite a lot of research in terms of cyclical unemployment or structural unemployment or seasonal unemployment. We are seeing what is happening now, even in terms of the Carnival season. We just came out of Christmas. The cultural impresarios are telling us that things are not good as they used to be. The calypso tents and so on. We also can talk about frictional unemployment, technological unemployment, where machines are now replacing men.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to deal with something here today. I want to

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tell all my colleagues that one of the most deleterious forms of unemployment, apart from all those we would have read, is a phenomena that exist and has been created in this country called political unemployment. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] Madam Speaker, somebody asking when it started. It started way back since 1956 under who was there. But I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, what is political unemployment. Political unemployment is when you are fired without cause; when you are frustrated in your jobs and you are frustrated to leaving; when you make redundant, contracts; when you do not renew people's contracts; when your contracts are terminated, when you are constructively dismissed. You lose your job if your leader or the leader of the country or a decision maker says, "When I say you come, you cometh and when I say you go, you goeth".

Madam Speaker, I want to say that sometimes people lose their jobs because of deliberate trumped up charges. I want to tell you of a famous line and I remember this very well and my friend from Diego Martin North/East will also remember this. Some people would have lost their jobs politically because of a statement such as this: we recognize the significant contributions you have made to the organization. However, because of a change in the strategic direction, we are unable to allow you to continue in your employment. "Ah wonder who that is?" I want to tell you that some of these are framed.

Madam Speaker, but you know, I want to deal a little bit with this political unemployment. "Yuh know why?" Because when you are politically unemployed and deliberately so, it destroys your character; it is designed to shame and embarrass you; it damages your prospects of future employment; it creates depression and loss of enthusiasm. I am going to now continue with other parts of

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the Motion as we speak. It totally destroys your self-confidence. Madam Speaker, there is much that I can say but I want to go and I want to focus because I indicated and my treatise really is in terms of all of this thing about unemployment, wage freeze and standard of living. I could say quite a lot of about that, but I want to focus substantially in terms of jobs and job opportunities.

As I speak, yesterday, two days ago or so, I think it was, we had—I was invited and I thank the Minister of Education and the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education for inviting me to participate in the opening of the state-of-the-art main campus of COSTAATT in Chaguanas. [*Desk thumping*] At that time, the Minister in the Ministry of Education indicated that there were thousands of persons, and he gave the figures, who wrote the SEA exams and were unable to pass mathematics and English, and therefore I say that in the context that we must be able to identify properly what is it we want to have, what it is we want to do, in terms of our future job strategy.

Madam Speaker, a lot has been said and a lot continues to be said about jobs, but I ask the question: are we able in this country to be told, to be directed to, where the jobs are? What are these jobs of the future? I will show evidence of how there is no data-driven decision when it comes to job and employment in this country. They are just statements in the—as whirlwinds.

3.30 p.m.

As a matter of fact, if it is that we have to build a 21st Century workforce, what is it that we are equipping our workers with? What are we doing? I indicated where can we really see what this jobs gap is all about. It is not sufficient for us to simply say that we have created quite a lot of jobs. Give us the evidence of the creation of those jobs. Tell us where. We still have, through the 9th EDF, a

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building at the University of the West Indies, which we constructed to facilitate jobs and job data called the CWRD, the Centre for Workforce Research and Development, that is still not occupied and populated.

Madam Speaker, I quoted just now from statistics, in terms of data, in terms of retrenchment, in terms of unemployment and the very institutions which were condemned when we were in Government are the institutions that are providing statistics to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the former Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, also those who are employed in the CSO [*Desk thumping*] and all those who are employed in the Central Bank for providing us with that opportunity of information.

My colleague from Diego Martin North/East talked extensively about the energy sector and there are opportunities for job and job creation in places that are very close to us such as in Guyana, where ExxonMobil is now drilling oil and in Suriname and, therefore, we have the opportunity, through the Ministry of Education, to expand the reaches of the NESC, if we wanted to create jobs and job opportunities.

Madam Speaker, as I talk about the NESC, I want to remind Members that one of the strategies for jobs and job creation came from the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, upon the dismissal of hundreds of workers from ArcerlorMittal, went to the NESC and started something called a jobs fair. Madam Speaker, at that time it was stated that the jobs fair was a one-stop job fair. Well, Madam Speaker, it was actually that in truth. I did not believe it. It started for once, it ended and it never got going again. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker, I want to indicate that one of the strategies for job creation, under this Government, as again stated by the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, was that Canada was looking for truck drivers. The information that we have, the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development came and said that there were approximately 35,000 truck drivers that Canada was looking for and that the company was coming to Trinidad in December to meet with the Ministry. I suspect it was December gone, to speak with the Minister and the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to see what could be done. Madam Speaker, you, I and everybody in this House knows driving truck in Trinidad is not driving truck in Canada and it is different weather conditions. Madam Speaker, I also want to tell you my research indicates that the agency that was coming to Trinidad is an agency and not of the Government of Canada. When you look, I have the data before me here, at the data from the immigration department that skill is not one of those that have been highlighted as in strong demand.

Without having to go into much of the details, since the hon. Minister and the Government in charge now were looking to create employment out of Canada for those from Trinidad and Tobago, I suspect what I should also do is to assist the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development by referring her to an article in the *Miami Herald* newspaper of the 5th September 2016, which indicated that needed now and in the next 10 years were thousands of construction workers, carpenters, masons, electricians, plumbers, roofers all of these.

Madam Speaker, all of those are persons who we have been graduating in large numbers in Trinidad and Tobago through the Metal Industries Company Limited. We have our former Chairman, Dr. David Lee, through the NESCC,

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through YTEPP, all of those.

Madam Speaker, I want to suggest, in terms of the way forward. And let me just indicate, as I was saying, before I get to the way forward, that very often we are told about technological developments. We hear about creativity at the individual level. We are often boasting about innovation at the organizational level, and we are talking that both of those will have wealth creation for our country. In terms of technology, we would have heard right here in the presentation of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, that there is going to be—the laptop programme will continue for all forms in secondary schools, as opposed to every individual. But guess what, Madam Speaker, and I want to make reference to it, in the allocation under Head—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, remember the text of the Motion, so if you could make the link very quickly.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, what I was saying is that very often people lose their jobs through technological developments. And, therefore, if we are saying that we want to have technology education, which will empower persons, which will give them a good education and a good life and a good job to get out of the standard of living and poverty that is what we are talking about. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I know that you would understand what I am saying very carefully, like all of us, that when you allocate \$1 million under Head 26, in the last draft estimates, that is very insufficient to carry out your policy. And, therefore, again we want to examine what is it that we can do, in the context of this Motion? What is it, in terms of education? It is my view that one of the things that we should accentuate in our country at this time is the development of education

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and skills and competencies. The last time I spoke on a Motion I dealt with drastic cuts, unwarranted cuts, to different institutions in our country.

Very often reference is made to Singapore, a country that I had the opportunity to visit as well and, you know, Madam Speaker, I want to make a suggestion that maybe one of the paradigm shifts that we should get involved in, in Trinidad and Tobago is that we should not only see education as a social good. We should see education as an economic good. When you do that, you are going to empower those persons.

We talk about the universities in our country and particularly UTT being an entrepreneurial university. That does not come by saying so. That comes by designing the curriculum to respond to the needs of the country. What about our national needs? Where is that list? In terms of jobs, as you have guided me, how will we know that these jobs are available? What will students want to study to gain scholarships through the Ministry of Education for further study? Is it that we have a shortage of neurosurgeons? Maybe so. What other areas and what other fields of study should we be guided? That is what jobs are about. We have to identify a difference between the skills shortage and the skills gap. It is because of that scientific study, that led us for the first time, historically, to seek to create jobs in a sector that was declining to some extent, denied, and not been accentuated. Madam Speaker, I speak historically here of the first aviation campus in Trinidad and Tobago of the University of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] To cutting cane. Madam Speaker, we need to ensure that we have better education and that our mature, young people need to be creative creators and creative servers.

Very often we speak about the quality of life. In talking about jobs, we

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would have heard, very often, that we are doing a lot of things. Two years now I would have been here listening to two budget presentations and in the main when you examine and you go through the books you will see a repetition of the same thing in most parts.

Madam Speaker, recently I had the cause to read in a newspaper and I can quote it, the *Newsday*, Wednesday, January 11, 2017, where the Minister of Trade and Industry was saying that the Tamana InTech Park was ready for business, that \$2.2 billion was spent on that park and there are 21 lots that were now prepared for leasing to businesses anywhere in the world. Madam Speaker, after 16 months we want to know what has been done with those lots. After 16 months they are saying that one lot has been taken and there are IT jobs available in the signature building. The question is: how many jobs are those? The question is: what is your marketing strategy for promoting Trinidad and Tobago as a knowledge capital, to ensure them that we attract investment and jobs in our country? And when you want to attract investment you have to look at the level of crime and criminality that is taking place. We now have the number of crimes in this country surpassing the number of days so far. Are people going to invest from abroad? Will people here invest?

Recently, the newspaper indicated, about the number of crimes in excess of “20-something” at that time.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I am allowing you some leeway but this is not a debate on crime. Okay? Remember this is about a clear and cogent economic plan.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, I just want to—maybe I should remind myself about the Motion. The Motion really talks about the rising levels of unemployment. Madam Speaker, I want to tell you that unemployment will

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increase if crime continues to increase. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, there will be a higher and growing level of poverty if crime continues to increase. Madam Speaker, there will be wage restraint and wage freeze if crime continues to increase [*Desk thumping*] and Madam Speaker there will be deteriorating living standards because people will not invest if crime continues to increase. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I think you are well, in my regard, I think, both of us are on the same page. And, therefore, I always say to my colleague, the Member for Laventille West who indicated here, and I am not going to deviate from my text too much, but, you know education was also important to all of us and he admitted that he took six years to get six subjects and that is an accomplishment. But one of the problems with some of my colleagues, particularly on the other side, is there is a difficulty to learn because when you learn well jobs are easy to access [*Desk thumping*] and the problem has always been that when you do not learn what you become is a TOI, you become a transferee of incompetence. [*Desk thumping*] And sometimes when you become a transferee of incompetence, because of the job that you are not doing well, your boss does not know in which portfolio to put you. [*Desk thumping*]

Therefore, Madam Speaker, as we talk about jobs I just want to indicate as my friend and colleague, the Member for La Brea is here and the Member for Point Fortin was here, recently—and again I am taking the lead so I am staying on the subject matter of the contribution of the hon. Minister of Finance, Member for Diego Martin North/East, he was saying—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas East, your original speaking time is spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes.

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Mr. F. Karim: Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I am going to stay on jobs and the economy and the quality of life. Madam Speaker, I was just about to say that my colleague from La Brea, the Member for La Brea was talking about the fact that BP's Juniper platform was constructed and the Minister of Finance, Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, indicated that we will soon have the Angelin project. The question really is: when will that Angelin project be commissioned, be approved? He might indicate that is a BP decision, yes, but I am sure that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will have some role to play. I listened to him on the television.

But the point I am making to you is both Members of Parliament for La Brea and Point Fortin indicated to the newspaper that they had a concern as well that now that the Juniper project—and I want to indicate the Juniper project was built as well, not only with local assistance but graduates from the NESC from La Brea and Point Fortin [*Desk thumping*] and the question that the Member for La Brea was asking, Madam Speaker was: what will happen to jobs now that the Juniper project is completed? She is absolutely correct representing her people. And so are all of us. We want to know what will happen to jobs.

People's contracts in the various Ministries are not being renewed, right here. Is it OJT received or is it OJT deceived? Because OJTs were also present on that platform as persons who were employed. But they were promised in the first budget presentation of this Government that there were going to be increases in stipends. Madam Speaker, we have not had that. As a matter of fact we have an answer from the hon. Prime Minister who indicated that we could not afford it at this time. But then if you could not afford it what about the graduate programme, the graduate recruitment programme, where you are going to have hundreds of

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persons in all 26 Ministries across the board? How many have been employed? We are talking about jobs. We are talking about people coming out of our universities with skills and competencies and no “wuk” and then when you get a work it is not commensurate with your qualifications. That is how under-employment is defined. We saw what happened in the years gone by.

You know, I listened as well to the hon. Prime Minister recently and he was saying that one of the efficiencies that we need to look at, and I am sure what I am going to tell you about here will be related to job creation, it has to do with the fact that many state companies have not been sending in audited statements in five years.

Madam Speaker, the question is: well, if we have to have job creation and audited statements are not submitted in five years and you are saying you are mandated to submit it, what about the audited statements of the Tobago House of Assembly? When will that happen?

Therefore, while that is not directly on the Motion it has to do with jobs and I would tell you why. You will not know the true state of a company. You will not know whether it has a loss or whether it has a profit, and in most cases the profit is also called retained earnings, which is reinvested to create jobs and opportunities. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you as well that with all of that we are talking about, in terms of the opportunities for job creation and for the standard of living, what we have to do is to continue, Madam Speaker, in my view, to ensure that we capture the best talent and the best brains in our country.

Madam Speaker, it always bothers me when we talk about unemployment that we might define unemployment as people who are looking for jobs or do not

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have jobs. But we have people who are willing. I said that. We have people who want to work. Is it because you are a retiree, some people are mentally retired, that you do not have a contribution to make? Madam Speaker, that is what the apprenticeship system, and I mean no offence to anybody. I am speaking about jobs. There was a columnist who said that there were a number of persons on the other side who might be categorized as apprentices but apprentice is a good thing. It is a good thing because you learn well from the **MYSTAR**. And that is based on the German system of apprenticeship.

Madam Speaker, I want to indicate that maybe one of the things that we need to do is to see to what extent industry and education can articulate very easy. Madam Speaker, as we talk about jobs and unemployment you also have to have the proper mind-set.

Benjamin Bloom, famous education psychologist, would have been noted for talking about the taxonomies, in terms of the cognitive domain, the knowledge; in terms of the psychomotor skills, or the psychomotor domain; in terms of the doing, but very importantly in terms of the affective domain, which really is in terms of the heart. Madam Speaker, I have mentioned before and I say again, that it is one thing for us to have competencies, to have certification, but sometimes people have a lot of paper that say they write exam and they pass but certification is not the same as qualification, certainly, just as schooling is not the same as education.

Madam Speaker, we have been advised very often about the importance of education. Even the Mighty Sparrow has spoken in his calypso about education being the foundation of our nation. And, therefore, as we speak on this Motion, it is very clear that the Government in charge of this country has failed on all counts,

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[*Desk thumping*] absolutely and from all that they would have said, the evidence suggests and it is clear.

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, as we talk on the Motion and you have guided me to stay and I want to stay there, when we were in Government there were thousands of items that we removed from the VAT list. Madam Speaker, I am asking for some reconsideration, the Minister of Finance is here, fortunately, sitting at the top of the table, whether we could go back and review this and do a survey, a household survey, of living conditions and see to what extent we would be able to assist people. Madam Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Madam Speaker: You have until 3.59.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And therefore, as we talk about jobs and unemployment, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance indicated in his contribution that we were able to secure so many jobs in the public service. We have the Couva Children's Hospital that is still not opened. We await the opening of it and it is not for want of doctors I am sure. Because if we have an advertisement for persons to apply to be medical doctors, we would be able to have a plethora, an overwhelming amount.

As a matter of fact, as we talk about jobs and opportunities, from the El Dorado Academy of Nursing and Allied Health, hundreds of nurses are being trained and many of them are looking for jobs. We started as well something called OJT Medical. Madam Speaker, do you know what that was? Because we did not have the capacity to accept all the students who were adequately matriculated and qualified to enter university, we thought that rather than keep them at home idle, we would pay them, through the OJT programme to work in the hospitals, the health centres, the clinics. The professors have since told us that

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those students enter as better students than those who came straight from school—
[*Desk thumping*] that is what it is, about jobs.

I told you earlier on about unemployment and I akin that to when somebody passes away. When you have no job, the “ole people used to say when yuh have money in yuh pocket yuh have fren, when yuh hah no money all ah dem does leave yuh and that is something that we go through” and that is something that we must ensure that, as far as possible, we do not revisit the situation.

And, therefore, I want to come back to this position. I mentioned earlier on opportunities for job creation. We are now expanding. We have the Juniper platform. Hon. Minister of Finance, Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries indicated that they were on to a mode of increasing production. He spoke extensively about Petrotrin, about the viability of Petrotrin which in our minds and the public minds, the evidence is there, has been substantially damaged and destroyed because of the past WGTL and millions of dollars. Every time you drive on that highway near to Pointe-a-Pierre by the gate of Petrotrin you must look to the right if you are going south or look to the left if you are going north and you will see hundreds of millions of dollars in concrete and steel doing nothing. [*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, those were jobs we could have created. Had we continued with that building people would have been working in there.

We have the drilling school, for the first time. The Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke about the history of oil and gas in this country. We acknowledge that. We honour that. We are proud of it. But for the first time, under our administration, a drilling school was started. [*Desk thumping*] And again I am saying that we have opportunities from here, job creation. Not only in terms of Trinidad and Tobago but our neighbouring countries right here in Guyana

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and in Suriname. We had visits from Ghana, from Uganda, from Nigeria, where persons were being trained. That is how you create jobs.

I want to also say I look forward. The Principal of the St. Augustine Campus indicated that in August of this year, the Minister of Education did say so too, that it was entirely up to the University of the West Indies, the Penal/Debe Campus and we acknowledge that, Minister of Education, and he indicated that they had all the money. We knew that. We gave them the money. And thankfully the principal now goes on the newspaper and says, in answer to our several questions, that in August of 2017, the campus will open for students for the first time. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, in terms of this Motion that is what is going to happen, in terms of the demonstration effect, the backward and forward linkages of job creation.

Madam Speaker, in terms of the forward linkages, and just for the benefit of my friends who may want to respond, I want to make sure that they understand the terminology correctly, that the forward linkage industry is one where the output of one leads to the establishment of another. And I hope that they are listening because sometimes they have a tendency to drop asleep, and not only that to take in a lot more air than required. But in addition to that, a backward linkage industry is where the needs of one industry leads to the establishment of another one.

Madam Speaker, on this Motion, again, even though my colleague, and I commend my colleague, MP for Couva South, Indarsingh, for bringing this Motion it is long beyond the time because people have been suffering. As a matter of fact, we are being told, I am reminded by some people of the faith, that what is happening in our country is when you deal with the devil, like Carnival you have to play the devil [*Desk thumping*] and it is almost like a cloud hanging over this

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country preventing us from emerging. But I want to tell you I believe in the resilience of our people, that we will rise again. We will rise again very soon and this country will continue on a part of prosperity.

Madam Speaker, I suspect my time is about a minute and a half, so before I end I want to thank you for the opportunity. But I also want to end on some words of a colleague of mine who continues to be a good friend, and it goes back for about 30 years, maybe, when he brought the lyrics to the stage of Trinidad and Tobago and he reminds me of what is happening captain "de" ship is sinking, and like nobody knows what is happening and we cannot look for any direction from this captain. Madam Speaker, this Motion I support wholeheartedly and this Government does not have a plan to rescue Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.
[Desk thumping]

4.30 p.m.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very warmly, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to make a short contribution in this very stimulating debate. Madam Speaker, I heard my friend, the Member for Chaguanas East, close with the words of a calypsonian we all know well, where he sang "Captain the ship is sinking". They sunk the captain, you know. *[Laughter]* "Yuh cyar find him today, yuh know." *[Desk thumping]* He came towards a red light house seeking salvation and found it.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East also told us that when you have no money you lose all your friends. That reflects a certain kind of morality, a certain view on life that we do not share, but I also disagree with him because that cannot be true. The UNC in their time in Government created a number of millionaires and billionaires in this country, and on September 07, 2015 the people

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still rejected them. They were rejected in a recent local elections, and although they wore blue and black, they were rejected in Tobago last week as well. [*Desk thumping*] And so bad was their rejection, they were thrown out of Rienzi Complex. They are now homeless and poor, and that I suspect is the reason for this Motion.

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, I guess that is your introduction and, therefore, I would guide you back to the words of the Motion.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged. I am obliged, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Motion raises concepts such as, and I am quoting from it:

“...rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty and deteriorating living standards...imposition of a wage restraint/freeze policy...”

And these are having a very adverse effect on the working people.

“...condemn the Government for its failure to deal with the current unemployment challenges...”

Let me begin, Madam Speaker, by complimenting the Minister of Finance and Member for Diego Martin North/East [*Desk thumping*] for his response to this nonsense. Let me reject and condemn, on the other hand, the mover of this Motion, and the last speaker in this House here today. Madam Speaker, I do so because the mover of this Motion was a former Minister in the Ministry of Finance. He was there when we had the very famous, some might say infamous, Minister of Finance, Sen. Larry Howai, a man who the public records show was priced out of the chair at the FCB to hold the office of Minister of Finance.

Dr. Tewarie: Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member, I would like you to continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you. I say “priced” because the price cost this country \$12

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million.

Hon. Member: Fourteen.

Hon. F. Hinds: \$14 million. That is for the public record. He sat as Minister of Finance for a sustained period and did not tell the country the truth about the matters that are being raised in this Motion here today. In fact, there is a view in the national community that they even misled the public on the facts about the economy in this country. I would come to that shortly to demonstrate why they may have misled this country.

I consider, Madam Speaker, this Motion to be deceptive, because it attempts, by the concepts I have described, to lend a certain impression to the unwary. If you did not live here and you visited and listen to this debate today, follow this Motion, you would get a certain impression of Trinidad and Tobago which is not correct. So, in that sense, it is extremely deceptive. I regard this Motion as reckless because it underpins. The state of the economy today, as I will demonstrate in a short while, is as a direct result of the mismanagement and mishandling of this economy by those who were in government when they were there. [*Desk thumping*] I submit as well, Madam Speaker, that this Motion—and permit me a colloquialism, is abject and downright boldfaced. If it was not boldfaced, they would not bring such a Motion to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but it falls to us to react to it.

And then to rub salt in the wound, I heard the mover of this Motion tell this country a while ago, he wants to know what is the Government's plan to revive this economy? It is almost as if, "You see ah man; yuh chop him up; yuh have him bleeding and half dead"; and somebody now, you are asking them: "How yuh go fix him?" The man half dead. To use that metaphor, let me tell you what I

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consider—and I agree with the Minister of Finance—the Members of this Government, we have bond ourselves together for the last few months in this country, and have been working hard to keep Trinidad and Tobago whole.

If I use the metaphor of the wounded man, the first thing we had to do was to stop the bleeding from the wounds inflicted by the last Government [*Desk thumping*] as we performed surgery on that patient to make him whole and to make him better again. We stopped the bleeding, we stopped the haemorrhage. If we contribute nothing else, as I have said before, the fact that we are in Government—and I see it week after week after week in the Cabinet from where I sit—the efforts, the pain, the energy and the intellect we exert using PNM 60 years of experience to hold this country together and to protect the economy in the interest of the people. I am proud as a result of that, absolutely proud—and now coming to ask: how we fixing the patient which they nearly half-killed, more than half-killed. To quote George Chambers, they are too wicked, but that is another thing.

If things are bad in this country and this economy today, it was all choreographed by our friends on the other side. There is a straight line, a straight line, unbroken, between their behaviour in Government and the state of Trinidad and Tobago's economy today—a straight line. [*Desk thumping*] Before I continue there, I cannot help, I cannot resist it.

My friend, the Member for Chaguanas East, reminded me and I have told children up and down this country my story. I was a young happy child—healthy, happy, well fed—but not altogether focused. So I had a good time in primary school and secondary school. As a result of that, notwithstanding the fact that my father provided every single thing that I needed as a child, as a result of that, I did not perform as well as I could, in that regard, but I would tell you what, every one

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of my six O Level subjects are bona fide, every one. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] I did not get no PhD in a warehouse in Brazil. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] This country has had the sad report and experience of seeing dozens and dozens of persons appointed by that Government with bogus qualification, who had to run away in shame in the last five years. My record today shows I have an LLB from the University of London. I have a Master of Laws from the University of London. I was called to the Bar at Middle Temple in London—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(1)

Hon. F. Hinds: And I am a barrister-at-law as a result. I am an attorney-at-law having received the LEC right here in St. Augustine.

Madam Speaker: Member, I think a point of order was raised. Member, what I would ask you, I know you are responding, but, please, get back to the text. I also want to warn Members, in terms of the decorum, I do not want to curtail Members support for the speakers on their side, but, please, do it in accordance with parliamentary practice and decorum.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you rather warmly again, Madam Speaker. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, I heard my friend introduce a concept that I had not heard so described before. I was familiar with it. I know the meaning, because this country saw them as soon as they went to Government—look, there was a man called James Philbert, as acting commissioner—he had two weeks again before the end of his contract—they chased him out of office. They disrupted the SSA. They chased people away. The records would show about 8,000 people they fired in their first year, and then coming to tell us today about political unemployment. They are too wicked.

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Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Order 48(4), Madam Speaker, and 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Please continue, Member for Laventille West.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, but he says “we are too wicked”. You accept that as being parliamentary?

Hon. Member: You are challenging the Speaker?

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, I am not challenging the Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: I would change it, devious. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Still Standing Orders 48(4), 48(6) on that word as well, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West—[*Crosstalk*—we have just heard your educational qualifications, I am sure you could find a better word. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Let me say, and I am guided by my friend, they are typically UNC. [*Desk thumping*] I know they are shamed about that too. But, Madam Speaker, I heard my friend, the Member for Couva South, speak about 600 workers or so from ArcelorMittal. I simply want the young people of this country, and for those who might have missed it to understand that was a private firm in operation, and they had a host of employees, and the issues had nothing to do with the Government. That was between a private firm and their employees and their trade union representatives.

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, by virtue of the law under which we operate and the Constitution, acted as a bit of a mediator. We know she put a lot of time and effort to resolve this situation, but it got to where it was. Madam Speaker, I cannot help it, I have to respond. I heard my friend, the

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Member for Chaguanas East, got up here a while ago and asked us “magically”, if you like, or “mystically” if you prefer, to open the Children’s Hospital in Couva. Madam Speaker, I recall his leader, a former Prime Minister, one Kamla Persad-Bissessar, went there with great fanfare and a whole entourage of them and opened it on August 14, 2015. He want us to open it again. It is only the UNC does do that. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, let me concentrate on this.

Madam Speaker, the latest CSO published data on unemployment in this country is for the second quarter of 2016, and it reflects that unemployment as at that time was 4.4 per cent. Okay? Those are facts. The International Labour Organization authorized, qualified with historical memory on the basis of internationally garnered statistics, indicates that given:

“...with volatile capital flows, still dysfunctional financial markets and the shortage of global demand...”

—global unemployment is naturally expected to rise. Those are facts. In light of that, the reality is that unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago has not been rising in the way that this Motion seeks to deceitfully underpin or suggest. Currently in the United States official unemployment hovers around 5 per cent. On all those tests, Madam Speaker, it is not as bad in Trinidad and Tobago as the mover of this Motion attempted to portray it. I understand the psychology of opposition. When you are in Opposition, is a lam and scandal over every little nothing. I understand the psychology of how the thing works. I understand.

Poverty, the experts tell us, describes a:

“Condition where people’s basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are not being met”—and it—“is generally of two types: (1) Absolute poverty is synonymous with destitution and occurs when people cannot obtain

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adequate resources (measured in terms of calories or nutrition) to support a minimum level of physical health...(2) Relative poverty”—on the other hand—“occurs when people do not enjoy a certain minimum level of living standards as determined by a Government”—and compared from country to country or even from area to area.

Mr. Karim: Madam Speaker, I just want to get the source of the information.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am quoting from the International Labour Organization's document and I will provide a copy of it for you when I am finished.

Madam Speaker, despite the global drop in oil and gas prices with which we are all familiar, and particularly familiar in Trinidad and Tobago, because those provided the largest chunk of our national income, Trinidad and Tobago still continues to enjoy a relatively high standard of living. I do not have to be an economist to work that out. I live here. I work here. I represent people here. I do everything here and, “I eh going no place else.” I can tell you something. I have not seen people around Trinidad and Tobago looking haggard and hungry as I have seen in other parts of the world where real poverty exists. I still go to many homes and drive by many homes and see three and four cars in garages. Some of my friends on the other side very well know they are putting up mansions here and mansions there. I know one of them, a former Cabinet Member in the last government, who has nine properties ranging from Moka to Federation Park to Philippine, all over the place.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1).**Hon. F. Hinds:** What is offensive about that?

Madam Speaker: Continue, Member for Laventille West.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you warmly again, Madam Speaker. Most people still

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send their children off to school, supported by the State, with transport provided with meals. Children are still allowed in this country to get involved in extra curricula activities. So it is not as bad as this Motion tries to make it, but they would like to see a state of poverty and deprivation and joblessness and mayhem and bloodshed and murders and crime. They would like to see that because that is the environment in which they believe they can get a toe into Government again, but you will stay right there.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). He is insinuating negative things to the Members on this side that we would like to see murders. That is wrong, Madam Speaker. I want you to correct him, please.

Hon. Member: What is the Standing Order?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: And that would be imputing improper motives. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Singh: The Speaker is on her feet.

Madam Speaker: Okay. I think we well know—because we are all here now—I consider seasoned Members of this House, all honourable Members of this House, when I am on my feet, please let us observe the Standing Orders that there be silence, and let any Member who is speaking please return to their seats.

I commend this sort of level of camaraderie. I understand banter, but I think some of the behaviour is really unacceptable. Some of us must realize that we have voices that project very well, which in another Chamber might be acceptable, but it is not acceptable here.

Member for Laventille West, in terms of the Standing Order, while I agree that it did not say that they are murderers or that the Opposition is encouraging murder, I think let us watch our language and be respectful of each other. Please,

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continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am guided, genuinely guided, and thank you very sincerely, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is known that since 2008, the world has been facing serious economic challenges. The interbank market collapsed; when that occurred, the entire industrialized world was thrown into crisis—the worst since the Second World War they say. Investment collapsed and real estate prices fell. Businesses and banks went bankrupt.

I sat in Trinidad and Tobago, and when I visited the United States it was pointed out to me there are large areas where entire communities, there were signs for sale, house up, because people could not pay their mortgages. I have seen no such thing, extraordinary activity, in Trinidad and Tobago and we must thank God for that, and do not cry negative on the country. Things are not as bad as this Motion attempts to purport. I am thankful to God for that. Despite those circumstances, the last administration, in my opinion, Madam Speaker, permit me that, continue their reckless endangerment of the economy ramping up expenditure facilitated by wild borrowing, and I have facts to demonstrate that in a short while.

Madam Speaker, the net balances in the Central Bank went from a positive of \$6.5 billion in May 2010 when the last administration went to office, and it became negative by \$8 billion when they left in September 2015. In other words, the net balance in the Central Bank deteriorated—and that is a word we find in the Motion—by \$14.5 billion despite the high oil prices that the economy benefited from. And you would have heard the Minister of Finance, not once, not twice, not trice, tell this country that there was \$14 billion in cash saved in the NGC which they squandered during the time they spent here. In “termite” fashion they went in—eat wood, mettle to use a metaphor; they eat wind, and now coming here to tell

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us about deterioration. They are too—what is the word?

Hon. Member: UNC.

Hon. F. Hinds: UNC. Madam Speaker, hear some of the major loans they engaged in. One—I am started with that—billion dollar loan to build the so-called Couva Children's Hospital. Just bear in mind that the Mount Hope Medical Complex where they have a children's hospital is 10, 15 minutes away. They told us was a children's hospital, it turns out that it has about 500 beds for adults and about 100 for children. Am I correct, Minister of Health? [*Crosstalk*] Eighty or less. Point Fortin Hospital, point six of a billion dollars.

They went and buy a Chinese hull for a vessel. They went to China and they were so happy to get the loan for the Couva Hospital, they just went down on a port. They see some boat and they say, "Geh meh one ah that." That is the cost you \$.2 billion. Acquisition of other naval assets, \$1.4 billion and the construction of the Arima Hospital, \$1.3 billion. Madam Speaker, all of these carry serious long-term implications for the economy that they are condemning in this Motion. Every one of them, and that is only part of the story. When you review the economy, Madam Speaker, you will see the deficit in 2011 was \$2.2 billion; in 2012, \$4.4 billion; in 2013, \$5.9 billion; in 2014, \$4.4 billion; in 2015, \$2.7 billion and in 2016, \$7.3 billion.

Madam Speaker, I heard one of my colleagues on the other side, when the Minister of Finance was telling us, reminding us what a powerful performance this Government is putting in to manage the servicing of this State, to keep the lights going, the roads, the police, the schools, the hospitals—and all other things—the social programmes, education and health, all of that, no major job losses and all of that. When the Minister of Finance was reminding us of that, I heard somebody on

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the other side saying: “But yuh borrowing, yuh borrowing”. Yes, we are borrowing, because we have to borrow, because “It eh ha none in the Treasury again to use.” We even had to go into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, to the tune of \$2.5 billion. All of that because of the state of the economy we inherited, all choreographed and stage managed by a reckless last government in this country. Those are the facts. So we have to borrow. The difference is we are not borrowing to thief. That is the difference. I did not accuse nobody of doing that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6). It is shameful. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, please. Member for Laventille West, there is a certain innuendo, I would ask you to withdraw that, please. You will withdraw it and you will continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, I withdraw without more. I withdraw without more. I withdraw. Madam Speaker, revenue increased from \$47.5 billion in 2011 to a high of \$58.4 billion in 2014, yet they continued to run large deficits every year. Net public sector debt—and I want the country to hear this—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(1), relevance.

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you so warmly, Madam Speaker. Net public sector debt rose from \$48.4 billion in September 2011 to \$76.5 billion in September 2015, an increase by \$28.1 billion. [*Crosstalk*] If one were to add the increased loans to the deterioration of Government's current balance of \$14.5 billion then it is a total of \$42.6 billion.

What is this Government doing about rising unemployment? We drafted for the sake of this nation—our colleague, the Member for Caroni Central was a part of this. It was led, not by a Government Minister, but by a captain of industry call

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Arthur Lok Jack in this country. We put together a whole host of experts from the University of the West Indies all over in every discipline, captains of industry—as a member from UWI, the Member for Caroni Central was there—a document called Vision 2020 for the benefit of this country. We did that, at great public time and expense. Now, that we are in Government again, we realize that we lost five years of that lofty ambition to take this country to developed country status, so we refurbished it and improved it, made it current and relevant and we now have Vision 2030. That is what we do. They cost us five years of development in this country, warped the economy permanently, but we will do the best we can. The development goals for 2030 are as follows. Putting people first nurturing our greatest asset, the human being in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what GATE was all about. It still exists, notwithstanding the challenges that the economy faces, we still manage. We tapered it a bit, made some adjustments but, in the main, GATE is still available to the nation's children and many other things and for many other things. So putting people first.

Promoting governance and service excellence. Good governance, and, as I told you, I cannot carry you in the Cabinet room, but week after week, when I see the pains that our leader and my colleagues—I could give you examples—undergo to make sure that we do not waste one cent of public money and do not repeat the mistakes of the recent past, I am PNM and I am proud to be part of this Government. [*Desk thumping*] I promise just as hard as others worked to rip this country off and raped this country, we will work equally hard. [*Crosstalk*] I said others.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Member for Couva South and all other Members, if I have to warn anybody else again about the proper protocol when the Speaker is on

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her feet, then I will have to invoke the Standing Orders. I really would not like to have to do that.

Member for Laventille West, I wish you will use a little more temperate language. The national community is listening and I think some words we should try to desist from them, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very much. Madam Speaker, to disrupt and to destroy the Treasury, I accept that, but it pains. It really does. It genuinely does. This is no joke. It does because to listen to some persons in this country, including parliamentarians, come to talk about poverty and the economy and all of that in the face of what we saw and what nobody spoke about, not a word, it is painful.

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, your original speaking time has expired. Might I ask, you have 15 more minutes, how much longer you would be?

Hon. F. Hinds: Every one of those.

Madam Speaker: So might I suggest we take the suspension now and your 15 minutes will commence after tea. We will return here at five o'clock.

4.28 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we would like to resume the debate. I recognize the Member for Laventille West; you have a continued 15 minutes, kindly proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before we took the break I was making the very truthful point that the Government is taking action to deal with the existing scenarios and the potential for it worsening, and I listed some of the goals: goal one, putting people first, nurturing our greatest asset, promoting governance—

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and I stress good governance—and service excellence, improving productivity through quality infrastructure and transportation. It needs be said that the Government—and we will borrow money to do it—is embarked upon major national infrastructure with particular reference to transportation projects, a major highway from Valencia to Toco and improvement from Wallerfield to Sangre Grande, and a number of other major transportation efforts so as to lubricate the tanks of the economy, among other things.

The Global Services Promotion Programme, or GSPP so called, and the Skills for Global Services. The GSPP funded by the Inter-American Development Bank is being executed by the Ministry of Planning and Development. The general outcome of the programme is to support the advancement of our country's positioning as a renowned location for the provision of information technology enabled services.

They say technology is limitless. As a man “thinketh” so is he, so too as you think and imagine, technology is apparently able to cope with those thoughts. Therefore, by virtue of that and by virtue of the experience of other parts of the world, where persons have been able to get involved in IT development and services, it is a major plank for the development of the economy, employing many people and improving the circumstances of mankind generally. We are focusing on that.

A critical element is to create a dynamic synergy between employers, educational institutions, trainers and business opportunities to allow for the development of the right mix of skills, capacity and competency which will take the sector forward. This is not new, but we are a little late but it has got to be done. There are some countries where you call it social engineering. They know exactly

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how many lawyers they want, how many doctors, how many veterinarians, how many pilots and all of the necessary skill sets. There are universities that are designed to deal with particular industries and to generate skills and training to deal with those industries; and that work continues. Finally, the goal is to increase the availability of human capital to support the growth of international competitiveness of the firms in the ITES sector.

I said all of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to let those who take time to listen understand that while things are not perfect, there is hope. We have been here before. Things are not half as bad as my friend, the Member for Couva South, tries to project them. Interestingly enough, I must make the point, when they were in government they were trying to sell the impression that everything was hunky-dory and perfectly fine, the economy was buoyant. They knew since 2012 that things were bad. They knew that, because I gave you the statistics to show you what the revenue was and the state of affairs. But because they were engaged in the conduct that is now well known to the national community, they had to pretend the economy was doing well, and they knew full well it was not, because it was in 2012 they began to raid the NGC, as the Minister of Finance so appositely described—so they knew.

Let me share this with you, en passant, Mr. Deputy Speaker. From EMBD, the Estate Management and Business Development Company, a state-owned company, imagine on August 4, 2015, they borrowed \$400 million, one month before the general election. I want to report to you in terms of the status, this facility has been fully drawn and the debt is being serviced through budgetary allocations. So when the Minister of Finance has to pay back this \$400 million which they took a month before the election and frittered away before they left in a

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couple days—

Mr. Imbert: They spent it in two days.

Hon. F. Hinds: That is what they did, but you know how some of it was spent? It was to pay contractors who had worked at inflated prices and all kinds of madness before they went, and now coming to tell us about economy and unemployment. This is what causes me consternation and trouble, hence the reason for my emotional demonstration from time to time. But thank God for the PNM.

That is not the only one. The HDC—we dealt with it in the Cabinet this week—on July 8, 2015, again a month before the general election, \$300 million. This facility too was fully drawn.

Mr. Imbert: In two days.

Hon. F. Hinds: In two days, as the Minister of Finance tells me, and we have to come to Cabinet this week to lengthen this short-term facility which they frittered away, for a seven-year loan at 4.75 interest or something like that. This country must know these things. That is why I say they were deceptive with this Motion and reckless, and the other things that the Speaker felt I should not utter and therefore I will not again. I will simply say typically UNC.

That is not all. At PTSC, the Public Transport Service Corporation, where members of the public complain every day about the quality of service, when I was Minister of Works and Transport I struggled hard to lift up and see what we could do to improve it. They went on September 3, 2015, borrowed \$57 million—fortunately, under the good guidance of the Minister of Finance—and he deserves our applause—we have repaid that in full. I think he deserves a little more than that. [*Desk thumping*] And that is not all—that is not all. [*Laughter*] T&TEC, on August 10, 2015, less than a month to go before they were chased out of office for

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their profligacy and their waste and their mismanagement and their deceptiveness and their lack of love for the same workers who this Motion pretends to be looking out for today, \$1.6 billion, a bridge loan currently in effect, a week before the election. That is the record of those on the other side.

I always remember as a young father at the time, when you bathe the baby and clean it and powder it and feed it, you expect it to lie down quietly, but suddenly in those circumstances you hear the baby crying. Common sense tells you the first thing you have to do is look in the diaper, and then you would discover the baby is uncomfortable. They sat like bad babies for five years, “all kinda ting, and eh do nothing”. They never even squirmed or cried. [*Laughter*] Bad babies, wicked babies.

So I must before I close—and he needs no defence. The Minister of Finance did speak of zero, zero, zero, and very quickly the Prime Minister and the Government, led by the Minister of Finance, said that was not any Government policy. He said that to his credit immediately thereafter, and he was condemned by all. The Member for Couva South raised it. But everybody knows, whether you like it or not, those comments were reflecting the state of the economy and the wisdom on the part of the Minister of Finance to know that we could no longer be profligate. We had to take it easy and not to give the 14 per cent increase they gave in some negotiations—14 per cent. In the midst of all of the chaos from 2012, they settled collective agreements at 14 per cent, with the exception of the OWTU who they had a problem with, who they went into government with and they had a problem. You understand.

So now the OWTU and others are expecting 14 per cent, but you cannot get more from less. So I say to the workers in this country as I close, be patient. We

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are going through choppy water, tough times; we have been here before, we will come out. The important thing is for them to hold their jobs. In the ArcelorMittal situation, it required a little more patience, a little more enduring and protecting your jobs. Even if your job only paying you half of what you would like, at least you still have something you could depend on, on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Hold your job, it will get better. Think about other ways that you could improve your income. People do all kinds of things now to earn extra income, lawfully and legitimately, and that is my advice to them. If we go and give 14 per cent now in the middle of what is going on, we will be deemed reckless. The country did not deem them reckless because they did not know the facts of the economy while they were doing it, but they knew. So I want to move to a conclusion.

I heard the Member for Couva South say that this country is being run by the IMF. That was his opinion. The Minister of Finance debunked it as being—we have been living with the IMF—what year we join?—since the 1960s, and we lived through the UNC in 1995 to 2001 with the same IMF. The IMF is nothing strange, they do their Article IV consultations regularly. The IMF was here since the birth of this nation and are still here, and they do it every year. So nothing so big about that, and I am sure the IMF “doh” run this country, okay. But I have to wonder who was running their government. I am sure it was not the IMF.

Mr. Imbert: El Chapo!

Hon. F. Hinds: What did you say?

Mr. Imbert: El Chapo. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Leader of Government Business, please. He can handle himself.

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Mr. Imbert: El Chapo.

Hon. F. Hinds: I heard something sounding like El Chapo, but I do not know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to wind to a conclusion, but not before I remind the people of this country—I said it before a few years ago, I am obliged to say it again today—they remind me of the phenomenon of the seagull, a friend of mind told me. He lives in the quiet, pristine district of Charlotteville in Tobago. He said beautiful and quiet and pristine it is on any given day, all of a sudden nature's plan—a swarm of thousands of seagulls would come to shore. They land on the pier, they land on the boat, they land on the shops, they land on everything, and the two things that characterize them is a lot of noise and a sippy mess. They practise “seagullism”.

They came to government and for five years and four months it was only noise and mess. That is why I call it “seagullism”, and it now falls to the Minister of Finance and this Government to clean it all up, and that is what we are doing. This country could thank God that we are in government. The bleeding has stopped, and we have started to mop up the sippy mess, and we hope not to see that environmental phenomenon in a long time again.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to be able to contribute to this Motion and also offer my support, as the Member for Couva South brought to the front many issues that appear to be affecting a lot of our citizens, especially our young people. Issues to deal with jobs, issues to deal with the economy, issues that deal with poverty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am also pleased to be able to give a voice to many in our society who appear to be voiceless; for many who feel marginalized for one

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reason or the other; for those that feel that they have lost all hope; for those who feel that there is nothing to look forward too, that there are no benefits to be derived from hard work; for those who are simply without jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just a few hours ago a new report came out from the Inter-American Development Bank, and this is what that report had to say—just a few hours ago. It said that the bank had concluded that the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago is not up to the challenge of supporting economic growth, creating employment, contributing to Government revenues in a significant way or improving the economic welfare of the nation's citizens. Interestingly enough those are the same sentiments expressed by many in our population just after having the PNM in office for the past 17 months.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I start my contribution, I am reminded of a conversation that I had recently with a constituent, a young 23-year-old who came to my office. I am sure many Members of Parliament both on this side and the other side would tell you that one of the main issues affecting constituents that they see whether it is on a daily or weekly basis—and that is why we are firmly rooted in reality on this side—is the issue of unemployment.

That constituent started off a conversation with me with a very interesting saga, when she said, “You see, MP, life is a very funny thing”, and I sat back not knowing where this conversation was heading. She said to me, “I gave you a job and today I have no job. Imagine your employers are not employed.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, while this may have had very little impact to many persons, it had a lot of impact on me, because I believe that one of the main hallmarks of being a Member of Parliament and being a representative of the people has to do with empowerment. I believe that when we are empowered, whether it is through

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education, whether it is through titles or whether it is through positions, our job is to empower others.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Laventille West spoke about the haemorrhaging and he spoke about the bleeding in the society with respect to the economics. He spoke about the bleeding of the Treasury and the haemorrhaging, but he belongs to a Government who up to today cannot put forward specific plans to deal with an issue that relates to crime in this country. He should have come here to speak about the bleeding and the haemorrhaging that is taking place in many streets in this country, especially those in his constituency of Laventille West. We did not hear about that bleeding and that haemorrhaging. Unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago over the past year and a half has skyrocketed in several different sectors, with the youth population being among the demographics most affected. Our society over the past 18 months has seen and heard reports of many companies downsizing, retrenching, scaling down or moving operations. Those are just all different terms and terminology used for job loss.

In preparing my research for contributing toward today's Motion, I looked at several different news outlets who had put out stories on the issue of unemployment over the past 17 months. I just want to share some of those headlines with you:

Unemployment rate rise—*Trinidad Express*, May 10, 2016. *Trinidad Express*, that is the reality.

“CSO: Unemployment rate up”—*Trinidad Express*, March 9, 2016.

“T&T unemployment will worsen, says IDB”—February 9, 2016, *Trinidad Express*.

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UN: Latin America and the Caribbean dismal outlook for 2016—*Trinidad Express*, December 22.

Jobless rate set to jump up to 15 percent warns UWI professor—February 16, 2016.

Jobless protest again in La Brea—July 2, 2016, *Trinidad Express*.

Unemployment rate goes up—August 30, 2016 *Trinidad Guardian*.

“Unemployment rate increases”—November 8, 2016, *Trinidad Guardian*.

Unemployment up—August 29, 2016, *Trinidad Guardian*.

Central Bank monetary report shows unemployment up November 25, 2016—*Trinidad Guardian*.

“Crime spikes in times of hardship”—January 3, 2016, *Trinidad Guardian*.

Expect increases in layoffs says experts—*Trinidad Guardian*, February 17, 2016.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is just a sample of what the stories are with respect to unemployment in this country over the past year and a half.

The reason why I went into raising these headlines and the stories regarding unemployment during that time is because a lot of our people, especially our young people, have become numb to these stories and these headlines. To many young people it is a story that is so repetitive that it is like a recurring decimal, without any hope for change or betterment or progress. Mr. Deputy Speaker, many of us are fully aware of what the contributing factors are to the employment situation in the country. We are aware and we heard from Members on both sides of the House, who spoke about the fact that we are primarily an oil and gas based economy, and that the global situation with oil prices continues to be worrisome. That is the reality.

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We are aware that the crime situation in our country has investors concerned both locally and internationally, and it has also affected our direct foreign investment. We are aware that the foreign exchange situation in our country has been a major challenge to the operations of several business that has seen companies losing millions of dollars which results in them not being able to sustain their workforce.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen where there has been a slashing of opportunities through cuts in education and skills training, especially among the young people. The Member for Chaguanas East went into some of those areas, where he spoke about those cuts and the effects that they have on young people with respect to funding for tertiary education and also those that were affected in the technical/vocational areas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have also seen that there is a lack of political will to fully operationalize projects that were destined to create sustainable jobs. The Member for Laventille West spoke a lot about nothing. He gave a lot of figures without facts, a lot of fluff—thank you Member for Barataria/San Juan—but he fell short of saying that those funds were used by the People's Partnership Government to do something that they are yet to do after 17 months, which is to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to create sustainable employment.

We have seen, and I think it is safe to say we have seen it all, and that is where the population is today, very frustrated. They feel as though they are seeing and hearing everything, but they are not getting any solutions to their problems. What are the problems? The problems are there are no jobs that are available, and not just any job but sustainable jobs. The crime rate continues to escalate, the poverty levels continue to rise. That is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago today

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under the PNM Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we now ask ourselves, what is the way forward? What is the plan going forward? In a 2015 report produced by the Caribbean Development Bank on youth unemployment in the Caribbean, this is what the President of the Caribbean Development Bank had to say:

He said, and I quote:

High levels of youth unemployment inhibit economic development with adverse social consequences, including poverty, risk behaviours and concomitant negative outcomes such as psychological scarring, crime, unplanned pregnancy and loss of future earning capacity. The youth unemployment issue is therefore not just an issue for the parents of the unemployed youth or the organizations that support young people. It is a critical development concern that requires urgent attention and durable solutions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the Caribbean Development Bank Report of 2015, it speaks about the period of 2012 to 2014. If you go in-depth, what it also tells you is that the Caribbean region during that time was identified as one of those regions in the world that had the highest numbers of youth unemployment.

But you know it went on further to say, that between the period 2012 to 2014, Trinidad and Tobago made significant strides with respect to youth unemployment. That was the leadership that was provided by the Member for Siparia, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Members like the Member for Chaguanas East who served as the Minister of Tertiary Education; Members like the Member for Caroni East, who served as the Minister of Education. Where during that period the plans and the programmes and policies that were put in train,

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in terms of being able to create sustainable jobs that the Caribbean Development Bank recognized that during the period 2012 to 2014, there were avenues that were becoming available to young people in Trinidad and Tobago, so that they would have a better quality of life and a way forward. That is in no small way due to the work of the People's Partnership administration during that time.

I have heard over the past few months, Members coming to this House and they would speak about streamlining and identifying the areas of discipline in which Trinidad and Tobago most require professionals. While that may be one approach in terms of looking at areas or spheres that the Government believes our students should be focused on—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leaders, you are free to have your sidebar at the back, please. Proceed, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was dealing with the issue of streamlining, where many Members of the Government would come and speak in this House and would tell us that they are trying to streamline spheres of discipline in terms of education in the tertiary education sector that would be reflected in job creation and jobs right here in Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* It is amazing to hear the Member for Moruga/Tableland ask what you are speaking about because he himself—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: I am not amazed that the Member for Moruga/Tableland would ask a question like that, because I am starting to see a lot more constituents from the neighbouring Moruga/Tableland constituency than I do in Princes Town, because they do not see him. *[Crosstalk]*

Let me get back to the issue of streamlining. *[Crosstalk]* We were looking

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at the areas that Government had identified, but up to this time they have failed to indicate to the population, what are these areas of streamlining. While the mantra of streamlining seems to be a parroted answer to the issue of creating sustainable jobs for the young people, it is yet to materialize. It is my hope that in the near future the Ministers of Education and/or Labour and Small Enterprise Development, could identify to the population what are the areas that have been identified and what is the road map to creating sustainable jobs in these disciplines.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we wait on the answers on the issue of streamlining, I am hopeful that our colleagues would also share with us some further details on the graduate training programme. Again, my colleague the Member for Chaguanas East spoke about this, where you are seeing a graduate trainee programme being instituted in many Ministries. I believe \$1 million has been identified in the last budget per Ministry, but we are still yet to be told how this graduate trainee programme is to function, how it would operate, how it would access persons in terms of being enrolled into the programme—one. Two, what is the after effect of the programme in terms of being able to employ these persons and what areas of studies are being focused on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in dealing with the current unemployment situation, I am also reminded of how the public started taking notice of what was happening in relation to job loss in Trinidad and Tobago.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are all too familiar with the saga that unfolded with the ArcelorMittal matter, many speakers spoke about this. We are familiar with the hundreds of jobs that were lost because of that devastating impact that it had on so many. Labour Minister, Jennifer Baptiste-Primus, —in a *Guardian* article on

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March 12th, 2016, written by Richard Lord says:

“...sudden closure of the Point Lisas-based ArcelorMittal is a ‘real tragedy’.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, she went on to speak in that article about areas of mitigation and support that Government will be providing to persons who were employed with ArcelorMittal. She spoke about convening a meeting with members the banking association, with the credit unions and in terms of how they were able to mesh their ideas together to provide these mitigating factors that would have elevated the troubles that persons that were unemployed from ArcelorMittal will be able to function and cope with.

I want to put a human face to that element, and that human face is a young lady in my own constituency called Jade Pariag. Jade Pariag shot to fame in 2006 when she became the top SEA student in Trinidad and Tobago. The human face of unemployment in this country is like that of Jade and many others and I will tell you why. Young Jade Pariag, 2006 top SEA student went on to become a very bright young lady in the school of Naparima Girls' High School and then into the Faculty of Medicine at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex in Mount Hope.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2016, she was in her fourth year of medical sciences studies and she has now had to withdraw from that programme because of the fact that she comes from a single parent household who is no longer able to sustain her needs when it comes to studying at the University of the West Indies where she is studying medicine. She has had to withdraw from that programme because her mother was one of those persons who had been sent home from ArcelorMittal. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the human face and the human story that we continue to

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face in this country because there many people that shared Jade's story.

Since the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development's announcement last March with respect to the unemployment register and the Ministry's plan to deal with this crisis, it is my hope that Members of the Government can today tell us what progress they have made in alleviating job loss in Trinidad. How many jobs have you created since you have come into office? Mr. Deputy Speaker, to many, the daily utterances of Government Ministers to our problems are predictable. The population now believes that the Ministers and the Government have no plans to deal with job creation, crime or the economy. They believe that the utterances of Ministers are either one of two things to the problems of Trinidad and Tobago. One, blame Kamla, and two, blame Kamla.

We in the Opposition are not about blame. We are about finding solutions, we are about putting Trinidad and Tobago first. When former President, Barack Obama, took up the US presidency, one of his greatest challenges was the issue of unemployment, specifically youth unemployment. In the most challenging times of any country that country whether it is in financial trouble, whether it is in national security trouble or any other challenge, the population always looks to its leadership for comfort, for guidance and for morale.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the words, "Yes we can" became a mantra not only in the United States, but the entire world. Today, that is the type of leadership that is absent in Trinidad and Tobago, during the challenges that we face especially for young people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, youth unemployment was faced head on by President Obama. In 2010, when he had dialogued with the European Union on the establishment of a youth unemployment commission. The United Kingdom

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accepted the challenge of President Obama in 2011 and they established a commission on youth unemployment. Former Member of Parliament in the UK Parliament David Miliband chaired that commission. And there were several things that emanated from that commission that I believe can help us right here in Trinidad and Tobago. There were several pieces of information emanating from that commission that, I believe, is relevant to what is happening in our own society.

The study led by Dr. Richard Dorset used nationally representative survey data to classify young people into groups sharing similar labour market histories between the ages of 16 to 21 by shifting the focus from a snapshot picture to the entire youth labour market history. The market allowed them to consider the full richness of individuals, youth, labour market experience.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to quote some of the preliminary results coming out from that study and that commission. And I quote, it says, one of the preliminary results was that a group of 10 per cent of young people are most likely to warrant policy attention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you relate that to Trinidad and Tobago, I believe it is far more than 10 per cent and therefore, if we strengthen the CSO—as my colleague from Caroni Central worked very hard to ensure that the upgrade of the CSO was being done so that [*Desk thumping*] this sort of information, this sort of empirical data will be able to inform some of the decisions that we make and some of the decisions that we put forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another one of the preliminary results was that this group can be divided into a number of categories including, long term—from the age of 16 and 18:

“...long term worklessness straddling unemployment and inactivity;”

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I am sure that many my colleagues especially those of us who represent more of the rural areas in Trinidad and Tobago, myself, Princes Town, Naparima; across the floor, La Brea in several of our constituencies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this piece of information is vital. You know why?—because it is in some of these areas that the opportunities for benefits and employment are far less than the urban areas. And we are not just talking about jobs in URP and jobs in CEPEP, we are speaking about sustainable jobs. And this what this commission was able to provide to the UK Parliament and to the UK people, that when they established this commission, they had the empirical data to work with. And that is why today I will stand up in this Parliament and I will support an unemployment commission to be established right here in Trinidad and Tobago. But I will take it a step further as I show the benefits of that as I relate it to another commission as we go forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another one was:

“...individuals who appear to withdraw from the labour market following an apparently successful entry into employment.”

Again, it speaks about the transition. And again, you know, a lot of the times we speak about the CEPEP and URP as being transitional jobs that, you know, is really meant to help those who are most vulnerable and so forth, to get a sustainable job thereafter. And again, I believe if we had pieces of information available to us like what this commission provides, it will be able to help mesh Ministries like the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and the Ministry of Planning and Development and the CSO.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the results also highlight the central importance of the school to work transition to successful longer term outcomes. Mr. Deputy

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Speaker, it gave a comprehensive road map in terms of what were the recommendations that were coming out. First, what were the findings, then the recommendations and then the road map.

The road map—what were the recommendations? And let me go through some of these recommendations. The commission that was chaired, again, by David Miliband former MP British Parliament said that, on behalf of ACEVO which was the organization that commissioned the unemployment commission, they said that the recommendations included ensuring more job opportunities are available to young people in 2012, they were dealing with that period at that time, by front loading the Government's youth contract initiative and doubling the number of job subsidies available in 2012.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague from Chaguanas East spoke about the OJT programme. And again, while this Government's involvement with respect to the youth contract initiative and doubling the number of job subsidies that were available with request to the UK system, we have that similar system right here in Trinidad and Tobago. You may say, well we are already doing that. But what this allowed and what it tells you in the further recommendations is that, it targeted specific areas. It targeted specific constituencies that were believed to be most at-risk with respect to unemployment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it spoke about the part-time job guarantee for young people who have been on the work programme for a year without finding a job. It spoke about targeting young people earlier, a new national programme ready to work with teenagers to prevent them from becoming caught up in things like crime and falling victim to things they should really not be getting themselves involved in, but being more productive citizens.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a very important one, where they spoke about providing localized education to career support for the none university bound who are fast becoming the forgotten 50 per cent. And right here in Trinidad and Tobago for those who are not university bound, it may be more than 50 per cent in many of our constituencies, again because of the lack of opportunities that are now available.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they spoke about youth employment zones starting in the youth unemployment hot spots, local organizations coming together and pooling resources. And you just heard where I spoke about the Inter-American Bank report saying that they have no hope in the private sector here in Trinidad and Tobago to create employment. So, what you are seeing is Government also being placed in a similar situation where you are not hearing about any sort of job creation, sustainable job creation, taking place in the public sector with any of the programmes, with any of the projects coming on stream because no project has really come on stream after the 17 months that they have been here, but now you are hearing the same thing is expected of the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member of Parliament David Miliband in the UK Parliament, former member, as the chairman of the commission had this to say, and I thought it was so relevant to what we are going through right here in Trinidad and Tobago. He said and I quote:

Britain faces a—"youth unemployment emergency... This is a crisis we cannot afford.

Government has set the right goal - abolishing long-term youth employment - but we will need big change if we are to achieve it."

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He said:

“Young people, Government, communities and employers will all need to up their game if young people are to succeed in a radically changing job market.”

He said:

“Our report sets out a practical routemap for how they can do precisely that. The crisis of youth unemployment can and must be tackled now.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Motion speaks to Government not having a plan in terms of creating jobs, in terms of getting us out of the problems that we are in. And here is where when I looked at this study I thought that this could work in Trinidad and Tobago because it does provide that route map, it does provide a way forward and that is why we on this side—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time has expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the 15?

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Continue.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is why we on this side will support the establishment of an unemployment commission right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

And I want to tie that in not only with the empirical data and collecting data and being able to use that data to our advantage through strengthening the CSO and others, but also in relation to how that can impact our social safety net. You know, similarly in the United States they have several unemployment commissions across the states and I looked at the Texas model. And the Texas model what they do is that similarly they use the data to inform how they assist persons through the

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social safety net whether it is through food stamps or government housing, et cetera.

And recently while I was doing some research, I saw the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West when asked in an article in the Trinidad *Guardian*, I believe it was, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yes. It was on Monday, April 4th, 2016 the headline read:

“Social Service ready to assist jobless: \$15,000 grant, food card relief”—et cetera.

And when you listen to the hon. Minister in this *Guardian* article, she spoke about how many food cards have been given out. She spoke about how many grants have been accessed and so on, but at the same time she was unable to say how many of those grants, how many of those food cards, how much assistance she has given through that Ministry, went to persons who are unemployed.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in essence what was happening there is that the “blind was leading the blind”, in local parlance. But when I speak about the Texas model I will bridge that or mesh it with that of the commission that took place in the United Kingdom. What it does, it gives you two bites of cherry. One, it puts you in an informed perspective in terms of the information that is available to you, in terms of the persons who are unemployed in your society. It also tells you those that are most at at-risk. But when you mesh that with a Ministry like the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, it now informs the information that is being provided to that Ministry so that the ones that are most vulnerable, the unemployed, will be able to access things like those same grants and so on that the hon. Minister spoke about in that article.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we have spoken about what is the way forward,

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as a responsible Opposition, and putting forward ideas and solutions, and you heard some of those ideas and solutions being put forward by Members on this side of the House. Member for Couva South did quite well telling us what was the problem, but he also indicated what were some of the avenues that were available to us through the collective bargaining process.

He also stood up in this House and he fought for the workers that were involved in those bargaining processes, because, yes, he has been a long-standing trade union member, but he has also been one of the most successful long-standing trade union members in this country. And I really want to pay tribute to the Member for Couva South for having the foresight [*Desk thumping*] to bring this. Because you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We on this side of the House are fully rooted in reality.

Let me tell you what is the reality in Trinidad and Tobago and why the Member for Laventille West went to great depths to tell us about “squandermania” and “tiefing” and all these things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 17 months they have been there and they have nothing to improve the lives [*Desk thumping*] of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And as their political leader likes to say, “You can jump high, you can jump low, you can drink this, you can drink that”, that is the reality that Trinidad and Tobago will judge you on.

This Motion has to deal with employment. It has to deal with the issues of poverty. We addressed the issue of employment in this country from two limbs. We looked at empowering our people through skills training. And the Member for Chaguanas East, I remember one day he came to the Prime Minister—and Member forgive me if the facts are a little bit skewed, but I remember you coming to the Prime Minister and specifically asking for the Ministry to be named Ministry of

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Tertiary Education and Skills Training. Was I right, Member? Yes. He is nodding in approval. Yes.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was the vision and foresight and I will show you and tell you how. This is what we did. We had two limbs in terms of empowering our people through job creation, but also through skills training. We understood that when we built the Couva Children's Hospital and the Arima Hospital and the Point Fortin hospital that we needed health care professionals and that is why the Member for Barataria/San Juan together with the Member for Chaguanas East ensured that we established the Academy of Nursing and Allied Health in El Dorado. Because you know why?—we ensured that persons were going out there looking for sustainable jobs had the tools, that they were equipped to get these jobs. So, we were creating the jobs, but we were also equipping you with tools that were necessary to take up these jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they come here and they speak about all the great plans and so on, they have plans—all fine and well and wonderful. But the Member for Diego Martin Central, in his absence, is always very happy to go and open facilities in this country like the National Aquatic Centre, the National Tennis Centre, the National Cycling Velodrome. But what that did was that it created opportunities for employment and creation of jobs right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

When the Member for St. Joseph and the Member for Laventille West talked about when the Children's Hospital was opened and when it was not opened, what they will not come in the Parliament and tell you, is that up to today when they could have created thousands of jobs through the Children's Hospital, they have been unable to do so. [*Desk thumping*] They have failed to do so. And similarly,

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similarly, they have failed to do so with the National Aquatic Centre, the National Cycling Centre, the national velodrome. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those were avenues to also bring in revenue in Trinidad and Tobago.

You know, I saw recently where the Canadian swim team came and they spoke about a world-class facility that the National Aquatic Centre is. And I must pay tribute to the vision and foresight that when you drive up and down that highway—and the Member for Laventille West wants to talk about how much we spent—you can see the real tangible things [*Desk thumping*] that we delivered to the people, not only to create jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which they have failed to do, but at the same time empower our people, where I started off in my contribution, to empower our people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, on the news and I know the Member for Couva North is always speaking about the issues of tourism and the dilapidated site—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence, please, Members. Go ahead, hon. Member.

Mr. B. Padarath:—that—the Member for Laventille West wants to talk about beaches and seagulls and so on, take a drive down to Maracas Bay and look at the condition that you have Maracas Bay in Trinidad and Tobago, again, where you could have created jobs, where you could have invigorated the economy. You have failed to do so with, review, review, review and nothing is happening in the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Tabaquite will tell you that in the constituency of Tabaquite there are packaging houses there that we made available through the Ministry of Agriculture then Ministry of Food Production were empowering people to get them involved in agriculture and agro-processing.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, 17 months have passed you have been in office and what has happened to that facility?—absolutely nothing. [*Desk thumping*] It remains unoccupied, it remains unused. And you want to come in this Parliament, stand up with the audacity to say that you care about the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the best thing that could have happened was for the PNM to be there. I want them to listen to a song by a calypsonian called Lady Gypsy. [*Desk thumping*] And I encourage my friend the Member for St. Ann's East to make available a copy of that song to all Members on that side, where she speaks about the hardship inflicted on a party that she supports, the PNM.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thought it was most appropriate how Lady Gypsy chose to end that song. And I will tie it back in relation to unemployment and poverty and so on in this Motion, because that is what the Motion is about. But you know what she said, Mr. Deputy Speaker? She said those on the other side want them to say, "Great is the PNM, great is the PNM, the PNM shall prevail". But you cannot go and pay your rent and put food in people's mouth [*Desk thumping*] with "Great is the PNM". And that is what they have done and inflicted on their own supporters, far less for anybody else in this country. That is the legacy that they leave for our children and our grandchildren.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East went to great pains in speaking of the energy industry and the energy sector Trinidad and Tobago. But you know what he did not tell you? He would not tell you that from 2002, when he sat in the Cabinet, to 2010, nothing was done [*Desk thumping*] no drilling took place, no exploration took place under the People's National Movement while he sat in that Cabinet. He will not tell you, when he spoke on this Motion about the energy sector, he will not tell you; he will not tell you this country lost billions of dollars

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because of decisions made by Cabinets that he sat in, he sat in with Malcolm Jones and the World GTL project. When you want to talk about—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Naparima, at times you just constantly, you know, make these little outbursts. Please, proceed, Member.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member came and said, you know, we did very little during our time, the People's Partnership, but yet he was anxious, you see him run down, put on his short pants on an Sunday to go and take out a picture with Juniper to ensure that they took—on his yacht, I am told, on his yacht, [*Crosstalk*] with his Bermuda short and Hawaiian shirt and Panamanian hat—we went down there to take credit for the Juniper project. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was the hard work of Members like the Member for Siparia, the Member for Tabaquite, the Member for Couva South. You want to know what is the legacy for the Member for Couva South while he was in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy? The Member for Couva South's legacy together with that of the Member for Siparia and the Member for Tabaquite and others will be that Juniper project where we are able to reinvigorate a stagnant energy sector that you left us for over seven years in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

You know what?—why so many people live in poverty in this country? Because we took up the patrimony of Trinidad and Tobago and gave it to people like Malcolm Jones, [*Desk thumping*] a case that they discontinued when they came into office.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very happy, very happy today to be able to support my colleague with a Motion like this [*Desk thumping*] knowing fully well that it resonates, it resonates with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the reality. You know, I saw one reporter saying, “Well, why they do not come

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here and talk about crime since they are so concerned about crime"? Poverty, unemployment also leads to high crime. And you know, we have seen so many murders that have taken place over the past few months and we have seen some of the most heinous crimes take place. But you know what is the saddest crime, I believe, of all? It is when you have a government who refuses to act or speak out in defence of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And I want to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago of something that the Member for Diego Martin West said. He said:

Anytime you have to turn towards blaming the Opposition, know that the Government—at that time—has no business being in office.

Because you cannot come here continuously and want to blame us for your incompetence and your ineptitude. It is high time after 17 months that you come and you indicate what are the plans and policies and no amount of posturing from Members like the Member for Diego Martin North/East and Member for Laventille West will change that, because you know why?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two more minutes.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know why?—it is in their constituencies as well that you find some of the most vulnerable people. And up to today they are yet to tell this country: what is the road map, what is the way forward? I have asked, and I am saying that we are willing to work across the aisle on establishing this unemployment commission. We can look at the UK and the Texan model to bridge that gap so that we have greater synergy, and also in terms of delivery between the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the Ministry of Planning and Development, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Enterprise Development in terms of being able to deliver jobs, and not just any

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jobs, but sustainable jobs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is about time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if they cannot get the job done, we are willing to help them. We are willing to give them the ideas, the plans, the policies to move forward. And that is why I am saying, today, on this Motion that deals with unemployment and poverty in our country, when it is at its highest—and yes, the Member said over 20,000 jobs, and that is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. But we are willing to work with you across the aisle to establish the unemployment commission but, more importantly, we are willing to work with you to give to the people of Trinidad and Tobago an alternative to providing solutions, because they are tired of the blame game. They want solutions, and I implore my colleagues opposite to answer some of the questions. [*Crosstalk*] You have to repeat, “Let’s do it together”. I do not have to repeat that, hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. But again, we are willing—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time has expired. [*Desk thumping*]
 Leader of Government Business.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 3rd February at 1.30 p.m., on which day we will do Bill No. 1 and Bill No. 2 on the Order Paper. And just by way of information, when this Motion resumes, whenever that is, we have 23 speakers on this Motion. [*Desk thumping*]

6.00 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on

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the Motion for the Adjournment of the House filed by the Member for Tabaquite. I now call upon the Member for Tabaquite. [*Desk thumping*]

**Housing Lots at Petit Morne
(Government/NIDCO's Failure to Deliver)**

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for allowing debate on this Motion which reads as follows:

Failure of the Government and NIDCO to deliver house lots at Petit Morne to persons displaced due to the construction of the Point Fortin Highway.

Madam Speaker, over the last couple of weeks my office has been flooded with persons whose properties were acquired for the purpose of the construction of the Point Fortin Highway, and who have not received the lots of lands that were promised to them so that they can construct their homes in the Petit Morne area. Madam Speaker, I have quite a large number of these deeds and promises that were made, and I just want to refer to one particular one, because all of them are virtually about the same matter.

Madam Speaker, before doing that though, I want to refer to a document of 2013 published by NIDCO, "Frequently asked Questions and Answers". And in this document NIDCO said to persons here, "How will I be compensated for the acquisition of my property?" And, of course, they said they will get fair market value, replacement cost for their structures and land, compensated for disturbance, related professional fees, surveyors/valuators, et cetera, and that NIDCO will offer an incentive to the owner to relocate within one month. That is payment of residential rental at a suitable property for up to one year together with moving assistance. What I would like to bring to the attention of the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure is this, that in a lot of these cases that 12 months has expired, and what happened is that they signed an agreement with NIDCO which says:

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Now, therefore, in pursuance of the foregoing the company hereby pays to the claimants the sum of \$60,000 Trinidad and Tobago dollars, the receipt of which the claimants acknowledge representing one year equivalent of rent in full and final settlement as agreed between the company and the claimants for the purpose of rental for temporary relocation.

Now, what has happened is that the people who were expected to be given the lands as quickly as possible within that year, and they have not. So, right now, they are out of pocket, because they have to now pay—from what I understand from them—the rental cost of staying in the rental properties, which I find to be very unfair. Because you made an agreement with people and the people in good faith signed the agreement, because you said that you would give them the properties within one year, and I am speaking specifically about NIDCO.

Secondly, what they made people do at NIDCO was prepare what was called a deed of transfer and assignment, in which the people turned over their property all in good faith, to NIDCO, so that the highway could continue, with the expectation that NIDCO would have fulfilled their part of the bargain. Today, this is not the case, and people are now, as you say, out in the rain, because they have not been given the house lots at Petit Morne, and in addition to that, they are not being paid any additional moneys for rent, and I find that to be totally unfair, totally unfair because in my view you have a state agency here who acted unethically, a state agency here who pretended to act in good faith and did not act in good faith, and I think that this deserves the attention of the Parliament.

Because the Parliament has committees that bring these state agencies, and I am even suggesting that this state agency, NIDCO, be brought immediately before the Parliament to the relevant Joint Select Committee, and that that committee—

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whichever committee—questions this state enterprise as to why this has happened, and why they have not been able to deliver to the people. Why they made people sign agreements knowing fully well that they were not going to deliver within the one year and, secondly, took their property by having them sign over a deed of transfer and assignment.

And I would like to know further that the lawyers involved in this on the part of NIDCO, did these lawyers inform the people of what in fact were their rights or what situation they were getting into? This is a very serious situation. This is not like a private lawyer, this is a lawyer acting on behalf of the State. And when you act on behalf of the State and you take away people's property without giving them back what they expected, when they acted in good faith, I think that is an atrocity, and I think that is why I have come before the Parliament with this matter. Not just to raise the issue, but to raise the issue of how unethical NIDCO was, and the lawyer acting on behalf of NIDCO towards these people. And I find this to be grossly unfair.

And I know that the Minister perhaps is very surprised also about this situation. You see, Governments, including this Opposition who was in office, tend to get blame for many things, but it is some of these state agencies, and the CEOs, and whoever are in those agencies acting as it were on behalf of the Government, who create these kinds of problems by their inefficiency, lack of care, lack of attention, and lack of compassion for people. And, Madam Speaker, that is a very serious situation. It is a very, very serious situation, because governments come and go, and one expects that public servants would be true to their task, and that they will be very fair, and they will exercise judgment. But, more than that, that when they give advice to people it will not be to the disadvantage of the

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citizen who, very often is undiscerning and, maybe does not know exactly the totality of what they were getting into when this was done.

So, Madam Speaker, I have several documents which are before me. You know, I am very concerned about this. I feel a sense of personal responsibility for this, because I was Minister of Works and Infrastructure during that time. In the *Newsday* of 28th October, 2013 it says here:

“...the Works and Infrastructure Minister, told residents...that it was not easy being uprooted from where many of them had lived for years. ‘Your families would have had traditions in those areas, those are not easy things to give up, your minds will always be there. But life is about change and there is much more that comes with change that is good. I urge you to be patient with the process.’”

Madam Speaker, what I want to say today, is that the people have been patient enough. But you cannot put people in a house, tell them you are going to pay them for 12 months by which time they expect to get the properties and they do not get it. What are they going to do? Who is going to bear that cost? Do we expect as a State, or should we allow state agencies to take advantage of citizens in the country?

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you something that is going to shock you. I tried to get from Mr. Steve Garibsingh, the acting CEO of NIDCO—and I can produce my telephone for you, because that is why I left this Parliament so often, because at one minute to four I made sure I went back to call Mr. Garibsingh’s office, to be told again by his secretary, since all afternoon I have been calling, that Mr. Garibsingh is unavailable to speak to me, but that as far as she is concerned she knows that they will not be paid anymore rental money.

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Madam Speaker, you cannot have an acting CEO of a company or any CEO behaving towards a Member of Parliament in that particular manner, even if that Member is a Member of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] And I call upon the hon. Minister to ask Mr. Garibsingh why he has been refusing to speak to me today to clarify this matter because I find that to be distasteful. Here we are as a Member of Parliament representing the interest of our constituents and of people who in my view are being unfairly denied and deprived of their rights to property taken away, although they have been paid for it, but the total expectations done in good faith have not been fulfilled.

Madam Speaker, this is what I bring to the attention of this House, and I ask you again to consider whether NIDCO should be called before the relevant committee of this Parliament to explain its behaviour in this particular manner. [*Desk thumping*] I do not think that as a parliamentarian, having sat here for five or six years and help set up all of those additional committees, that those committees should languish, but they should be used for the purpose for which they were set up, that is to defend the rights of citizens and to make sure that these companies are made to account for their performance or the non-performance of those who are placed there and paid to run those companies.

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

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):
Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, it is a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to address this august House. However, I am a bit surprised that the questions put to me would have been on the Point Fortin Highway, because I really thought that that is one project that the former Government would want the population to forget. [*Desk thumping*]

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Two projects I know the UNC Government would not want this country to remember is the Piarco Airport and now the Point Fortin Highway. Madam Speaker, I do not think Member for Tabaquite went too wide, so I would not go too wide with my response, only to say that this project, the Point Fortin Highway was conceptualized under a PNM government pre-2010, by the former Minister of Works and Transport, Mr. Colm Imbert. *[Interruption]* Yes, it was a PNM project. However, 2010 came and the election came, and this project moved pre-election from \$4 billion, which included acquisition, including all fees, everything, from \$4 billion—let me give you the exact figure. *[Interruption]* No, we are talking 2010. Let us talk 2010, from \$4 billion, and I think \$90-something thousand, to six months later, to \$7.5 billion. The acquisition cost—and we are talking 2010. “We eh talking now, 2015, 2017”, we talking, March/April 2010 to probably August 2010. The land acquisition went from \$400 million, approximately, to \$800 million.

It is the first place or the only place—it is the only place in Trinidad that within six months property prices went up by 100 per cent. So, I am saying this just to give you a little idea as to—it may sound as easy as the Member for Tabaquite said, but you must have a history as to what went on, on the project. Madam Speaker, to date the land acquisition is about 50 per cent, and NIDCO has already spent close to \$600 million, with another close to 700 to \$800 million needed.

Hon. Member: What?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes, that is based on the projection and the method that was used. *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Well, we changing that.

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Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well, I am just telling you if we continue the way the former Government was going this is where we were heading. Madam Speaker, we are dealing with landowners who have been paid, in one instance \$23 million for a five-acre parcel of land—

Mr. Hinds: Oh my, what?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: No, wait, wait, I “eh” finish yet—but they are still claiming another \$50 million for the same parcel—*[Interruption]*—5-0. *[Interruption]* No, this has been agreed upon by the previous Government—for an additional \$50 million. For what? Injurious affection and disturbances, for the same five-acre land. This is not one piece eh. I have another case right here where the land was bought for \$20-odd million and they are claiming another \$40 million, and now I am being told that we really did not need the land, so we do not know if the people would take it back. *[Laughter]* So, I just brought that to your attention so you would know exactly what we are dealing with going forward. And despite the challenges, the highway will continue, and whoever was promised land will get their land.

Madam Speaker, the Member raised the topic of rentals, and yes, NIDCO is not paying any more rentals. The problem there is that there was a one-off payment, I think it was supposed to be for six months, but from 2013 this payment keep turning over, and to date NIDCO has paid over \$8 million in rental, after they paid for the land.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Hinds: So, they paid for the land and then paid rentals?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: No, they are giving rental for—to go and rent, but it was supposed to be a one-off payment.

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Hon. Member: They paid for the land?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes, they got the money. NIDCO paid over five— through you, Madam Speaker, close to \$600 million already, and then they still paid rent.

Mr. Hinds: Oh my God.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: We have since stopped that practice. And, Madam Speaker, I could go on into the debate, but the Member for Tabaquite did not go too wide, so I would not want to open the debate. I just want to keep it to the specific topic of the said parcel.

To date, Madam Speaker, NIDCO has requested 180 requests for the land that have been completed and approved, 180 parcels. The Commissioner of State Lands have already issued 156 leases, and the next 24 is at the Commissioner of State Lands.

So, once the Commissioner of State Lands, and we know they had a little challenge at the commissioner's office where there is a new commissioner now in place. So, we expect that the Commissioner of State Lands will finalize these leases, and that would bring them to the 180. There will be no other leases pending by NIDCO. Cabinet had approved, I think it was 300 plots, the next 120 have not been finalized. So, it is not that we moved people from their site and we did not give them the new location. The information that I have, the last 24 is at the Commissioner of State Lands, and very soon the commissioner will finalize that, so everybody who gave up their land will be in possession of their deeds.

Dr. Rambachan: That is Katwaroo Trace or—

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well, you asked me on the Petit Morne, so I am just reporting on Petit Morne. I also want to just remind the hon. Member of

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Parliament, that the Cabinet Note stated 2013 with a one-year grace period in 2014 and up to September 2015, the hon. Minister was the Minister.

Mr. Al-Rawi: He was the Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Right. So, we are really trying to get this sorted out, and as far as NIDCO goes, NIDCO's end of the bargain is completed with this 180 that they have in front of them.

Dr. Rambachan: But, they did not deliver the land.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well, the Commissioner of State Lands has to issue the lease, the Commissioner of State Lands just has 24 more leases to issue, and then, I mean, our job there would be finished.

Hon. Member: So, the complaints is at 2013/2014, the last Minister did not pay it?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes. So, Madam Speaker, with that—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Interruptions, please allow the Minister to finish!

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, with that short—I think this could have come in a question, but that is basically the answer to the Motion, and I say thank you for the opportunity again. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.19 p.m.