

Oath of Allegiance

Tuesday, June 23, 1992

SENATE

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The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Prof. John Spence from June 23 to August 1, 1992.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have been advised that his Excellency the President has appointed Dr. Eric Baldwin Anderson St. Cyr to be a temporary Senator during the absence of Sen. Prof. John Spence.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Dr. Eric Baldwin Anderson St. Cyr took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

APPEAL FOR CO-OPERATION

Mr. President: This is an appeal for co-operation and it is directed to Members of the Senate, the media and the security services.

Modern technology also brings with it certain problems. We have the modern technology of tape recorders, communication by radio without cord and cellular telephones. All I am asking is that those who have to replay tape recordings or make use of walkie-talkies or cellular phones, to kindly do so outside the walls of this Parliament Chamber. I look forward to your wholehearted co-operation. Thank you.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Laventille Community Bath

20. Sen. Muntaz Hosein asked the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs:

- (i) Is the hon. Minister aware that the community bath and laundry situated at Picton in Laventille is without electricity and in need of urgent repairs?
- (ii) Is the Minister also aware that the state of disrepair of the said community bath and laundry is a threat to the safety of the people of Laventille who use this facility?
- (iii) If the answer is in the affirmative, can the hon. Minister inform this Senate what corrective measure she intends to take, and when?

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams): Mr. President, the bath at Picton in Laventille was completed in 1991. The building has been wired and contact has been established with T&TEC to make the necessary electrical connections.

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs is now undertaking a survey of all community baths with a view to instituting corrective measures designed to put these facilities into service in the shortest possible time.

Sen. Hosein: Mr. President, can the Minister be more specific with regard to that particular community bath at Picton? Approximately when will they get the electricity connection and the repairs that are required?

Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: Mr. President, up to yesterday, we had been in contact with T&TEC. As I said before, all efforts will be made in the shortest possible time to have that remedied as well as the other community baths.

Public Convenience (San Juan)

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Muntaz Hosein.

- 21. (i) Is the hon. Minister of Local Government aware that the public convenience situated next to the Priority Bus Terminus in San Juan is in a state of disrepair, and is he also aware that at present this facility poses a health risk to the people of San Juan?
- (ii) If the answer is in the affirmative, can the hon. Minister inform this Senate what corrective measures he intends to take, and when?

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Russell Huggins): Mr. President, I have had discussions with Sen. Hosein and I beg to have this question deferred for one week.

Question, by leave, deferred.

Laventille/St. Bard's Gas Station

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Muntaz Hosein.

22. (i) Is the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries aware that the Laventille/St. Barbs gas station is inoperative and has been so for a long time, and that this is causing great inconvenience to the people of Laventille?
- (ii) If the answer is in the affirmative, can the hon. Minister tell this Senate what corrective measures he intends to take, and when?

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Russell Huggins): Mr. President, I have not had discussions with Sen. Hosein on this question. I have not seen my colleague. May I ask that this question be deferred to a later stage of the proceedings.

Question, by leave, deferred.

FIREARMS (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Firearms Act, Chap. 16:01 [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

FOREIGN DEBT (GOVERNMENT PLANS)

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [May 26, 1992]:

Whereas it is recognized by both Governments and International Agencies that the foreign debt constitutes a virtual roadblock to socio-economic development; and

Whereas it is recognized that the working population has had to endure severe sacrifices and hardships under the adjustment programmes of the IMF/World Bank; and

Whereas the country needs to be circumspect and cautious in its future borrowing arrangements; and

Whereas it is recognized that the country would be called upon to meet levels of debt servicing hitherto never experienced;

Be it resolved that this Senate call on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago;

1. To outline its specific plans, expectations and assumptions in respect of fulfilling the debt servicing levels;
2. To outline the measures the Government intends to adopt if its expectations and assumptions in respect of net foreign earnings turn out to be significantly incorrect;
3. To engage in no further borrowing commitments before disclosure and discussion take place in respect of (1) and (2) above to the satisfaction of the mass citizenry. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question again proposed.

Sen. Roi Kwabene: Mr. President, once again we are debating a subject that is not only topical in this Chamber but also in the streets of Trinidad and Tobago amongst the mass citizenry.

In this motion we are calling on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago:

- (1) To outline its plans, expectations and assumptions in respect of fulfilling the debt servicing levels;
- (2) To outline the measures the Government intends to adopt if its expectations and assumptions in respect of net foreign earnings turn out to be significantly correct; and,
- (3) To engage in no further borrowing commitments before disclosure and discussion take place in respect of (1) and (2) above to the satisfaction of the mass citizenry.

In Trinidad and Tobago, as you are well aware, Sir, we are confronted by a situation where we have a contraction taking place in the economy. We are faced with a situation with a rise in crime. We are also confronted by a situation where the working people of Trinidad and Tobago feel alienated because they do not believe that they have a say in the running of this country. That is a bit unfortunate

when one takes into consideration that on December 16, 1991, people voted a Government into power on the basis of certain promises made to them, and these promises hinged directly on this motion. They deal basically with our foreign debt.

During the years when the Government before the last one reigned, we were in a situation where we had money which we could have spent in the right areas. I speak specifically here about our human resources, of the institutions which are so necessary in order to have a proper functioning society, of libraries, of the situation confronting culture, and in particular our youth, who for some strange reason are being overlooked in this country despite the fact that they have so much to offer.

Now, I am going to link the youth directly with this whole situation confronting us as far as this foreign debt is concerned. If the Government were to involve themselves in further borrowing, they could always absolve themselves later when they are not returned to power, and as such the young people would be saddled with this debt, and I do not think it is right for the present Government to continue any further borrowing from any foreign agency.

As far as I know, according to many of the leading international publications, these countries that are involved in borrowing moneys from these agencies have to fulfil certain conditionalities and these conditionalities, as you know, currently place us in a situation where we have something called trade liberalization, something that was brought before this Senate very clandestinely, if I may refer to it in that way—it is a bit unfortunate that despite the fact that we have a motion before us and we had an opportunity to discuss it—

Sen. Dr. Kuarsingh: Would the Senator please explain to me how trade liberalization was brought in in a clandestine manner? I thought that all the stipulations as stated in the Standing Orders were upheld.

Sen. Kwabene: My answer, Mr. President, is that it was never really formally brought before this Senate. If they had brought something to this Senate in respect of trade liberalization directly, we would have been able to deal with it. This is what we are saying. On June 30—as you are well aware—our markets will be flooded with imported goods and the local manufacturing sector will suffer because they will not be in a position to compete with those goods. And I am not suggesting that the goods will be of such a standard that they will put the standard

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of our goods in jeopardy either, when one takes into consideration the fact that the Caribbean, among other developing countries of the world, is becoming a dumping ground.

If I may continue, and I am speaking on behalf of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. I am saying that if we are to engage in any further borrowing from any lending agency, we should at least consult the people of this country and have some sort of referendum. People do not understand currently what is happening in this country. In my contribution to the budget debate.

Well do I remember referring to the austerity measures that were put in place by this Government. But Promises were made by the Government and they have not fulfilled most of them: People are very disenchanted. We have rising unemployment; we have a situation where crime is beyond control.

I am pleading with the Members on the other side to desist from this sort of activity because we are not going down the right path. It is going to be a rough road ahead. We are all in this together. We have to work together and take into consideration the fact that we have our youth at hand, that we have a foreign debt and the backs of all our citizenry, are saddled with this debt regardless of whether they are babies, adults or old age pensioners. It is unfortunate that they have not been taken into consideration.

Sometimes I feel that I am speaking but my words are falling on deaf ears, but at the end of the day I am clearly aware of the fact that the young people are not going to take this lightly in the days ahead because if they do not have any opportunities—I notice that a statement was made in the press by Members on the other side via their Minister, that they are going to receive a drawdown of some funds to assist the social dislocation in this country. If so, you must indicate to us—not only us but all the citizens in general—how soon you are going to put this in place and what measures are going to be taken.

Because when we leave this honourable Senate and we go back to our workplaces or we go and continue whatever contribution we are making to the society, we are well aware of the problems that confront the people of our country. There are homes where people are unable to put meals on the table. People complain to me daily about unemployment.

The Government had a big symposium on unemployment. They claimed that they were going to put certain things in motion to assist with the problem, and yet

people are still complaining to me. They are coming to me individually and they are asking for help. I am pleading with the Government to desist from this activity of borrowing, because one has to take into consideration the fact that we had all that money and what they did was misspend it.

I do not want to go into the allegations of corruption, because I was quite young at the time, probably too young to understand what was taking place, but now it is common-day history. Everybody is aware of what took place during those years. I am not here to castigate or attack them, to tell them what the foreigners did, but at the end of the day they have a responsibility to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that if any further borrowing is done, it is in the interests of the people of the country.

Often we hear references being made to the working class. There are a large number of the working class people in Trinidad and Tobago who are just languishing, unemployed, unable to fulfil their duties in their homes, unable to fulfil their commitments to their families, and as a result we have crime. The police service is unable to deal with crime—that is a serious problem—because they are not properly equipped. We have a situation in the prison and reference was made recently to tension building up there. We are confronted by all sorts of situations in our beloved country and yet the Government are content to just sit idly by and watch a situation and claim that they have to continue borrowing because we have our foreign commitments. Here we are, cup-in-hand, begging again and what are we expecting? Handouts.

While we are expecting handouts, we have a human resource that can be utilized fully. There is land lying idle all over this country that could be cultivated to enable us to feed ourselves.

I think they are getting off quite free today, because if I was in a bad mood I would have had much more to say. But I am being honest, without any idle chat, I feel very strongly about this point that this Government should desist from any further borrowing. I am of the opinion that we are being led like sheep to the slaughter, because most of the countries in the developing world are confronted by the same problem. Discussions have taken place, international publications are published, there is much information on this subject and we have all come to terms with the fact that it is necessary at this time for the people of our country to have some sort of say in the running of it.

The people are suffering from alienation; they somehow feel helpless because they have placed people in power based on the electoral process and yet they are not getting satisfaction. And I am making a plea on their behalf. Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Michael Mansoor: Mr. President, I am indeed pleased to take part in this rather protracted debate on the question of debt management in the country. Before I get too distracted from the main thrust of my small contribution today, I should just like to deal with some of the assumptions and the preamble to the motion because I think it is absolutely important in a debate of this nature that we very clearly identify those parts of the motion that one can agree with and those parts which one, unfortunately, may have to disagree with.

While one may not be in a position to say that one is against a motion, certainly in an instance like this, there are certain points which Sen. Mark raised which I must unfortunately express my disagreement with. The first disagreement that I have with him is on the first part of the motion where it says:

“Whereas it is recognized by both governments and international agencies that foreign debt constitutes a virtual roadblock to the socio-economic development,”

Mr. President, the plain fact of the matter is that foreign debt sometimes and in many cases—hopefully in most cases—facilitates socio-economic development. What may be a roadblock is the repayment of that foreign debt. But if one assumed for a moment that Trinidad and Tobago decided in the year 1970, or even before that, that it was going to borrow no amount locally or internationally, I dare say that the development that we have seen in this country would not have taken place.

So debt, both local and foreign, is a necessary aspect of development. Therefore, I must express my strong disagreement with the first recital to Sen. Mark’s motion.

He then proceeds to say that severe sacrifices and hardships have been put upon the backs of the people of the country. That I have to agree with. We have been through difficult economic times. One would have to be a prophet to determine whether or not we would have more difficult economic times if we had sat back and done nothing about the development of this country and waited until we had enough funds to make every investment that the country needed to make,

both in terms of social infrastructure and in terms of other aspects of the Government investment programme.

The third recital I agree with. We need to be circumspect in our borrowing activities. The resolution itself where he is asking that the Government outline specific plans and measures, I am in agreement with that. I, however, have many misgivings about the part of this resolution where he is asking that no further borrowing be made before disclosure and discussion take place in respect of both of those recitals to the satisfaction of the mass citizenry. Mr. President, I have difficulty with that. I do not know what mechanism Sen. Mark has in mind that would accomplish that level of consultation.

The motion is a mixed bag. I am in agreement with some aspects of it, but some of the other points made I find rather difficult to swallow.

It is no secret that both the local and foreign debt of Government have become a major feature of many budget debates, and indeed many debates of this Senate. If one accepts for a moment that debt is necessary in order for us to develop, one has to come to the conclusion that what is most important to debt management is how one manages it.

The first aspect of debt management is what you decide to borrow for. If we have erred in this country, we have probably erred in the aspect that we have borrowed large sums of money for projects which have not yielded the return or the profits that were expected at the time that the loans were undertaken; this is true both of local borrowing and of foreign borrowing.

One has to ask the question: Why did this happen? Why is it that, in 1992, we find that the foreign external debt service of the country is as much as \$2.5 billion, bordering on 30 per cent of our export earnings? Why is it that in a limited budget of about \$6.5 billion, some \$2 billion of Government expenditure goes towards the repayment of interest and capital on local and foreign debt? One can say that in the mid 1970s and early 1980s, we had forecast revenues that have not materialized and that we have just been unfortunate to make some investments which did not yield the returns that we thought they would, and bad luck is perhaps an excuse.

But, I have often wondered whether or not this country would have been exposed in the way it was exposed if the loans that were undertaken by Government were undertaken after due parliamentary process. The fact of the

matter is that many of the loans that were accessed were done pursuant to the Development Loans Act or the External Loans Act and what came to Parliament was a blanket approval for the Government to increase its borrowing by an unspecified amount of money.

So that parliamentarians were presented with a request for the Government to increase its borrowing by \$100 million or \$250 million, and if I remember anything about the debates that took place while I was here in this Senate, Mr. President, it is that Government was asked: What are you going to be borrowing for?

The Government would usually answer, well, a variety of projects. We are going to borrow for the general development of Trinidad and Tobago, or for certain projects of which we are not very sure at the present time, or we are going to borrow for certain projects but it is not appropriate or prudent to tell you what they are at the present time.

2.00 p.m.

So that the Government has the ability to borrow for anything, as long as one could justify it on the basis of general development or some other type of broad description which would be very easy to fill and which it would be possible to put many projects under. Therefore, when the real loan decisions were taken, the decision-makers were essentially the Cabinet. Parliament had very little to do with the undertaking of borrowing large amounts for specific projects. That was a decision of the executive. And if it has gone wrong, one has to wonder whether or not the errors that were made in the past would have been made if there was some required parliamentary process before major loans were agreed to, that Parliament had something to say about it. Let me give you an example, Mr. President.

In 1992 the Government came to this Senate with a Capital Development Programme of \$636.7 million and that figure is lifted from the *Draft Estimates of Revenue for the year 1992*. Some time after the budget, a document was tabled in this Senate, called the Public Sector Investment Programme. This programme, says that all things being equal, the Government will be spending on its capital account \$1,441,000,000 during 1992 and beyond. The document also says that of that \$1,441,000,000, \$1,225,000,000 would be borrowed. Now what Parliament debated was a capital development programme of \$636 million. But what will happen is that the Government will spend \$1.4 billion worth of capital expenditure in 1992 and it will borrow \$1.2 billion to fund that expenditure.

Now we spent much time in the budget debate discussing whether or not we should let the Family Planning people have an extra \$200,000 or \$300,000. But, perhaps, the most important part of the budget, where we agreed to borrow large sums of money on both the local and foreign markets, was not debated in Parliament, or it is debated in Parliament only to the extent of the rather minuscule capital development programme. So that all the money that will be spent upgrading Trintoc and doing all sorts of things, all the loans that will be undertaken and agreed to which will cost this country interest and capital payments in the years to come; all the loans agreed to by the previous administration and by this administration, will take place but Parliament had nothing to say about it.

Now, I am not suggesting that it is illegal, not at all. It is very legal, but it slips under this arrangement whereby Parliament gives approval to Government to borrow large sums of money without the requirement that Government come to Parliament and say, specifically, what the money is going to be used for.

Now, it seems to me that it could never have been the intention of those who framed the Constitution that Parliament would spend endless hours debating small matters as to whether \$10,000 is spent under one Head or the other, while the major matters as to whether or not we should commit the country to millions and even billions of dollars in local and foreign loans, should escape the attention of Parliament. So I ask the question, once again: Would it have been different, before Government undertook to borrow \$10 million, \$20 million, \$100 million—US—on each occasion, if that loan was subjected to the scrutiny of persons other than the executive of the Government? Mr. President, no one will really be able to give a clear-cut answer to that question. But it is most relevant when we consider that for every dollar of the Government's budget about 25 to 30 cents goes to pay foreign debt or local debt, interest and capital.

It is the most difficult thing for Government to accept that it has too much executive power and I would perhaps go further and say that no one can expect that the executive would wish to fetter itself with a parliamentary process that would require that before loan documents are signed, Parliament would have something to do with it. Indeed, most executives would like to do what is being done now, agree or indicate that we are going to spend \$1.4 billion on capital development, without really having to deal with the rigours of a debate.

So that, I do not expect this Government, or any Government, to say, "yes, we agree that before we commit the country to another US \$100 million of debt we

must come and tell Parliament what we are going to do with it; we must come and tell Parliament what rate of interest we are paying; we must come and tell Parliament what is the underwriting commission." I do not expect that, Mr. President. But I ask the question: Would we have been in the same economic mess that we are in if as a country we had subjected ourselves to the discipline of having to face the rigours of a debate before we committed the country to millions and millions of US dollars both on account of capital and on account of interest?

Now, Mr. President, I do not expect to get an answer to this question, nor do I expect that the Government will agree that this is a matter that needs to be addressed. Indeed, during the last Parliament this idea was resisted very strongly, except in what might be called the dying moments of that Parliament when a Government Senator indicated that this was high on the priority list of the Government; that he, as a Government Senator, would have sought to use his best powers to ensure that such matters came to committees of Parliament. But it was instructive to note that that undertaking came very late in the day. So I ask the question: What will this debate change? Will the Government agree to fetter itself in the interest of good decision-making? Will Government agree to delay the decision-making process in order that that incremental investment would be subjected to the analytical review that all investments should be subjected to? I ask, that some voice on the Government side answer that question, because I rather suspect that if we had the financial discipline that I am talking about, we would not be in the state that we are today.

2.10 p.m.

I now come to another point which has been made and has been spoken about in this debate. Several speakers have suggested that we should stop the borrowing, as I have said on occasion too, and that we should do something about the debt. The Government, however, is faced with a liability of TT \$11 or 12 billion, in all sorts of currencies, Japanese yen, US dollars, French francs, and whatever, and it cannot, if it wishes to retain any semblance of confidence and credibility in the economic world, walk away from that debt and say, "We are not going to pay it or we are not going to give priority to those payments." If it does that, we would be black-balled in the international markets and not only will we not be able to borrow, but also very few foreign investors would put their money in Trinidad and Tobago, because our credibility would have been lost. So the Government has to be commended for attempting to retain the financial credibility of this country.

I would be the first to say it is not an easy job, because the Government is in a very similar position to an individual who had difficulty making his or her mortgage payments. If any individual has been in that position, he or she knows that the banker will, of necessity, be demanding—the banker will say, "Well, you cannot afford that extra car; you cannot afford that extra holiday; you need to put your money in this bank to pay off your liabilities on this mortgage." The position of the country is very much the same.

It is not easy to manage foreign debt. Interest rates move; the parity rates of currencies move; we are very heavily borrowed in yen; interest rates are relatively low today. Should we lock in at this stage? Should we not lock in at this stage? What should we do? Should we seek to hedge our position in US dollars as opposed to our yen liabilities? The management of the foreign debt is a very difficult, complicated and complex matter and the Government has its hands full in dealing with it. But we cannot glibly say that we should get rid of the foreign debt on the one hand, and then, on the other hand, say that there must be no divestment and that we must retain all our assets. We cannot do those two things at the same time.

If we wish to get rid of the foreign debt, we have to divest, whether it be in the oil sector or in the non-oil sector. The two things do not make sense together. You cannot say that we will not divest and the foreign debt or the local debt must go away. A decision has to be made. Either you retain your responsibilities and say, "Yes, we will continue to pay the foreign debt and the local debt, both interest and capital." Or if you decide that the debt load is too heavy, even after rescheduling, one of the first options that are available to you, apart from begging, is to divest yourself of some of your assets. Again, it is a situation that an individual is faced with from time to time. If you are over-borrowed and your debt burden is too high, one of the fundamental mechanisms to get out of that problem is to get rid of assets. So you exchange assets for debt.

No serious commentator can suggest to the Government that they should somehow wish this debt away, by not telling the Government exactly how it is to be done. The divestment programme is a straight economic decision—which assets do you divest and retain the required amount of patrimony, if you will, or national security, whatever you want to call it? But a decision has to be taken. If we say, as we all do, that the debt burden at 30 per cent of export earnings is too high and we will not be able to fund that level of debt service, something has to be

done. It is no point borrowing anew to pay off old debts. You either have to divest or sell some part of your asset base. There is no other way. Or win a lottery. I do not believe the Government invests in lottery tickets.

The divestment programme of Government, as an adjunct and an important element of the management of the debt, is something that we need to examine carefully and we need to do so with a sense of purpose. Clearly, you can divest sensibly or you can divest stupidly. The country is very aware of circumstances where, perhaps, divestment has not been to the best return of the country. People are aware of this. But a decision has to be taken. If you want to get out of the debt and you are unable to make the payments that you have agreed to make, the only immediate option is to undertake a level of divestment that would not offend the other policy objectives of the Government of the country.

There is another matter which I should like to raise and it has to do with local borrowing. The amount of local borrowing done by the central government has increased quite dramatically since 1987. One effect of the central government tapping into the local financial market is that, depending on what the Government borrows for, the money can very easily get out of the financial system, and large amounts of borrowing on the part of Government essentially crowds out local private borrowing.

We are faced with a very severe unemployment problem and the private sector is asked, as it should be, to invest, to create job opportunities. But job opportunities and employment can only be created if there are funds available for investment. If the Government, with its superior borrowing power—and borrowing power the Government has—sovereign debt—seeks to borrow too much money from the system, what happens is that private investors are not able to borrow because there are no funds to be borrowed, or alternatively, because the interest rates have got too high.

I want to suggest that in the current economic climate in which we find ourselves, this phenomenon is very true. We are told that the Government plans to come with a \$320 million dollar bond issue in a matter of weeks and that it will be using these funds, not to re-invest in projects that would get back into the financial system, but to repay Government's debts at the Central Bank. We also expect that Government will use some part of its local liquidity to get foreign exchange to pay part of its foreign debt obligations.

2.20 p.m.

Mr. President, if it is that the Government soaks up as much as \$320 million of the limited liquidity that is in the market today, and if it is that there are going to be further drawdowns to meet foreign obligations, one has to ask the question: Where will interest rates go before the end of this year? One has to ask the question: Where is the liquidity going to come from to enable the private sector, or anybody for that matter, to make the investments that would create the jobs?

There are always good reasons for governments taking positions such as the one we are confronted by, the rationale is that our trade Minister has caused us to liberalize our trading regime—for all the good reasons that he has been at pains to tell the country about—and if you have liberalized trade, and you have a pegged or protected currency, the only way, or one of the simplest ways of protecting the parity of that currency, is to choke off liquidity so that the demand for foreign exchange is limited or reduced. That is the logic.

We must protect the parity of the exchange rate, and, in order to do that, we have to dampen the demand for foreign exchange, and the only rational way to do that, if you can import anything you want, is to choke-off liquidity and have very high interest rates.

I understand the rationale, but I think that what we need to do is to level with people and tell them that if it is that we are going to protect the exchange rate, do not expect jobs to come out by the hundred overnight—if that is the holding pattern which the Government seeks to follow. We have to understand that there will be no large number of jobs all over the place. Where are they going to come from?

So, what one needs to do is to understand very clearly, in a case of this nature, that the Government is on a sticky wicket. If, for example, it decided to open the floodgates and let liquidity come back, as it were, what we would have is what we had earlier in the year—a pressing demand for foreign exchange—and before we know it, we would either have to devalue or stop the sale of foreign currency; because the Central Bank would very quickly find that it has sold all the foreign currency it has and there is no more for the other requirements of the country.

We have, in critiquing the Government's economic policy, to understand that you cannot wish the foreign debt away. You have to understand that the Government has to manage the foreign and local debt in a very creative and pro-

active way, and it will not be able to do all things for all men. If you want to reduce the level of foreign debt, you have to divest.

Further, if you do not wish to increase your foreign debt and you wish to have development in the country, you have to decide to encourage foreign investment which is a form of divestment. It does no good for anyone to adopt a blinkered style and to assume that the Government can do one thing without considering the repercussions on the other hand.

Mr. President, to bring my contribution to an end, I wish to ask the question again—

Sen. Kuarsingh: Mr. President, I did not wish to disturb the hon. Senator while he was speaking, but I wish to have a clarification on one of the points he made; it was the first one, I think. As I said, I did not ask it at that time because I always like to listen to what the Senator has to say. Dealing with the fact that Parliament has not had the opportunity, in his view, to debate the use of the funds, did he, as in the past, use the instruments available to him as a Member of Parliament to try to correct the situation?

Sen. Mansoor: Mr. President, I suppose that is not a rhetorical question. This brings us to the core or the nexus of this problem—the powers of the executive as opposed to parliamentary power. Let us take the current situation.

The Government, I am told, either has borrowed or very shortly will, borrow US \$100 million through First Boston and their associates, and the local investment bank. The Government has decided to do this because—if I remember correctly—there is a maturity of about \$250 odd million yen debt which has to be paid, and if I also remember correctly, there is another US \$50 million of City Bank floating notes which must be paid sometime this year. I think that is the requirement.

The Government has indicated very clearly, it is very proud of the fact that it has been able to get a foreign bank to underwrite this issue of US \$100 million. What can a Senator do about that? I ask the question: Would the Government not consider itself perhaps unduly fettered if before it could borrow that money or agree with the foreign bankers to sign the loan documents, guarantees and all those sorts of things that have to be signed, they have to come to Parliament to say, "Well, we are borrowing US \$100 million at high rates of interest, maybe a high underwriting fee, because we have to, and would Parliament agree.?" If

Senators are as difficult as they can be, we could perhaps delay the execution of these documents and maybe frustrate the entire loan agreement because of the time constraints therein. It is a very delicate question as to how much one fetters the executive.

We have gotten ourselves into the mess that we are in—extremely high debt service, bunching of debt, having to do all sorts of things, cut salaries, not grow the economy. I am asking, have we not gotten into this problem because similar amounts of \$100 million were borrowed, maybe to put up a steel plant, a Hall of Justice or a twin tower, without coming to Parliament and saying "Listen, we are borrowing these funds for this reason, what do you think, Parliament?", and suffer the executive difficulties that are inherent in that process.

It is my view that it is a mockery of Parliament to come here to debate whether \$100,000 should be spent on constructing or repairing a bridge, on family planning, and millions of dollars are committed without any reference to Parliament. I do not know whether I have answered the good Senator's question, but maybe it was a rhetorical question.

Mr. President, I was just about trying to bring the threads of my contribution together. I want to suggest that consultation with the mass citizenry, as I understand it in Sen. Mark's motion, is not practicable because one must give the executive a certain amount of latitude in running the affairs of the country.

I also want to suggest that, at least, parliamentary committees should sit even after the fact to debate and comment on major loan agreements which have been entered into by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Even if it were after the fact, if there were debates of that nature, the Government would know that what it does in terms of the specific arrangements that are made in respect of interest rates, underwriting commissions and all other conditionalities that are usually contained in a loan agreement, would be subjected to the scrutiny of Parliament, even *post facto*, I suggest that there could be some improvement in the future.

2.30 p.m.

More importantly, the use to which the funds are put should be subjected to the same scrutiny, feasibility studies and analytical reviews. Should we invest in Point Lisas which was a big issue 10 or 15 years ago? Should we make all those investments? Should we seek foreign partners? How should it be done, if it is the Government subjected itself to the review that would be performed by a parliamentary committee, even *post facto*.

I want to suggest that would add to the financial discipline that maybe, could have prevented us from getting into the rather tight economic situation that we now find ourselves in. I should also like to ask the Government, or any Member of the Government who would be persuaded to speak on this matter, to tell the country when the current liquidity position is likely to change. There is a great urgency that jobs be created; that investments be undertaken, but if local borrowers, investors, and businessmen are unable to borrow on the foreign markets, because of the devaluation risk, and if they find themselves faced with interest rates as high as 15 1/2 per cent—and this applies to small businessmen also—they do not get 15 1/2 per cent; they sometimes have to pay 17 1/2 per cent and higher than that. With these higher rates of interest, where is the investment to come from? Where are the jobs to come from?

I know this Government is very committed to employment creation and I ask for some clarification on that matter. Thank you.

Sen. Surendranath Capildeo: Mr. President, I really ought not to be speaking, but my leader suggested that I share my thoughts with you.

This is a very important motion. Deep within the bowels of this motion lies the fundamental problem that this country faces. As I sat here listening to the economic jargon, I got the feeling that we are debating this very significant and important motion in a sterilized vacuum chamber divorced from reality. It is as if the people of Trinidad and Tobago do not exist, and that the few who assemble in this august Chamber are taking decisions in their name, which would tie their children, grandchildren and their great-grandchildren to burdens that they know nothing about.

That is, as I have said, the fundamental problem that this motion brings forth. It is a problem of the complete divorcing of political power from the people as soon as an election campaign is over. There is a complete lack of connection between those in power and the people of the country. So what takes place is that you have this clique, this minority group who sit, make decisions, bypass Parliament save to come here and say, “rubber stamp what we have done,” and then commit the country to the kind of mess we have found ourselves in, because the fundamental problem we face is a problem of trust and confidence.

It matters not which party or government is in power. It could be anybody in power. The point is we must pay our debts, but before we incur the debts, we ought properly to have consulted, told, advised and to have brought into our

confidence, the people that we are saddling with the debt. The people are the people of Trinidad and Tobago, who, to me, form absolutely no part of this debate. They have no voice or say in it. There is a complete lack of trust and confidence between the Cabinet-oriented decisions and the ordinary man-in-the-street. There is no nexus, no connection.

You come here and sit and hear about hundreds of millions of US dollars in debt servicing and the man-in-the-street says "I want a work. Where can I find a work? I want to earn a living." It is of no comfort to him to sit and listen to splendid rhetoric as to how this country is going to manage its foreign debt, when the foreign debt has not in any way impacted upon the citizen, except to put the burden of repayment on his shoulder. Because the problem with the country and our people is the attitude to work.

It does not matter what fancy jargon there is here; what rhetoric emerges from here; what feasibility study is done, what economic plan is followed; what professor you bring down, if the people of this country are not motivated to work hard, "crapaud smoke we pipe". We would never get out from the debt trap. There is something lacking in all of this—the trust and confidence that a government must have in itself and the people, so that it can approach the people and tell them, this is what we propose to do; this is where we need your assistance; this is what we are going to do with your help.

What has been happening? Mount Hope, Twin Towers, highways that have collapsed within 25 years, huge housing projects, prison projects which never get off the ground, enormous capital expenditure saddling the poor man in the street with a debt that he knows absolutely nothing about. It comes about on the political premise of the arrogance of power. It is a Third World disease. As soon as the election is over you forget the people who put you there, and you act as if they do not exist at all.

To my mind, all of the debate here, all the learned speeches that we have heard; all the suggestions that come forward about servicing of debt, whether there should be a policy on borrowing and how that policy should be effected, the fundamental question is how you motivate your population to work and produce, because if we do not work and produce, we would never be able to emerge from the trap that we are in.

It does not matter which plan they follow or do not follow; as long as the Government of the day continues to hold its secrets to its chest, and does not trust

the people of the country, we would forever be in this problem. Up to today, the motion being on the agenda for months now, the country does not have a clear vision of where it is going and what is happening to it.

2.40 p.m.

Nobody knows, Sir, nobody can tell if there is going to be a devaluation. Is there not going to be a devaluation? What is going to be trade liberalization? How is it going to take effect? What is going to happen on June 21? Is the Customs Department ready to act? Nobody knows. It is a minority government taking decisions to the exclusion of the majority of the people and again forgetting the basic question. We can do all of it but if we do not motivate the people, if we do not have confidence in the people, if we do not allow trust and faith, if we do not do away with alienation in this country, if we do not change the feeling of transience, if we do not make the average citizen in this country want to work hard for this country, this debate as I said, is sterile. We will forever be in the problems that we are.

It is a fundamental motion. It is a motion which goes to the root of our society. It is a motion that speaks from the gut of Trinidad and Tobago, because what it is saying to this country is, "Look, we are being saddled with debts that we know nothing of and we are calling upon the Government to outline its plans, its expectations, its assumptions. Up to today we do not have the plans, the expectations, the assumptions. We know nothing. It calls on the Government to outline the measures the Government intends to adopt if its expectations and assumptions in respect of net foreign earnings turn out to be insignificantly incorrect. Again, Sir, we know nothing and if Parliament knows nothing, how much less does Tom, Dick and Harrylal.

We would never come out of our predicament unless there is a complete change in the attitude; unless we involve the nation in a struggle to move forward; unless we forget the rhetoric, the jargon and come down to the simple basic premise that the average citizen of Trinidad and Tobago has got to believe in himself and his country and to dedicate himself to work harder to get out of the mess that has been heaped on our shoulders. There is no other way. We can sit here and debate in fine style and language, and then return year after year and we will hear the same complaints year after year—that all Parliament must do is to come and rubber stamp machinations of a little clique sitting down in an office taking decisions on behalf of the country on which the people have no say.

Mr. President, that is as much as I would say. I should like before I wind up to propose a motion to amend paragraph 3, which would bring it in line and take care of the mischief of the words “mass citizenry”—those words I know strike fear into the hearts of many people; those words presuppose confrontation with the ordinary people of Trinidad and Tobago and people get scared with that. So we would change the words “mass citizenry”. I want to suggest that we delete in paragraph 3, the words before “before disclosure and discussions take place in respect of (1) and (2) above to the satisfaction of the mass citizenry” and we substitute therefore “without the prior approval of both Houses of Parliament”. So that paragraph 3 would read:

“to engage in no future borrowing commitments without the prior approval of both Houses of Parliament.”

Implicit in that amendment, is the suggestion that the little parasitic clique, before they burden the citizens of this country with more debts, would come to the Houses of Parliament and say, “Look, this is what we want to do, we seek your approval.” I move that the amendment be accepted.

Seconded by Sen. R. Kwabene.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, there is an amendment proposed by Sen. Capildeo and seconded by Sen. Kwabene. It deals with the final paragraph of the resolution. The amendment is to delete all the words after, “before”. So the final paragraph should now read—if the amendment is accepted:

“to engage in no future borrowing commitments without the prior approval of both Houses of Parliament.”

Senators are now free to speak on both the motion and the amendment. Sen. Deodath Ojah-Maharaj—I think I ought to remind Senators that notwithstanding the fact that this is the month of June, the Senator is now about to make his maiden speech. I look forward to the co-operation of all Members during his maiden speech.

Sen. Deodath Ojah-Maharaj: Thank you, Mr. President. I should like first of all to take this opportunity to extend to you my personal congratulations on your reappointment to the Senate. A bit belated but I believe it is incumbent upon me to extend to you my best wishes for your term. I can give you the assurance that you will be with the PNM Government for a very long time because, we intend to be here longer than those on the Front Benches opposite because we come to this nation with a plan and a vision.

I wonder, when I hear the Members of the United National Congress, whether at all they took the opportunity to read copies of the manifesto of the PNM which was forwarded to them so that they could be informed of the type of government and party that was coming into power and the vision that the party had and of the vision that the party pronounced way before we got into Government. We did not come unprepared to serve this nation.

Between the period 1986 and 1991, we took stock of what was happening in the nation. On the basis of that I can give the nation the assurance on behalf of my party that we are not going to make the mistakes made by the previous administration. I can give that assurance and on the basis of that, I want to refer to the PNM's manifesto, the PNM's economic vision for this nation. A vision that was left with us by the founding father, both of the nation and of our party; a vision to carry this nation forward and moreover, a vision to carry the young population forward.

2.50 p.m.

On page 7 of the manifesto is stated:

"The PNM's economic vision is the attainment of a diversified economy based on the optimum utilisation of our natural resources and the fullest development of our human potential".

One wonders whether Senators refer regularly to the budget speech delivered by the Minister of Finance. If they refer to it and to our manifesto, they would see that we acknowledge one thing—that we have to maintain the integrity of this country; we have to improve on the credit rating of the country and we have to re-establish Trinidad and Tobago as a respectable country in the international market. That is the responsibility of a good government.

Being aware of our responsibility, the Minister of Finance at page 6 of the budget speech said:

"The servicing of the public external debt will be a major challenge over the next three years or so. On the basis of the stock of debt at December, 31, 1991, the country's debt service obligations—both principal and interest—on public and publicly-guaranteed debt will jump from US \$423.4 million in 1991 to US \$612 million this year..."

I will not go on to read the remainder of the budget speech, all I will advise Senators is that before they stand to make their contribution, they should refer to

budget statements, and moreso the manifesto of the PNM, and they will see that we are taking a course of action that is planned. We are not taking *ad hoc* decisions. For instance, Sen. Wade Mark blamed the PNM and the National Alliance for Reconstruction for the debt burden. One would appreciate that the debt as at 1986 was in the vicinity of US \$2.391 million. As at December 31, 1991, there was an increase. I will not state the increase because Senators are aware of it.

I have much confidence in the media of this country and many of the commentators that we have. On the basis of that, I believe that the faith that this party has in the nation—I would like to give Sen. Capildeo the assurance that, while he feels that he is not speaking on behalf of the people, when we stand to talk we all speak on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to let him know because probably he is not properly entrenched in the party to which he belongs. We are the voices of the people. The Westminster system gives us that opportunity. We should be expressing the views of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and not our personal views, but we see personal views coming from there from time to time.

I should like to refer to page 7 of the *Sunday Guardian* of May 24, 1992, *Comments and Analysis* by Dennis Pantin, Economist:

"Trade liberalization—root cause of liquidity crisis

The root cause of this incompetent budgetary management..."

He was referring to what happened during the period 1986—1991.

"was the embrace of the policy conditionalities of the IMF and the World Bank by the previous NAR Government."

"The incompetent budgetary management". You would not see that happening with the PNM Government. I can give that assurance.

I should like to refer Members also to the *Express* of Friday, May 29, headlined "Deputy Central Bank Governor on T&T's economic situation." He says, "Don't Panic," and I want all members of the public to understand that this is the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank speaking to us. It is not a politician. If the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank makes a statement, we, as Members of Parliament, must not make wild statements that will, in any way, affect the confidence of the population and take the country backwards. This is what he said:

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"Deputy Governor of the Central Bank, Dr. Terrence Farrell, said yesterday policy makers, businessmen and the community should not panic over the country's economic situation".

The Deputy Governor of the Central Bank giving the nation the assurance, telling them not to panic.

"It is important that at the level of the policy makers..."

We are the policy makers. He was speaking to us—Members of Parliament—and I hope Senators will appreciate that.

"at the level of the business community and at the level of the ordinary citizenry, we be collectively resolute and keep our nerve in this period."

It means that he was giving the assurance that the economy is being managed; that the Government of the day has the competence to manage the economy:

"He noted that certain sectors of the community had 'a strong penchant to panic and to feed speculation and old talk into rumour mills' which were founded either on fiction or the misrepresentation of fact."

And we have had a lot of that in this debate coming from the Members of the United National Congress—not the independent Senators, very responsible people, very responsible statements. I must commend very highly Sen. Mansoor for his support of the divestment of part of the energy sector and the plan the Government is now embarking upon.

It is quite unfortunate that on a newscast today, I heard my good colleague, the Leader of Opposition Business, making a statement to the effect that the Government is bankrupt of ideas, and a number of statements that were not in the interest of the nation and its development. One wonders whether those Members opposite are just playing to the gallery or whether they feel that there is going to be an election. I can give them the assurance that this Government is going to election in 1996 and staying in power beyond that.

Sen. Kwabene spoke about the youth population. He said that he was speaking for the youths of the nation and that he was concerned. Everybody is concerned about what is happening in the country. We all know that we have come into a very rough situation and we have to be very innovative in our management. They stand here and talk about the parasitic oligarchy and the people who are controlling the economy of the country.

We also saw that certain of the multinational corporations and large companies have embarked on a very commendable programme for the youth population of this country. I am not hearing senators commend these companies on what they are doing for the youth population. I am very concerned about that. Take, for instance, Republic Bank's Youth Link Apprenticeship Programme. In today's *Express* newspapers we see a big advertisement where 74 young persons graduated from the Sixth Youth Link Apprenticeship Programme. I wonder whether we read the newspapers and inform ourselves. This is what the advertisement said:

"We are proud to present our 6th group of Apprentices with whom we have shared the last 9 months."

preparing the young people of this nation to go out there and be productive,

"Coming to us from school, uncertain, naive and inexperienced, they leave Republic today self-confident, enlightened and self-reliant."

3.00 p.m.

It means that we have 74 young people who are coming out of there ready to contribute to the development of this country courtesy Republic Bank. These are the people whom they attack all the time. They do not give credit where it is due. Neal & Massy Innovators' Programme, Royal Bank Roy-tech Programme, these are programmes that are really making a significant contribution to the development of the youths of this nation.

Other programmes are coming on stream because we are concerned about the situation of the youth population of this country. I wonder whether those Members on the Front Bench opposite are really taking their tasks here seriously. I have to be very careful.

From time to time we have heard statements being made about senior Members of this Parliament that really hurt us on this side, and we wonder whether people recognize that the President of this country has named competent and respectable citizens of this country to represent him and, therefore, we must treat them in a particular way.

This is one of the problems we have in this country: People are not respecting office and authority. It is not a question of attitude to work; it is a question of respect for authority and office, and this is the problem. Therefore, when we in

Parliament stand and make certain statements that are disrespectful, it makes the youth population wonder whether they should be respectful. Therefore we have got to show that we respect office when we stand up to make our contributions here.

We have Members who have been criticizing the trade liberalization programme. Very valid contributions have been made from the Independent Senators. It has been said here, and people have made reference to the whole question of where Europe is going; where Canada, the United States and Mexico are now; where Latin America is going. We brought a bill here seeking permission of the Parliament to create a one-way trade programme with Venezuela, and this is why I say we are dealing with this country with a vision.

In 1973, when the junior secondary school system started, Spanish was compulsory. I, as a Spanish teacher between 1974 and 1981, in that particular system, had a problem convincing my students why they should learn the language. As a teacher, you devise all types of means to get them to realize why they should learn a foreign language. I would commend a foreign language to all Members of Parliament. Every Member here should take the opportunity to learn another language because it enhances and enriches your personality.

Learning a foreign language gives you the opportunity to understand and appreciate another person's way of life. On the basis of that, you find the approach to the programmes of the junior secondary school was not too successful. We had to devise all types of means, and, in 1979, we started a programme of student exchange visits to Venezuela. That programme will pay off—and I want Members to listen very carefully—because, today, we have a bank of almost 300,000 youths who went through that programme, between 74 and now, who have an appreciation for the language.

So that if the Government is trying to open up a wider market for our products, it means that we have, in place, people who can communicate very easily with the Spanish speaking traders and businessmen of Venezuela.

I can give Members the assurance—I believe Sen. Spence made the point that he was concerned that the language that is going to be used may not be the right language and it may create some confusion and so forth. Anything coming out of Venezuela, including, the language used, I can give the assurance we have the ability locally here to determine whether or not it is correct.

I want to refer, also, to the *Guardian* of Monday, June 22, an article about the signing of a trade pact:

“Finance Minister Wendell Mottley had described the prospect of one-way free-trade with Venezuela as a welcome development for Caricom member states.

Mottley said yesterday that the agreement was beneficial to the region because it did not stress reciprocal trade as did agreements like the North American Free-Trade Area.

He cited, however, two significant factors to be borne in mind—the expectation of two-way trade after a grace period, and recognition by the business community of the rapid pace of trade developments.”

This indicates to our businessmen what we are doing with a programme like this, especially people in the garment industry and so forth. What we are doing with this programme is making available to the business community of Trinidad and Tobago, a market of almost 20 million people. In the Caribbean we are just five or six million people. We are opening up the market in light of what is happening internationally. We have to look for new markets. It is to our advantage.

When I went to Venezuela in 1979, I asked myself why we did not go there earlier. Why were we not exposed to the Venezuelan market and to Latin America earlier? Because we were missing an opportunity to go out there and really take advantage of the opportunities that are available in that market. Today, I must commend the Minister of Trade for having initiated this programme. I must commend him on behalf of the youths of this country who have been clamouring for an open market and the opportunity to go out there and seek employment.

Many of the youths who went through that programme in the secondary schools can today offer themselves as interpreters. They will find employment in the companies that are seeking to trade with Venezuela. We can now employ them to talk on our behalf. This is where our businessmen have to become creative and start to learn the language or employ people who know the language, to communicate on their behalf and open up the market for them.

There has been talk that we have not been speaking to the national community. Since we came into power, we have taken the opportunity to create platforms within our party, and outside the party, to talk to the citizens of this

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country. We will continue to create those platforms to make sure that we communicate the policies and programmes of this Government, because we understand what it is to represent people. We know that we have to go back to the people and, on the basis of that, we have to report to them regularly on our performance. We know that and we will not only use the Parliament to do that. We are also going out there and meeting the people.

We went out there when the 1992 Budget was presented. Members will recall that we communicated with the national community. We had two public meetings, after the presentation of our budget, to explain the provisions of this budget because we knew people would have been about trying to distort the information.

In terms of how we are going to stimulate the economy, Sir, we have given a commitment that we are going to look at the whole question of the construction industry—bring the construction industry back to where it was. Members are aware of the types of jobs that are created when the construction industry gets going.

I want to refer to two programmes that were financed by international organizations, one being conducted now by the Ministry of Health and one due to come on stream by the Ministry of Housing.

The first programme deals with the whole question of the refurbishing of hospital and health centres. The Ministry is spending \$10.3 million to improve these facilities, and they go across-the-board from Port of Spain, Tacarigua, Point Fortin, St. James, Caura Hospital, and so forth. This Programme will create some employment. We are not telling this nation that we can solve the serious unemployment situation overnight. We do not have the ability to do so in light of the economic situation in which we have found ourselves.

What we did is that we have offered certain relief programmes. One wonders whether people do not recognize that after three months in Government, we were able to come to the nation and restart LIDP. It is a relief programme intended to keep people employed. We are trying, as far as possible, in that programme to make sure that relief employment is offered to parents, in particular, who have to feed and clothe their children.

But more than that—for the benefit of Sen. Merritt, because she was lamenting the plight of women and so forth—we have come up with a programme after the symposium on job creation and employment. It was not an

unemployment symposium; it was a symposium that focussed on job creation and employment.

We did not want to go down there and rehash what has been said over the years in terms of what have caused the unemployment situation. We went down there to get some answers. We were very happy to see the type of contributions made at that level. We were very happy that the trade union movement, the business community, the Government, the Manufacturers' Association, and the non-governmental organizations got together—in the absence of other people—they were not missed—and we came up with some creative programmes that are now being looked at by the Cabinet, and which will come on stream very soon. Out of that, we found \$15 million to offer a programme of relief to single mothers who are under pressure in this country. Do not smile, it is a serious situation.

It has been stipulated that people to be employed in the School Maintenance Programme must be single mothers; no body else. The programme is being offered in this way—and we are not disregarding what is in place: The people who are employed in this programme work from 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. because the permanent workers who are there work from 6.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. and they resume at 2.00 p.m. until 6.00 p.m. So we are filling a vacuum there.

I have been visiting the schools in my village and surrounding areas and the people are engaged more so in the agricultural section or in school maintenance; and the principals have expressed their appreciation for the programme because it is working very, very well in the interest of the school community. The programme started about a month ago and I would advise Members to go out there and see what is happening with it.

The present Government do not have a problem here because our Ministers are going out there—we are going out there too, although we are in the backbenches, and are monitoring certain things to make sure that people are producing. This is where Sen. Capildeo's observation comes in, in terms of attitude: We are going on the job site and telling people they have to produce in order to earn a living.

We want to change the attitude of the country, and the only basis on which we can do that is with the people who are visible, the people on the road. Therefore we must not lose sight of the type of amenities that are being brought under this

programme. For instance, in my village, we have finished one pavement that leads to a nursery school. Therefore, that is a very successful programme—the children can now walk very comfortably to school. I wish Members would stand here and say what has happened in their villages and how people have benefited from the Labour Intensive Development Programme.

When we came into office we met certain programmes in place, agreed to by the last Cabinet. We reviewed those programmes and, on the basis of the review, decided to go along with them because it was a commitment given by the last administration to international organizations, and so forth. We decided to utilize those facilities that were made available, like IADB loans, and so on. The IDB loans to the National Housing Authority are intended to provide core houses in a number of areas. One of the areas is Couva North/Harmony Hall.

Opposition Senators are talking about alienation, discrimination and the parasitic oligarchy. They are attacking citizens of this country, and I want to know, if and when they get into Government, what is going to be the position of the French Creoles they are talking about? This is a very serious situation. They are threatening people now. They are standing on the byways and highways and threatening citizens of this country. And that is a very serious thing.

I can give the assurance from where I stand, and when I listen in another place, that my political party represents and recognizes every citizen of this country—equal opportunity for everyone. They are making a contribution. The people whom they are attacking, on a daily basis, are providing employment for more than 50,000 people in this country. I hope that they will change their attitude and rethink their position. I am appealing to them to rethink their position. When you stand here, you do not have to repeat exactly what other people say.

In Couva North, for instance—that is represented by their leader—550 housing units are going to be made available. Their leader would not stand up and say that. He would not say that. We could have withdrawn that programme and put it somewhere else. We had the authority, as he rightly said there. We could withdraw that housing programme and say put it on the East-West Corridor. We did not do it. This programme continues in Couva North and South.

I have taken very long to make a contribution at this level, because my contribution is being made outside there, also—our contribution has been outside there to the people who have elected us into office; on a daily basis we interact

with them. If Opposition Senators do not know, we are outside there day and night working for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Every time we talk, we talk on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We are not talking on behalf of any section of the community, we are not talking on behalf of any geographical section of the community, we are talking on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago—and this is how the People's National Movement operates.

I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to address this Senate [*Interruption*] I dealt with the wild, uninformed statements that they make from time to time. My role is to deal with the other side and to make sure that the population understands where they are coming from.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Russel Huggins): Mr. President, at this time I beg to move that the debate on this motion be adjourned.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Russel Huggins): Mr. President, earlier on, I asked that question No. 22 on the Order Paper be deferred. The Minister is now here. He can deal with it.

Laventille/St. Barb's Gas Station

22. Sen. Muntaz Hosein asked the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

- i. Is the hon. Minister aware that the Laventille/St. Barb's Gas Station is inoperative and has been so for a long time, and that this is causing great inconvenience to the people of Laventille?
- ii. If the answer is in the affirmative, can the hon. Minister tell this House what corrective measures he intends to take and when?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Barry Barnes): Mr. President, the Minister of Energy has been aware, for some time, that the gas station located at St. Barb's Road, Laventille, is inoperative.

In response to the second part of the question, the Minister is advised that NP is taking appropriate steps with a view to having the outlet reopened.

Sen. Hosein: Mr. President, I wonder whether the Minister could give some indication of the time in which action will be taken.

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Hon. B. Barnes: Mr. President, regrettably, I cannot give an indication of time. The station was closed in 1991. It needs some refurbishing, some renewal, and the National Petroleum Company is looking at what has to be done, as I understand it.

Motion made and question proposed, That the Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, June 30, 1992, at 1:30 p.m. [Hon. R. Huggins]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.23 p.m.