

*Leave of Absence**Thursday, August 07, 1997***SENATE***Thursday, August 07, 1997*

The Senate met at 2.02 p.m.

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

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, leave of absence has been granted to Sen. Sadiq Baksh from August 7 to August 9, 1997; Sen. Dr. Daphne Phillips from August 6 to August 9, 1997; Sen. Philip Hamel-Smith from July 30 to August 19, 1997; Sen. Andrew Gabriel from August 7 to August 11, 1997; and Sen. Carlos Dillon from August 5 to August 10, 1997. Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand has also been granted leave from today's sitting.

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received communication from His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, as follows:

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON,
President and Commander-in-Chief of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

\s\ Arthur N. R. Robinson
President.

To: MR. SATYAKAMA MAHARAJ

WHEREAS Senator Sadiq Baksh is incapable of performing his functions as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, SATYAKAMA MAHARAJ, to

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be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Sadiq Baksh.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 7th day of August, 1997."

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

\s\ Arthur N. R. Robinson
President.

To: MR. VINCENT CABRERA

WHEREAS Senator Dr. Daphne Phillips is incapable of performing her functions as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, VINCENT CABRERA, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Dr. Daphne Phillips.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 7th day of August, 1997."

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

\s\ Arthur N. R. Robinson
President.

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To: MS. INDERA SAGEWAN

WHEREAS Senator Philip Hamel-Smith is incapable of performing his functions as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, INDERA SAGEWAN, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Philip Hamel-Smith.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 7th day of August, 1997."

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

\s\ Arthur N. R. Robinson
President.

To: MR. DAVE COWIE

WHEREAS Senator Andrew Gabriel is incapable of performing his functions as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, DAVE COWIE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Andrew Gabriel.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 7th day of August, 1997."

Oath of Allegiance

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2.10 p.m.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Senators took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law:

Satyakama Maharaj, Indera Sagewan, Vincent Cabrera, Dave Cowie.

CONDOLENCES

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I wish on behalf of the members of this honourable Senate to convey our condolences to Sen. Selwyn John and his family on the passing of his elder brother, Arthur, yesterday.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION
OF APPROPRIATION) BILL**

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1997, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage of the Bill be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Lotteries Control Board for the year ended December 31, 1992. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Lotteries Control Board for the year ended December 31, 1993. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 1996 and on other selected audit activities. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
4. The financial statement as at September 30, 1996 of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (Petrotrin). [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
5. The financial statement as at December 31, 1996 of Trinidad Nitrogen Company Limited. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT
National Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago (Inc'n.) Bill
Presentation

Sen. Nizam Baksh: Mr. President, I have the honour to present the following report:

Report of the Special Select Committee appointed to consider and report on a private bill for the incorporation of the National Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago and matters incidental thereto.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Public Assistance
(Applications)

17. Sen. Penelope Beckles asked the Minister of Social Development:

Would the Minister please indicate by office location:

- (a) the number of applications received for public assistance for the periods January 1, 1996 to December 31, 1996; and January 1, 1997 to May 31, 1997;
- (b) the number of successful applications for the periods and the moneys disbursed to the applicants.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. President, I would like to point out that in 1996, Government commenced action towards improvement of the non-contributory social security scheme which includes both old age pension and public assistance benefits.

In August, 1996 the Public Assistance Act was amended to introduce legislation to ensure the speedy processing of public assistance applications. Applications were now to be processed within 90 days, thereby ensuring a speedy response to the needs of applicants and their families. If, however, an application is not processed within the stipulated 90-day period, it is considered approved.

When an application is made, the procedure is that a Social Welfare Officer conducts the investigation through a home visit and interviews. A recommendation is then made on the applicant's eligibility for public assistance and the application is then presented to local board members for consideration. When this is granted, the recipient will receive his or her first cheque within 6 weeks.

Mr. President, it is also interesting to point out that previously the encashment of these public assistance cheques posed serious problems to some of the

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beneficiaries under the scheme because they were encashable only at banks, revenue offices and certain designated post offices. However, the decision was taken recently to allow for encashment of cheques at supermarkets and groceries, only by recipients and not by their nominees in order to minimize the incidence of fraud. This decision was taken to ease the hardship experienced by recipients who suffered from ill health and, sometimes, have to travel long distances to reach payment outlets such as the banks. It should also be noted that the paymaster service is still available in very remote areas such as Matelot, Moruga and Cedros, where the other mentioned facilities may not be available.

For the period January 1, 1996 to December 31, 1996, 6,495 applications for public assistance were received by the Ministry of Social Development. The distribution by office location was as follows:

Local board district:		
St. George Central	-	706
St. George East	-	923
Caroni	-	965
St. Andrew	-	290
St. David	-	25
Nariva/Mayaro	-	361
Victoria West	-	766
Victoria East	-	508
St. Patrick West	-	245
St. Patrick East	-	623
Tobago	-	257
St. George West	-	826
Total	-	6,495

For the period January 1, 1997 to May 31, 1997, 2,933 applications for public assistance were received by the Ministry of Social Development. The distribution by office location was as follows:

St. George Central	-	294
St. George East	-	337
Caroni	-	399
St. Andrew	-	175
St. David	-	15
Nariva/Mayaro	-	162
Victoria West	-	394

Victoria East	-	267
St. Patrick West	-	114
St. Patrick East	-	260
Tobago	-	89
St. George West	-	427

2.20 p.m.

For the period January 1, 1996 to December 31, 1996 out of those applications received, 4,564 applications for public assistance were approved by the Ministry of Social Development. The distribution is as follows:

St. George Central	-	498
St. George East	-	535
Caroni	-	606
St. Andrew	-	231
St. David	-	13
Nariva/Mayaro	-	268
Victoria West	-	636
Victoria East	-	412
St. Patrick West	-	156
St. Patrick East	-	450
Tobago	-	146
St. George West	-	613
Total	-	4,564

For the period January 1, 1997 to May 31, 1997, 2,007 applications for public assistance were approved by the Ministry of Social Development as follows:

St. George Central	-	170
St. George East	-	271
Caroni	-	266
St. Andrew	-	94
St. David	-	14
Nariva/Mayaro	-	120
Victoria West	-	340
Victoria East	-	200
St. Patrick West	-	69
St. Patrick East	-	225
Tobago	-	37

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St. George West	-	301
Total	-	6,495

The amounts disbursed to recipients of public assistance for the periods January 1, 1996 to December 31, 1996 and January 1, 1997 to May 31, 1997 were \$91,522,789 and \$39,290,544.19 respectively. These amounts were inclusive of the food subsidy.

I thank you.

Establishment of Postal Services

19. Sen. Penelope Beckles asked the Minister of Public Utilities:

- (a) Would the Minister indicate the qualifications for the establishment of a post office or agency in a community or district?
- (b) Would the Minister indicate whether the community of the Heights of Aripo meets the qualifications?
- (c) Would the Minister state what services are provided to meet postal needs of this community?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. President, the Postmaster General has advised that the criteria for the establishment of a postal agency are as follows:

- (i) the district should not be less than three miles (4.8 km) from the nearest post office;
- (ii) the district should comprise a population of between 500—1,000 persons or approximately 100—200 households;
- (iii) there should be an average mail flow of at least 400 items per month; and
- (iv) the district is not currently being served by a home delivery.

Mr. President, the Postmaster General has further advised that while no explicit criteria exist for the establishment of post offices, consideration is usually given to upgrading a postal agency to a post office:

- (a) when the population of the district grows well beyond 1,000 persons or 200 households; and
- (b) when the average mail flow increases well beyond 400 items per month indicating that the area can no longer adequately be served by a postal agency, which is a one person operation.

Mr. President, with respect to item (b) of the question, the Postmaster General has advised that the village of the Heights of Aripo broadly meets the qualifications for the establishment of a postal agency. However, the Ministry of Public Utilities is not agreeable to the establishment of a postal agency for the Heights of Aripo at this time. In fact, the Ministry of Public Utilities has undertaken a restructuring exercise which commenced in April, 1996, involving the post office. The exercise will entail a complete review of the entire Postal Services Network to ensure that all residents of Trinidad and Tobago are adequately served and that counter collection and delivery services are reasonably accessible to all persons in the country. Indeed, it is envisaged that as part of its social obligation, the restructured body will be responsible for the appropriate development and supply of postal services to satisfy all reasonable demands of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Public Utilities wishes to indicate that the needs of the community of the Heights of Aripo will be considered within this context and action taken to accommodate same. The restructuring exercise is expected to be completed by the end of 1997.

Mr. President, with respect to item (c) of the question, the Postmaster General has advised that currently, a complete range of postal services, with the exception of home delivery, are available at the Arima Post Office for the residents of the community of the Heights of Aripo.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. President, before we proceed to Government Business, I seek leave of the House to deal with Bills No. 1 and 2, under Private Business as well as Motion No. 2 on the Supplemental Order Paper.

Agreed to.

CARIBBEAN UNION COLLEGE (INC'N.) BILL

Question put and agreed to, That a Bill to provide for the incorporation of the Caribbean Union College and for matters incidental thereto, be now read a second time.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill referred to a special select committee of the Senate chosen by the President as follows: Mrs. Carol Cuffy-Dowlath (Chairperson); Mr. Nathaniel Moore, Member; Mrs. Cynthia Alfred, Member; Dr. Eric St. Cyr, Member .

**PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF THE
WEST INDIES (AMDT.) BILL**

Question put and agreed to, That a Bill to amend the Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies (Inc'n.) Act, No. 26 of 1965 and for matters incidental thereto, be now read a second time.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill referred to a special select committee of the Senate chosen by the President as follows: Mrs. Vimala Tota-Maharaj (Chairperson); Rev. Barbara Gray-Burke, Member; Ms. Elizabeth Mannette, Member; and Rev. D. Teelucksingh, Member.

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

**National Dance Association (Inc'n.) Bill
Adoption**

Mr. Nizam Baksh: Mr. President, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that the Senate adopt the Report of the Special Select Committee of the Senate appointed to consider and report on a Private Bill for the Incorporation of the National Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto.

2.30 p.m.

Our committee was appointed by the Senate on Thursday, March 06, 1997 and given the following mandate:

“to consider and report on the Private Bill entitled an Act for the Incorporation of the National Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto.”

The Committee comprised: Mr. Nizam Baksh, Chairman; Rev. B. Gray-Burke, Member; Mr. Mahadeo Jagmohan, Member; Dr. Eric St. Cyr, Member.

The committee was satisfied that the requirements of Standing Order 75:3 (b)(i) and (ii) of the Senate were fulfilled and the public was given sufficient notice of the intended introduction in the Senate of the private Bill referred to above. These notices appeared in the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette* and the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper on February 13, 20 and 27, 1997. No objections to the Bill were received. The committee held two meetings, the first was on Tuesday, March 25, 1997. At that meeting oral evidence was taken from the following persons

representing the promoters: Mr. Eugene Joseph, President; Mrs. Heather Henderson-Gordon, Treasurer; Mrs. Sandra Warner, Attorney-at-Law and Legal Adviser to the association.

At the end of the meeting the promoters were required to submit additional information and documents. On June 27, 1997 the promoters submitted the additional documents requested by the committee. The committee held its second meeting on Tuesday, July 22, 1997 and at that meeting oral evidence was again taken from the promoters who were represented by Mr. Eugene Joseph, President and Mrs. Heather Henderson-Gordon, Treasurer.

During its deliberations the committee examined the organization's constitution, minutes of their meetings, register of members and audited financial statements. The committee made a careful examination of the preamble and clauses of the Bill and having regard to all the evidence, the committee is satisfied that the facts and allegations presented in the Bill are true and correct.

The committee wishes to report that it has completed its deliberations and has found sufficient proof in support of the incorporation of this organization by an Act of Parliament. The committee, therefore, recommends that the Bill be accepted by the Senate. Mr. President, I beg to move.

Seconded by Sen. Dr. St. Cyr.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be now read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) BILL

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): *[Desk thumping]* Mr. President I beg to move,

That a Bill to Supplement and Vary the Appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1997, be now read a second time.

Mr. President, I have the honour to report that the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago met on Monday, August 04 to debate the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1997) Bill which relates to the 1997 accounts. The Bill is seeking approval to:

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- (a) increase the 1997 Appropriation by the sum of \$142,371,338;
- (b) vary the 1997 Appropriation in the sum of \$205,432,174.

Now, Mr. President, as a general statement one can say that, in essence, the Bill seeks to increase the expenditure in the 1997 appropriation by the sum of \$142,000,000 which has come about mainly because of the settlement of the public sector negotiations, and whilst they have not all been settled, I certainly think it is appropriate at this time for us to deal with those that have been settled.

In the main, therefore, you could say that the sums that are being asked for today address, in the first case, the Ministry of Education. The settlement has been brought about by the negotiations between the Chief Personnel Officer and TUTTA.

Similarly, with the Ministry of National Security the negotiation has been settled between the protective services, the police, fire and so forth. It also addresses some of the other settlements that have been made with nursing and like personnel in the Ministry of Health.

I take the opportunity as well, Mr. President, to seek Parliament's leave to give some more expenses to a few other ministries and a number of the explanations have been provided for these.

In essence what I would like to do is just quickly indicate some of the increases that I have sought under various Heads. The increased sum is \$142,371,338. Under Head 03: Judiciary, a sum of \$672,840; under Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, a sum of \$6,447,863; under Head 16: Central Administrative Services, Tobago a sum of \$461,000; Ministry of Finance, \$10,000,000; Head 22: Ministry of National Security, \$36,100,000; Head 26: Ministry of Education, \$36,273,436; Head 28: the Ministry of Health, \$34,231,260; Head 41: the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, the sum of \$3,850,000; Head 42: the Ministry of Local Government, the sum of \$3,380,998; Head 44: the Ministry of Public Utilities, \$953,941 and; Head 50: the Ministry of Tourism \$10,000,000. The other matter to vary the 1997 Appropriation Bill in the sum of \$205,432,174 is really a re-ordering of the priorities set by the Government given a review of the Public Sector Invest Programme. Mr. President, explanations for the increases in the appropriations have already been circulated to hon. Senators.

By way of example, I would like to illustrate the nature of the increases by making reference to three areas. The Ministry of Finance \$10,000,000: I am seeking the approval of this honourable Senate for a national disaster relief fund.

On March 06, 1997 Cabinet agreed, *inter alia*, to the establishment of a National Disaster Relief Fund in the sum of \$10,000,000. The Fund will be the source of funds which will allow for the granting of assistance to victims of national disasters. On May 22, 1997 Cabinet also agreed to the appointment by the Minister of National Security of a co-ordinating committee to manage the administration of the National Disaster Relief Fund. The specific terms of reference of that committee were to be as follows:

- (i) to recommend to the Prime Minister when a national disaster should be declared.

In other words, this fund is not readily available to every individual disaster that takes place but one that must have been of a fairly national basis before access to this fund can take place.

2.40 p.m.

So that the committee was required to recommend to the Prime Minister if it considered that the disaster was of a national scope.

- (ii) To provide direction and support to a technical committee and to report to the Minister of National Security.

This fund, as I said, is under the direction, general and specific, of the Minister of National Security.

- (iii) To establish procedures/guidelines to determine the qualification of applicants in respect of payment from the National Disaster Relief Fund.

Obviously, Mr. President, we would want to ensure that there are appropriate checks and balances in the payments that have to be made. The committee has to satisfy itself, with the assistance of a technical committee, that the losses are genuine and they can be supported by independent or third party verification.

- (b) that upon the declaration by the Prime Minister of any event as a national disaster, the Minister of National Security, on the recommendation of the coordinating committee, approve assistance up to the sum of \$25,000 to families who are the victims of such disaster.

And one of those that has been considered by Government is the Piparo mud volcano which took place.

- (c) that all assistance in excess of \$25,000 be approved by Cabinet;
- (d) that secretariat services, including, *inter alia*, the processing of applications for assistance from the National Disaster Relief Fund, be provided by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

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The Minister of Finance has already signed the necessary order to amend the First Schedule to the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 by the addition of the National Disaster Relief Fund thereto. It is therefore necessary to appropriate the sum of \$10 million to transfer to this fund.

Ministry of National Security - \$36,100,000:

Mr. President, I seek the Senate's approval for the implementation of the revised remuneration agreement to the protective services.

On July 17, 1997, Cabinet agreed, *inter alia*, to ratify the terms of the agreements reached between the associations representing the first and second division officers of the police, fire and prison services as embodied in the Memoranda of Agreement dated June 4, 1997.

The additional cost involved in meeting payment of the revised terms for 1997 is \$116.5 million. It should be noted that in accordance with the conditions set out in the agreements, cash payments in respect of 1997 will take effect from August 1997 and is estimated at \$36.1 million. The arrears in respect of the period January to July, 1997 will be paid in January 1998, provision for which will be made in the 1998 estimates.

Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates to meet cash payments for the period August to December 1997. Supplementary funds in the sum of \$36.1 million are therefore required to meet this payment.

Mr. President, you would recall on the presentation of the budget I indicated that we could not have made provision under the budget for these negotiations for a number of reasons, the best being that the intention of the Government was to allow the Chief Personnel Officer to negotiate in good faith with each of these associations and that any sums that would have been included in the national budget at the time would clearly have circumscribed her own negotiations and put some pressure on her with respect to how those negotiations would have been conducted. Given, therefore, the approach of the budget that it not include any sums, I am now seeking the approval of this honourable Senate to pay the sums that had been negotiated with the Chief Personnel Officer in the final form.

Similarly, the Ministry of Education for the implementation of revised remuneration arrangements for members of the teaching service: the sum of \$33,550,000. Cabinet ratified the terms of the agreement reached between the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association and the Chief Personnel Officer as embodied in the Memorandum of Agreement, dated May 15, 1997.

The additional cost involved in meeting payment of these revised terms for 1997 is \$67.1 million. It should be noted that in accordance with conditions set out in the agreement, cash payment in respect of 1997 will be met from the month of July to December and is estimated at \$33,550,000. The arrears in respect of the period January to June 1997 estimated at another \$33,550,000 will be paid in January 1998, provision for which will be made in the 1998 estimates.

Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates to meet the cash payment in respect of 1997. Supplementary funds in the sum of \$33,550,000 are therefore required to meet this payment.

With respect to the variation of the appropriation, it should be noted that the Ministry of Planning and Development has overall responsibility for the planning of the Public Sector Investment Programme. As an integral part of this responsibility, that Ministry undertook a review as at April 30, 1997. As a consequence of this review, Cabinet agreed to the reallocation of funds in the sum of \$205,432,174. Funds were shifted to programmes and projects which were performing well and required additional funding and funds were removed from programmes and projects which were not progressing as well as originally estimated. The objective of the exercise is to maximize the use of resources.

Details of all the variations have been supplied to members and are summarized as follows: I will deal with those which have been increased first. This is just an accounting exercise.

HEADS & MINISTRIES	PROJECT/PROGRAMME	INCREASES \$Mn
15 Tobago House of Assembly	All projects which are being implemented in Tobago but were previously funded under ministries in Trinidad have now been allocated to the Tobago House of Assembly	<u>38.66</u> 38.66
17 Personnel Department	Scholarship and Training Programme	<u>2.00</u> 2.00

HEADS & MINISTRIES	PROJECT/PROGRAMME	INCREASES
18 Ministry of Finance	Construction of Infrastructure at Port of Spain	<u>46.63</u> 5.75
	Purchase of Training Facility-Marksman Academy	0.80
	Refurbishment of Trinidad House	1.00
	Upgrading of Pointe-a Pierre Refinery	39.08
30 Ministry of Labour & Co-operatives	Improvement to infrastructure and purchase of equipment	<u>1.00</u> 1.00
	Almond Drive, Morvant	<u>56.55</u> 6.65
36 Ministry of Housing and Settlements	Couva North Phase IV	13.00
	Shelter Construction Financing Facility	29.00
		3.00
	Developing of John John and East Port of Spain	
	Construction of core houses for residents of Demerara Road, Wallerfield	4.90
41 Ministry of Community Development Culture and Women's Affairs	Construction, extension and Refurbishment of Community Health Centres	<u>0.88</u> 0.88
	42 Ministry of Local Government	Drainage works, Trinidad

HEADS & MINISTRIES	PROJECT/PROGRAMME	INCREASE \$Mn
42 Ministry of Local Government	Upgrading and improvement of local roads and bridges	16.20
	Recreational Facilities	1.83
	Refurbishment of Public Buildings	9.00
43 Ministry of Works and Transport	Construction of Jetty at San Fernando	<u>3.20</u> 3.20
44 Ministry of Public Utilities	Upgrading of water distribution system	<u>25.45</u> 4.50
	Priority pipeline projects	10.95
	Reconditioning of Buses of the PTSC and purchase of spare parts	5.00
	Replacement of pumps and other equipment	5.00
51 Ministry of Public Administration and Information	Public Sector Institutional Strengthening	<u>3.48</u> 1.60
	Acquisition of Assets of A.V.M (Caribbean) Limited	<u>1.88</u> <u>205.43</u>

Mr. President, those were the heads that have been increased. However, the Heads that were decreased correspondingly were:

HEADS & MINISTRIES	PROJECT/PROGRAMME	DECREASE \$Mn
26 Ministry of Education	Construction of Mason Hall Government Secondary	<u>8.40</u> 4.00
	Construction of Primary Schools	4.40
28 Ministry of Health	Health Sector Reform Programme	<u>25.15</u> 25.15
36 Ministry of Housing and Settlements	Calder Hall Tobago	<u>0.012</u> 0.012
43 Ministry of Works and Transport	Airport Highway Programme	<u>163.70</u> 3.70 1.50
	National Highway Programme	10.00
	Rural Access Roads	3.70
	Airport Infrastructure	150.00
	National Highway	10.00
46 Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs	Construction of a 50 metre Swimming pool in Tobago	<u>1.62</u> 0.12
	Construction of Indoor Sports Hall, Tobago	150
Ministry of Tourism	Tourism Action Plan	<u>6.55</u> 6.55 <u>205.43</u>

Sen. Dr. St. Cyr: Mr. President, before the hon. Minister takes his seat, I wonder whether he can tell us something about Project 820 in which I see a decrease of \$150 million. Secondly, could he tell us whether the thinking behind the National Disaster Fund is to bring it up to a certain quantum over a period of years?

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. President, I wonder if the hon. Senator would allow me to address that particular project he is asking about in my winding up? I really would not have the opportunity to research it while I am on my feet. *[Interruption]* Then I would certainly undertake to give a little more information.

Sen. Dr. St. Cyr: Except it is the biggest one on the whole sheet.

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Is that the one on the airport that I just read out about the airport infrastructure development, a decrease of \$150 million?

In essence, Mr. President, we anticipated that we would have been able to deal with the development of the airport starting very early this year. One would recall that the Government indicated that it was going to use a fast-track process, which has been slowed by certain elements. In view of the fact that we have had to respond to some of the concerns that have been expressed, the fast-track method did not quite work out for us and we have had to put it on hold. The Minister of Works and Transport is presently exploring the options that are available to us to get it restarted very quickly.

Obviously we are not going to need the \$300 million that was originally scheduled to be spent this year, so rather than keep the money holding there, knowing full well that between now and the end of the year it is virtually impossible to spend the \$300 million, we have scaled down the needs for the cash flows to roughly \$150 million. I hope that explains it, Senator.

With respect to the National Disaster Relief Fund, Mr. President, as I said, this came about out of the crying need that the people in Piparo made when a totally unexpected disaster of fairly national proportions took place. We recognize that we did not have any such reserve funds which could quickly be tapped to help people in that situation.

Of course, since then we have had problems in Tobago where there have been earthquakes and problems in other areas where roofs have been blown off. We know that we cannot deal with each emergency even on an individual or narrow location, but we felt that, in the first instance, we should start by setting aside a fund which is national in scope.

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Our experience over a period of years could be good or bad, as we all know, and I do not know how far \$10 million could really take us. However, I think if it really becomes necessary we would at least have this fund already set up and, depending upon the state of the finances of the country, could increase it to a point where we would be able to cover as many of these disasters as we can and hopefully start addressing it to areas where people experience disasters of a narrower scope. However, initially, given the finances of the country we feel that we should at least start something by having that kind of fund there.

I am sure we are all aware that the wheels of government move very slowly, and without this kind of mechanism it really would be impossible to respond as quickly as we would like to. So that this mechanism is really an attempt to address, in the most efficient manner, a way in which to assist people in their hour of need. Even now, as I speak, we have not yet disbursed funds to the people of Piparo or Tobago, but we feel, ultimately, when we get this fund moving, it will at least address the needs of the people much more readily than at present.

Mr. President, I am also to inform hon. Senators that the Bill was approved in the other place and that it will increase the 1997 appropriation by \$142,371,338. The total amount to be appropriated for 1997 will, therefore, be \$12,055,616,970.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Sen. Elizabeth Mannette: Mr. President, I am pleased to be able to make a contribution on this Bill which seeks to vary and/or supplement the budgetary allocations for 1997. Coming as it does, in the middle of the year, I think it is an appropriate occasion to consider the performance of the Government—or the lack of performance—over the first half of the year.

As this Bill seeks to increase and decrease allocations for various ministries and projects, it gives us an indication of the areas which the Government now thinks are priorities and the relative importance of other areas. Indeed, if one is to look at the Bill as just a simple accounting measure we would not give it the depth of review that it really merits.

3.00 p.m.

In education, we often have mid-term exams, and the Prime Minister recently said that we all should do some stocktaking. He was referring to an unfortunate event—and we all should really do some stocktaking with respect to how this Government is performing.

I would not look at all the variations in detail—that would be too lengthy—but I propose to focus on one area which I find very important; increases and decreases in allocations. The Ministry of Health has been so mishandled and mismanaged that it is a good opportunity for us to really tell the Government what it ought and ought not to be doing. I know some Members on the Government side have been listening to contributions made in the other place and so they may already be familiar with our lack of confidence in their various ministries.

I thank the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who seems to have some concern for vagrants in the square—but the Government apparently does not have very much concern.

Mr. President, I am sure you were very surprised and alarmed a few weeks ago, when the administrator of the San Fernando General Hospital informed the public that they should stay away from the hospital. That was a very drastic and severe warning. If the Government were not alarmed, then I wonder what sort of Government it is. There were also rumours that people were unable to obtain the necessary healthcare; the death of a Petrotrin employee who was transferred from the San Fernando General Hospital to the Port of Spain General Hospital and who died on the way. We know of the industrial impasse which took place and which is still taking place between the doctors at the San Fernando General Hospital and the South West Regional Health Authority, and indeed, doctors in other hospitals. It is certainly interesting to look at the treatment of the funds which were allocated to the Ministry of Health because, in this context one really has to consider what is the Government's policy, what is the Government's priority for the health sector.

In the Schedule to the Bill, and as the Minister indicated earlier, he has proposed to increase the allocation to the Ministry of Health by some \$34 million, and to also decrease it at the same time by some \$25 million. So there is a net effect of an overall increase of a mere \$9 million. I do not recall him mentioning the decrease.

The decreases started with the development programme. In that development programme, which was part of the overall Health Sector Reform Programme which was to be funded partially by the IADB loan, as well as by Government funding, the total of \$72 million which was allocated in 1997 has been reduced by \$25 million to \$47 million. In fact, we were told in the explanation circulated, that as of the end of June, only \$4.95 million was spent in that development programme during the first half of the year. When the loan agreement was signed last year,

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there was a big hullabaloo that the Government signed this loan agreement in July for US \$134. It was going to be part of a large health sector reform programme and we were looking forward to that programme coming on stream as initially envisaged by the previous Minister of Health.

Unfortunately, one reads in the explanatory document that key elements of the projects have not been implemented due to the fact that the Ministry of Health has been unable to fulfil all the conditions precedent to the first disbursement. I find that is quite sad because the conditions, in my estimation, are quite important and would require some complex setting up of new units. But when one looks at the conditions and at the projects which were not completed in 1996 and in the first half of 1997, one wonders what is the Minister of Health really doing.

The loan document specifies the conditions. As of this date, for example, the signing by the Minister of Finance of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health has not yet been completed. After an entire year, I wonder if the Minister of Finance could really tell us why it has taken him 15 months to sign this Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health. I read that the Government signed an agreement with the Tobago House of Assembly last month. The Tobago House of Assembly was only brought on stream at the end of last year with the new Tobago House of Assembly Act.

The Minister of Finance has been involved in the process, the Ministry of Health also. I do not know if it is that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is not speaking with the Minister of Health or perhaps, the Minister is so busy going around trying to meet with the First Citizens Bank chairman, and other people that he does not have the time to focus on the Ministry of Health and the Health Sector Reform Programme. We ask that the Minister clarify and specify exactly why it is taking so long. That is one facet of the whole Health Sector Reform Programme. Other conditions such as the project administration unit and hiring consultancy firms, human resources, advertising and recruiting, we understand can be a problem. But for it to take an entire year in the health sector is really of concern because this is not an area that does not affect all of us. Some of us may be fortunate to attend private doctors and private hospitals, but for the majority of the population, when they go to hospitals that are underfunded, have no equipment, and sheets and the staff is disgruntled, the fact that all these issues are taking so long can cause one to become very angry. In fact, the whole issue with the doctors' impasse is part of that anger that is developing within many of us.

Another condition that has not been met over an entire year is that of engaging an approved firm of independent public accountants to carry out the audit. We do not want to appear to be picking at the details, but if a government is taking a year to find a public accounting firm to carry out an audit for the Health Sector Reform Programme, one has to ask oneself, how is the implementation of this entire programme being done? I cannot understand why it would take 15 months after signing the loan agreement to come up with a suitable auditing firm.

In the Minister of Health's contribution in the Lower House it was stated that the Government would be signing agreements on August 11 with the new employees for the Project Implementation Unit, as well as with the public accounting firm. It appears that suddenly as the crisis has taken place; people have died; doctors have taken industrial action, finally some adrenalin has started to flow with the Minister of Health, and, therefore, they are signing agreements like mad. At least, they are getting it done but we hope we do not have to wait for another year for other things to be implemented.

Mr. President, there was a decrease of \$25 million because of the delay by the Ministry of Health in implementing this Health Reform Project but we understand that some money has been allocated for increases. Before I get to the increases, I should look at where the money went.

The money that was removed from the development programme was transferred to various Heads. It is instructive when one considers the importance of the health sector. Where did the money taken out of health and put in other places go? The sum of \$3 million was transferred to the Tobago House of Assembly. We understand it was in the Ministry of Health and it is going over to the Tobago House of Assembly for the design and construction of a new hospital. This is August 1997. In the Minister's budget presentation in 1996 he stated that they were going to start the construction in 1997 and they were going to allocate the funds for design and construction in 1996. They are finally allocating the money to the Tobago House of Assembly in 1997 and we are glad for the benefit of the people of Tobago, this is happening, but we certainly hope that we do not have to wait this length of time for additional allocations.

3.10 p.m.

In addition, \$2 million is being taken from the health sector and is being transferred to the annual scholarship and study leave programme, which we know is of benefit to public servants and we are not against that. We take note that the

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Government has tried to penalize teachers who exercise their legitimate rights in demonstrating and it has sought to deny them the ability to take advantage of these scholarships. We simply take note of that.

Three quarters of a million dollars was transferred from the health sector to the community centres. We in the PNM, of course, are not against community centres, it is a concept which we have started and funded quite well, but if one asks any member of the community which one he prefers, I can guarantee that almost all of them will say a health centre. When we have the Government taking money from health to put into community centres, one has to question that. In my estimation, it is not acceptable.

In a newspaper article, there was mention that the community development programme is taking on a very unpleasant political change, where the Government is seeking to change the whole nature of community centres into regional complexes and putting persons outside of the community on the boards and hosting UNC meetings and so forth. We are looking at what is taking place in the community development area, and since the Minister is not here, I would not make any statement against her, but will certainly refer to it again at an opportune time.

Mr. President, \$8 million was taken from the health sector and given to the Ministry of Local Government for the reconstruction of Tent City. We certainly applaud the efforts to reconstruct and build a permanent structure for Tent City but again, there are projects such as the airport, why did they not take money from there and give to Tent City and leave the money in the health sector so it could be used to refurbish the hospitals, improve facilities and purchase additional equipment? I imagine that the Minister of Works and Transport will soon start a new wave of public relations visiting Tent City and turning the sod for a new construction. Unfortunately, the Government has not turned any sods for new hospitals, only health centres. They are cutting ribbons and opening doors that were started years ago, but they are not turning the sod for any new ones.

Millions were taken away from the health sector to give to the Ministry of Public Administration and Information for the hon. Minister Mark to go on television. I hear that he is preparing his resumé because he knows that his days are numbered, and we question the method of taking money away from the health sector to give to the Ministry of Public Administration and Information to buy a TV station.

Increases of \$34 million were also made to the Ministry of Health, as the Minister stated earlier, and this was primarily personnel expenditure, because \$30 million was allocated to the three regional health authorities.

The Minister of Health is on record as saying that it was the level of distrust between the regional health authorities and the personnel which caused the industrial impasse with the doctors. What is needed to increase this level of trust? It is really some support and directive from the Government and the Minister particularly, indicating that his ministry and the Government are all prepared to work together for the better of Trinidad and Tobago.

When the budgetary allocations to the regional health authorities were cut in 1997, it demoralized the entire staff and it put the administration in a very tight spot because it started off the year with a deficit. In fact, the South/West Regional Health Authority stated that it had a \$5 million shortfall in its budget and it had to deal with demands of staff for better conditions and compensation. One sees that the Minister is giving an additional \$2 million to that authority. It will still be operating with a deficit and one hopes that this situation is not allowed to continue into next year.

One may recall that last year June we had the same situation developing with junior doctors in Port of Spain at the annual review of their contracts and the demand for more money. Unless this whole health sector reform programme is put on stream as it was intended, then there will be the annual contracts terminating and negotiations starting each year with the doctors demanding more and the RHAs would be under-funded, resulting in a tight position and a similar impasse.

I recall last year when the Minister of Health said there was no crisis because no one has died. The next day, the newspaper said six persons had died, and he suddenly admitted that there was a crisis. It appears that only death can excite the Minister into some action. That is unfortunate.

I noted the Minister mentioned that a committee had been set up to look into one of the deaths which took place recently. Last year, when the meteorologist Glen David and other persons died and it was alleged that it was connected to the impasse, a committee was set up and it has never reported. The Minister said that his investigations were inconclusive and he was setting up a committee to make further investigations. We have heard nothing from this committee.

The whole problem really stems from a lack of dynamic leadership in the health sector. It is a chain process which the Minister understands is complex so we need

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someone to channel this process in such a way that matters are implemented on time as anticipated, thus increasing the trust and confidence in personnel who will work better with the regional authorities.

I make one final point dealing with the finding of the hospitals and the working of the health sector programme which has been negatively affected by the non-performance of the Minister. The Chief of Staff at Mount Hope Hospital recently stated in the *Daily Express* on Saturday, August 2, 1997 that because of financial constraints and limited human resources, it has been forced to close the paediatric ward indefinitely. Then on Monday, August 4, 1997 in the Lower House the Minister stated that they were transferring the paediatric ward from Port of Spain to Mount Hope, and even suggested that Members of Parliament in the East/West Corridor should tell their constituents of the new development.

Does the Minister of Health really know what is going on? The Chief of Staff is closing down the paediatric ward and the Minister is transferring the paediatric ward from Port of Spain to Mount Hope. Do you see the situation in which we may all find ourselves? The Minister is supposed to be the one who sets all the policy directives and coordinates all the RHAs and their policies, but it seems as though he is swimming around trying to handle crises as they develop. In doing so he allowed himself to embarrass the Minister of Legal Affairs in her attempt to stop the action at the San Fernando hospital. That was really unfortunate because now the doctors are demanding an apology from the Minister for calling them "criminals", or stating that they were taking criminal action.

The painful part of these allocations and changes is that it affects the poor. Persons here may be able to go to private doctors and nursing homes, but the majority of the population has to depend on the public hospitals, and so I wish that the Minister would consider the majority of the population when he makes his changes and allocations, when he cuts and he slices and when he chops with his Chinese chopper.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt: Mr. President, I would be very brief in my contribution about the budget and promises which were made and fulfilled. I would start off by thanking the hon. Minister of Finance and the Government for fulfilling a promise which was made earlier this year, that Servol would get its allocation increased from the \$3 million which it was given to that which was originally promised, which was \$6.5 million.

3.20 p.m.

In fact, as I compare the figures that were requested with the figures that were finally allocated, with this supplementary allocation, Servol comes out with \$1,242 ahead. I am not quite sure how the accountant came up with that figure but I would like to thank the Minister and the Government, not just for meeting a promise that was made, but also for recognizing the value of the work being done by a non-governmental organization such as Servol.

I think that everyone in the country knows what Servol is and what it does. This particular allocation is, however, going towards the payment of salaries for teachers, particularly those in the Servol centres. The teachers at Servol are paid about less than one third of what the teachers in government schools are paid and they probably work three times as long and hard. They have a very difficult constituency to deal with and they also have many extra duties which go outside of just teaching, such as counselling and helping.

I do not know if you are aware, Mr. President, for example, that some 5,000 adolescents pass through Servol each year. I think I can safely say that most of them come as a last chance desperate plea for help. For many of them it is their only chance to escape from what turns out to be a life of drugs and crime. In many cases they come into Servol with knives and guns in their pockets. Mr. President, if you have ever had the privilege and the joy of working with the people at Servol you would realize that it is absolutely amazing because after three months in the Adolescent Development Programme they are totally different people; they are no longer candidates for the Minister of National Security's attention. Ninety per cent of them maintain what they have learnt in Servol. They achieve changes in attitude, self-esteem and their whole outlook on life.

The Government is giving its support to this organization, which has been a model for organizations throughout, not just the developing world, but also for the newly liberated countries of Eastern Europe which turned to Servol in Trinidad and Tobago to ask: "How does one get something like this going and how can we help our young people?" Mr. President, the fact that we, in this country, produced such a marvellous organization, is commendable. As I have pointed out many times before in this Senate, Servol is a totally indigenous organization, it is not something which was helped, directed, formed or shaped from abroad, it is from Trinidad and Tobago and well deserves the Alternative Nobel Prize it got recently.

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I thank the Minister of Finance and his Government for fulfilling a promise which was made to the country and to Servol. In doing so, I would like to ask a couple of questions in relation to some other promises that were made. First of all, I was very pleased to see that the Ministry of National Security has allocated an extra \$36 million for revised remuneration in regard to protective services. I am wondering if the Minister, in his winding up, could tell us what is going to happen to the 360 Special Reserve Police Officers who were supposed to be absorbed into the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

I know that the hon. Minister of National Security is shortly going to become tired of me championing the community police, but if I do so, Mr. President, it is only because they are doing such an absolutely wonderful job, particularly when it comes to helping young people and victims of domestic violence in communities throughout this country. They are making a real difference. I quote from an article from the *Newsday* dated Wednesday, March 17, 1997, by Nalinee Seelal which says:

“Minister of National Security Brigadier Joseph Theodore has assured that the existing 360 Special Reserve Police officers will be absorbed in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Already, 50 of the 360 officers are in training to complement the staff at the 999 Rapid Response and Community Policing Section.”

He did recognize, in his speech, the contribution these officers were making, but that was in March. The year is moving on and I do not see any allocation in the budget for making these Special Reserve Police Officers, who are doing the work of regular full-time police officers, permanent, considering the kind of work they do, which is very stressful and which demands a Servol-like commitment, if I could put it that way. I do not think there is a higher accolade anyone could be given because I have done work with some of these police officers and they do have a Servol-like commitment. I know that cannot be paid for, but I think it should be recognized and that the promises which are made to people in this country by the Government should be met.

The second question along with a comment which I wish to make has to do with the allocation made to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women’s Affairs. I am concerned also with cultural events taking place in Trinidad and Tobago and, in particular, Mr. President, I would like to express my dismay and shock at the happenings that took place at a recent cultural event for President

Rawlings. According to reports, some very discourteous, obviously uneducated and ill-mannered—I cannot even think of a word to describe them because they could not be citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—disgraced the Government, the country, the Emancipation Committee, our guests and most of the citizens of this country. I think that it was only the civilized and very sophisticated behaviour of Mr. Kafra Kambon on behalf of the Emancipation Committee, and our Prime Minister, who behaved with the most enormous dignity and restraint and should be congratulated, [*Desk thumping*] that we have been saved from total embarrassment. My question is: Why can funds not be put aside, whether through the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women’s Affairs or, as Sen Mannette referred to Sen. Mark’s new television station, to somehow teach our people plain good manners; [*Desk thumping*] teach people what national pride means.

I am not in favour of any kind of restriction on freedom of expression; I do not believe in that. I do not believe in restricting what people write and I certainly do not believe in any intimidatory tactics against people calling in to talk shows. If people want to talk they should be allowed to talk. However, I do believe if we are going to raise the level of public discourse in this country, we have to do some public education. The people who behaved in such a disgraceful manner should keep in mind that had they been in the country of the President in front of whom they behaved so badly—our foreign guest—they would very probably have been dealt with in a very severe military way because he is, after all, a military man. I think, perhaps, if one is looking at supplementary allocations in the budget, some should be put aside for public education.

3.30 p.m.

The third thing that I want to ask about, again, has to do with promises given and promises kept. In the Government’s *1995 Manifesto*, under the heading: “Small Business” it says:

“A critical area of concern is the funding for smaller scale projects which have enormous potential for employment creation. This is a sector in which neither foreign investors nor the traditional local lending institutions have shown much interest. It is a sector which has its own peculiar problems of access to finance, production...”

It goes on to say that the UNC Government, if elected—which, of course it has been—is going to promote business interests and would do everything that it can to help promote the growth of small business.

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The Minister of Finance did not, specifically, refer to any increased allocation in funding for business. I noticed an article in the *Daily Express* of Wednesday, July 30, entitled: "Government input off-track" which says:

"The pending introduction of the National Tote System under control of a State agency known as the National Racing Commission is tantamount to a complete nationalisation of the system and governance of the horse racing industry in Trinidad and Tobago."

Mr. President, I have no interest in horse racing, except that I like to watch the horses run around the Savannah. I am not a gambler or a bettor, that is not my point. As the article points out, this is, in effect, nationalization and it is creating a state-run monopoly contrary to the Government's policy of free enterprise. From this article I gather that what is being done is to, in fact, set up a Government monopoly and close down small business. To me, this seems to be in total contradiction to what the Government's stated policy was, both in its *Manifesto* and its budget addresses. I cannot believe that the Minister of Finance would be going back on one of his promises, so far he has not. I am just hoping that he would be able to throw some light on this particular instance.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh: Mr. President, I join with my colleagues in extending you a most gracious welcome back. I pray that God would bless you.

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for the Explanatory Notes which he has given to accompany his presentation of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1997) Bill. This has been quite helpful. I just want to raise a few concerns and make a few enquiries.

The first one is under the heading, the "Ministry of Public Utilities." I observe that there are provisions for the upgrading of water distribution systems of pipeline projects and the purchase of pumps and other equipment, requiring additional funding, over the 1997 budgetary figure of \$20.4 million. A few days ago you would recall that in the south, pipeborne water made people ill. The quality of water distribution continues to be a problem in this country, both in homes and schools.

Mr. President, where is Severn Trent? The Minister is telling us that we have to find, again, \$20.4 million. I am not quoting how much we pumped into that for the first half of this year, not to talk about 1996 or since we entered into an agreement

with Severn Trent. Mr. President, our citizens have not been told; one million and more inhabitants, up to now we do not understand what is happening with water distribution. Many of us are very much aware that it has to be lucrative profits which are being creamed off by Severn Trent. Do not tell me they are coming here to help us. They are coming here for profits. That is a business agreement as far as they are concerned. Why should taxpayers find another \$20.4 million? Why is the Minister asking us to approve this today?

You have heard Sen. Mannette, I am going to touch on the question of health just now, but it is not only health. There are so many essential services in Trinidad that need this boost and this is what the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1997) Bill is all about—transferring funds and strengthening so many ministries. The Minister is asking us for \$20.4 million for the upgrading of water distribution systems, pipeline projects, purchase of pumps. What is Severn Trent doing for us? Who really is in charge of water services? There are many taxpayers who believe that this arrangement continues to be a burden on the Treasury. I still wish that taxpayers would be set free from a political blunder that sits as an albatross on the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. President, I want to draw your attention to another provision in the Bill before us under the same heading, Ministry of Public Utilities. That is an allocation of \$5 million for the reconditioning of buses and the purchase of spare parts. Only last week Parliament received the Auditor General's report dated May and June of 1997 for the Public Transport Service Corporation for five years between 1983 to 1987. I just want to read into the record some of the Auditor General's comments about PTSC—because so very often we get these audit certificates. The Minister is asking us to approve \$5 million in a supplemental budget for this particular item in the Bill before us. The Audit Certificate states:

“All the information and explanations which were requested have not been obtained. Source documents necessary for the verification of inventories, debtors, trade creditors, other liabilities and accruals of Government loans, advances were not produced. This and other deficiencies prevented satisfactory verification.”

Mr. President, I have a feeling that all these documents in the next few weeks would just end up in the waste-paper basket of many parliamentarians. It continues:

Inventories totalling \$42,349,464 were not verified as supporting documents were not produced. In addition, the Board's approval for the 'Provision for Stock Loss' of \$18,891,346 was not seen.

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Debtors of \$1,113,649 (net of provision) were not verified as source documents necessary for the verification of this balance were not produced.

Trade Creditors of \$14,856,495 were not verified as supporting books and documents were not produced...

Other Liabilities and Accruals—\$41,906,258

Deferred Assets—\$868,605

Source documents for the verification of this balance were not produced for audit inspection.

Provision for Pensions—\$1,885,303

Evidence of the introduction of a Pension Plan...was not produced.”

There is a difference here on page 2 of \$28,831,467 not explained. That is only one for five years.

3.40 p.m.

Sen. John: Just to be certain of what the hon. Senator is saying, is he of the view that maybe in the next few weeks these accounts that were laid on the table would find their way in the waste-paper baskets of Members? If that is so, some of us on this side, including Sen. Rev. Barbara Gray-Burke—and I am looking at Sen. Dr. Eric St. Cyr—are members of the Public Accounts Committee, and I can assure the Senator that every Wednesday we sit here for very long periods investigating these reports which are laid on the table. I want to assure him that we are taking an interest when these various accounts are laid on the table. It is headed by the Opposition, but we take an interest as members of that committee appointed by the Parliament.

Sen. Rev. D. Teelucksingh: Thank you, Sen. John. If this is so, and the Auditor General is saying there is no documentary evidence to support these figures from 1983 to 1987, could we get the assurance—and I am only asking for 1995 and 1996—even from the Public Accounts Committee, that it is going to report to us about accounts for the last five, maybe for the last two years. This utility has been heavily subsidized. This is a very important matter. In the same document, the 1987 report, the total revenue of the corporation amounted to \$25.1 million, but the total expenses were \$170 million. Calculate the kind of support from the Consolidated Fund; the amount of money we pumped into that.

Mr. President, in response to Sen. John, where was the Public Accounts Committee during the periods 1983 to 1987, and 1988 to 1996? Does it report to the Parliament, or is this only an embarrassing situation for the Auditor General's office? This is a very important question. We are getting at the whole question of accountability. We are passing at this level, and approving at this level, millions of dollars to various Ministries, and we are not having mechanisms for proper accountability. It is incumbent on the Government to devise new mechanisms to monitor public spending. Where is the accountability? Where are the results after we approve, in these exercises, millions of dollars to be varied from ministries?

We can speak about a lot of things in this Bill for almost the whole night. For instance, I want to ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries about the upgrading of Petrotrin. Is this only an accounting figure? I see that we are pumping millions of dollars into the upgrading of the refinery at Pointe-a-Pierre every year. When is this going to stop? When will it be finally upgraded? *[Laughter]*. We dealt with this last year. It is a recurring decimal. We are upgrading this refinery for millions of dollars. Tell us when it will end? They are tapping on the precious resources of the Consolidated Fund.

I want to speak about the health sector, as well. It is the most important concern this evening. Continuing where Sen. Mannette left off, the health sector continues to be a disaster area. It is an embarrassment to the Government and the country. We have a medical school in Trinidad and Tobago; one of the few in the Caribbean. The next one is in Jamaica. Ours is the second medical school in the Caribbean. Mr. President, we have been following the brilliant achievements in surgery performed in Trinidad. We have some of the best surgeons and doctors, not only in the Caribbean, but in the world. It is the mother of all ironies that we do not have a good hospital. I do not know how to analyze this paradox.

In spite of all of this, I cannot understand why—as Sen. Mannette so rightly observed—so many of these ministries could be further subsidized: \$38 million to the Tobago House of Assembly; \$56 million for the Ministry of Finance; \$36 million for the Ministry of National Security; \$27 million for the Ministry of Education; \$56 million for the Ministry of Housing and Settlements; \$30 million for the Ministry of Local Government; \$26 million for the Ministry of Public Utilities; but only \$9 million for the Ministry of Health. That shows up right there. Something has to be wrong. It is either that the Government is thinking all is well in health—this has to be a sick view—or it believes that enough money is being pumped into the Ministry of Health.

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We come back to the question of accountability. Is the Government saying that it is providing so many millions for health and, therefore, that is enough? Mr. President, this is the first time I have spent so much time looking at the annual report of the Auditor General. According to the Auditor General's report that was laid in this honourable House last week, how many of us know that the audited statements for the four regional health authorities in Trinidad—except for Tobago for one year—were not presented for the years 1994, 1995 and 1996?

Sen. John spoke earlier on. He is on that committee. What is happening? The focus is on the regional health authorities (RHAs) with the Minister saying one time, he does not have the authority to do this and that, and then suddenly, there was the injunction. One time the Minister and the Government cannot do it, suddenly, they can do it and then, they made a mistake. I do not understand. Are the Minister of Health and the Government saying that certain things cannot be done? It is the national view that there is chaos in health, whether the authority is with the RHAs or the CPO.

Our Prime Minister is quite correct. He said, "The buck stops with me." It stops with the Government. Not the RHAs or the doctors. The Government is responsible to the electorate who put it there. It is my view that some of these problems are endemic in the Ministry of Health. I have a feeling that the problems in the Ministry of Health have been inherited not only from the last administration, but the previous ones in years gone by. My opinion is that the problems in the Ministry of Health are beyond the ability of any single Minister. There are too many chronic problems that have plagued that Ministry. I do not support an independent enquiry into that. That is a waste of time.

Mr. President, Cabinet meets on Thursday of every week. This is an issue which should engage the corporate wisdom of the Cabinet. The Cabinet of the country must take control of this issue. It has been with us for too long, and I submit that there is urgent need, not for ministerial intervention, but for governmental intervention in the Ministry of Health.

3.50 p.m.

My problem with the Bill before us this afternoon is the fact that this is a wealthy country. We have a lot of money and we have been budgeting endless millions of dollars to ministries, those of which I spoke previously and, of course, there are the Ministries of Works and Transport and of Public Utilities. I have a problem that somehow, the moneys are getting to some places and we are not getting the results. I just want to repeat that there is need for the Government to

look at all these various agencies—we have to monitor spending—either beef them up or create new ones.

I thank you very much, Sir.

Sen. Cynthia Alfred: Mr. President, I rise to make my contribution in respect of the supplementary allocations. It is very gratifying to see that the sum of \$38 million has been allocated to the Tobago House of Assembly. Indeed, I was getting somewhat concerned and very worried about the construction of the Mason Hall Government Secondary School in particular. When I look at the various heads under which moneys have been allocated, I am pleased that this has been done. However, I do have some concerns.

When I look at the budget, I note that in the majority of cases original provisions were not made under these various heads. The question is, why not and why now? I will answer the second one first. With respect to why now, I am glad that, at least, funds have been released now, but it must have been known to the Ministry of Finance or whatever ministry, that these projects needed to be addressed early. Most of those are outdoor projects and we are smack in the middle of the rainy season. It is known that the rainy season is between June and December. Projects will slow down because of the rain. I hope that this is not a ploy on the part of the Ministry of Finance to give the moneys now, and if the moneys are not utilized by the end of the year to say, "Well, in 1998 I am going to give you less because you did not utilize what we gave you at the time". So we shall keep our eyes and ears open to see whether, in fact, this is perhaps what the Ministry of Finance has in mind. Though I do not really think so, I do believe that there ought to be greater dialogue between the Assembly and the Ministry of Finance.

One may recall that the Chief Secretary of the Assembly complained that there was not enough dialogue between the Ministry of Finance and the Assembly in respect of the budget. We would wish that in the future there be such dialogue, so that instead of waiting until August to give supplementary provisions, these provisions would be given earlier in the year. So, whatever needs to be addressed should be done from, perhaps, February or March and not from August or September.

I note the construction of Buccoo Government School, Castara Government, Scarborough Methodist, Ebenezer Methodist and Mason Hall Government. I see linked with the Mason Hall Government Secondary School the construction of

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rural access roads and bridges in the rehabilitation programme. I know that in order for students to get to the Mason Hall Government Secondary School they will have to take a short cut. Instead of going all the way through Scarborough and then going into Mason Hall, they will be passing through the Hope region and it will be easier for them to get to the school. I am glad to see that there is a link up and that funds have been provided for the rural access roads and bridges. I know that, certainly, the roads that lead to the secondary school are part of this programme. It is also good to note that, at last, there will be construction of an indoor sports hall and a swimming pool at Bacolet and, from what we have seen, it would appear to be a swimming pool where the participants would be able to train for, perhaps, greater feats like the Olympics and so forth. At least we hope that is the intention. So, in effect, we are pleased.

I note again that provision was not made for the hospital in the original provision, but we are pleased to see that funds have been provided for the construction—or, at least, to have the initial stages, maybe the design and so forth—of the hospital. This, of course, is long overdue, but again I make the point that this is August and we would wish that in future there be greater dialogue between the Assembly and the Ministry of Finance so that there will be some sort of prioritization.

I got the impression that the Ministry of Finance, almost like a tongue-in-cheek thing, was saying, let us give Tobago this amount of money and, in fact, we are not taking from any other ministry as such, we are taking from the Ministry of Health for hospitals, we are taking from the Ministry of Education for schools. That is commendable, that is very good. So, at least, the Ministry of Finance cannot be accused of taking funds from other areas and filtering the funds into the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. President, as I said, perhaps in future we would not have a recurrence of this and I do hope that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism would take cognizance of the point I made about allocating funds this late so that when the time comes, Tobago does not suffer.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Carol Cuffy-Dowlat: Mr. President, firstly, I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism for his most comprehensive and, as usual, competent presentation of today's Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1997) Bill.

Mr. President, it is, in fact, my distinct honour however, to address this honourable Senate on the increase in allocations to the Ministry of Housing and Settlements to the tune of over \$56 million. The hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism did, in his explanatory notes, give a breakdown of what this money is to be used for. However, I think it is important that the community at large appreciate the work that is being done by the Ministry of Housing and Settlements. Of the sum of over \$56 million, \$6.65 million is to be used at Almond Drive, Morvant. When we came into office the project at Almond Drive was already designed to the tune of over \$23 million. However, the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements, realizing what had happened to taxpayers' money when that contract was decided upon, decided that we must look at a redesign and renegotiate the cost of that project.

4.00 p.m.

This was, in fact, done and what we have today is the construction of 112 apartments, seven four-storied buildings at Almond Drive, Morvant which I want to point out, I think is in the Laventille/Morvant constituency. Mr. President, \$6 million is to be used to continue the infrastructural work, to complete construction of the apartment buildings and to purchase water tanks.

Couva North Phase 4: \$13 million. This is in a UNC constituency where the sum of money is to be used for the completion of all infrastructural works in 1997 and the commencement in the fourth quarter of 1997 of the construction of 50 housing units. These were initially scheduled to begin in 1998. However, because of the work that is being done by the Ministry of Housing and Settlements and its agency, the National Housing Authority—efficiency in that department and ministry—we are able to bring forward the commencement work of that project.

A little over \$29 million is to be used in the Shelter Construction Financing Facility. This is the Inter-American Development Bank Settlements and Squatter Regularization Programme. There are over 11 sites for low income earners and we are having improvements in the living conditions of over 3,000 squatter families.

Moneys based on our performance: We expect that the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance which manages this fund will make disbursements to an average 60 new beneficiaries per month with loans ranging from \$75,000 to \$100,000 for the construction of their shelter. We are able to accelerate work in this sector because, again, under the astute guidance of the Minister of Housing and Settlements, we were able to re-negotiate conditions with our international funding

agencies so that construction can now take place at the same time at which the cost of the land is being paid for. In effect, when one applies for a loan now and it is approved, one had to complete payment for the cost of the land and only then was application to construct a house possible. Now once an application is approved, loans are approved for both house and land, thus we are able to accelerate the construction in that programme.

Mr. President, little over \$3 million is needed for John John in East Port of Spain. I think it is important that I must point out that while we in this Government are on the path of constructive development, there are always elements who are trying to disturb and, probably, attempt to behave in an unacceptable manner. Citizens of this country would never allow for unacceptable behaviour. We are on the path of growth and development and will continue to do so. We are demonstrating community involvement and the Government is working closer with the people to achieve this, which can only redound to the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Community development, community involvement and Government: Mr. President, there has been quite some rumble about the John John Towers and I think it is important that we clarify what happened and what is happening. When we are through explaining what happened the then PNM government and present Opposition should feel very, very embarrassed. I think Members on the other side would then be forced to apologize to the national community.

Mr. President, when we assumed office, we found that at John John, 23 two-bedroom apartments were constructed at a cost of a little over \$300,000 per unit. The hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements, realized the advantage that could have been taken of the citizens of this country. I think it is important to note that the citizens probably realized what was happening because they did, in fact, change the PNM administration just about that time. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing and Settlements realizing and having found out that no allocations were made for those apartments—it is important that we re-emphasize this—no allocations were made for the John John apartments by the National Housing Authority. [*Interruption*] Mr. President, I heard it was earmarked. The state of a man's mind is like his stomach. We do not know what many people had for lunch, therefore we could not have known what some people might have had in their minds for the John John Towers. There were no allocations for the John John Towers.

Mr. President, what did the Minister of Housing and Settlements decide to do? We looked at the situation and decided. In truth and in fact, we hear a little rumbling again that they were supposed to be for fire victims. There is absolutely no evidence of that; absolutely no evidence that these buildings were ever intended for fire victims. What did the Minister of Housing and Settlements do then? He invited the Member for Port of Spain South and said, "Let us discuss what we must do with those apartments."

Mr. President, we had no favourable response. The hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements approached Cabinet. A decision was taken on these apartments and an offer was made by CONCACAF to acquire them. Some persons raised objections to this. Again, this being the listening Government, it decided if there are people who are saying that they are interested, give them an opportunity to participate. Maybe Concacaf was not the only party which had an interest. So what did we do? Sale of the apartment units was advertised to the general public for those who would be interested in purchasing the units. We did not even put a price on it. We advertised what it cost and only described the apartments.

I think the Member for Port of Spain South said his constituents were not aware of the advertisement. What did we do? We extended the time to give them an opportunity to participate. At the end of the day in response to the advertisements, only five persons out of a population of just over 1.3 million persons made any application for those apartments. Mr. President, one person offered \$100,000, another just about \$90,000, while another offered \$15,000 for an apartment that was built at a cost of over \$300,000.

Mr. President, what must the Government of Trinidad and Tobago do? Give away taxpayers' money? That is money which belongs to us. Government does not make or create money. The taxpayers' money is our money; we must not squander and waste it and this is what we are encouraged to do. *[Desk thumping]* CONCACAF has again confirmed its interest in purchasing the units at an agreed price which was agreed to by two independent valuers. I am certain the hon. Minister would be willing to entertain suggestions if the Member for Port of Spain South or members of the public are yet interested in making a price similar to that of Concacaf.

Sen. Dr. St. Cyr: May I be told the price in order to decide whether I could make a bid? I was told if I made a similar offer, so I must know the figure.

Sen. C. Cuffy-Dowlat: Mr. President, as was advertised, these apartments were built at just about \$300,000 for one and there are 23

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apartments. We have independent valuers and if the hon. Senator is interested, he can most definitely visit the Ministry of Housing and Settlements.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, I just want to ask. In my experience of every part of the world, government houses are subsidized but the Senator is seeming to imply that the Government expects a price equivalent to the cost of construction. I am not aware of any government in the world that builds houses and then sells at the cost of construction. So this is a rather strange position for us to be in.

4.10 p.m.

Sen. C. Cuffy-Dowlat: The conclusion arrived at by the hon. Senator may not have been very accurate. I have said that the apartments were built at \$300,000 per unit, that we did not put a cost when we advertised the apartments and asked persons to bid. I am not saying the apartments are not to be subsidized.

Mr. President, sometimes I wonder and I think members of the public also wonder, because if you view those apartments, you know for a fact that they could not actually cost \$300,000 to construct. [*Desk thumping*] I am not saying why.

Sen. Beckles: Mr. President, could the hon. Senator state what is the agreed price? She said there was an agreed price between the Government and CONCACAF.

Sen. C. Cuffy-Dowlat: There is a price. Two independent valuers have given us a price. At this point in time, I am not willing to disclose the agreed price because the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements is still affording Members on the other side an opportunity to bid.

Mr. President, the \$3 million is to be used as a revolving fund—if anybody, I ought to know about revolving funds. [*Laughter*] This money is to be used for the improvement of John John. This \$3 million is to change the face of John John. It would add to the improvement of the environment.

A firm of architects has already looked at the area and we are hoping to redevelop that area to really improve the aesthetics of the city. We also hope that we can bring the cost of those units down to prices that are affordable so that persons for whom they were intended, could, in fact, enjoy them.

Mr. President, we must first clear the area for this redevelopment to take place. We have to build accommodation. These are to be provided at Paradise Hill in

Morvant, where we are designing high and medium density complexes which will provide over 200 units. The purpose of these units is to move persons, redesign and redevelop and give them the option to re-enter if they so desire.

Mr. President, many things are happening in the Ministry of Housing and Settlements and John John is going to be an area of which every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago is going to be proud. I am assuring the national community that we are not going to build apartments in John John at a cost to the taxpayers of \$300,000 per unit. This Government would not allow that type of behaviour.

Sen. Prof. Julian Kenny would be most pleased with the next measure. The Government has agreed to spend over \$4.9 million for the construction of core houses for the residents of Demerara Road, Wallerfield. *[Desk thumping]* This Government having received the report on the poisoning in the squatter settlement located at Demerara Road, Wallerfield, Cabinet has agreed to the resettlement of the residents from the contaminated area and to the construction of 140 core houses at an estimated cost of \$4.9 million.

Sen. Prof. Kenny, we are, in fact, listening and working and I assure you, through the President, that this Government is not going to allow generations to come to suffer. That is not the only approach. Prof. Kenny is also aware of what is happening and the initiatives taken by this Government in dealing with the question of lead poisoning at Demerara Road.

Sen. Prof. Kenny: I wonder whether the hon. Senator could make me absolutely, deliriously happy by telling me that the site is going to be decontaminated.

Sen. C. Cuffy-Dowlat: As I just indicated to the hon. Senator, he will be pleased when he hears Government's other initiatives in dealing with the question of lead poisoning at Demerara Road. Let us keep something in suspense. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, the Ministry of Housing and Settlements and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are on the path of the development of this country.

I thank you.

Sen. Martin Daly: Mr. President, of course, we have no vote in connection with this Bill, so that guides one to be even more brief than usual. Indeed, we do not even have a 990 veto. Now that we have got these very valuable detailed explanations of the variations, it makes it easy to offer a few comments on them.

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First, I want to refer to page 15 of the Explanatory Note, the provision of \$1.8 million to pay the VAT on the purchase price of the assets of AVM (Caribbean) Limited. I think it is a very sorry thing that we have to find more money in connection with the Government's purchase of an obvious white elephant. Indeed, I invite hon. Senators to look at any newspaper, today, to see what is the output of AVM on a daily basis—old movies, repeats of local programmes and material supplied by various embassies some of which are advertised in a foreign language. I know it is German because I recognize “Deutsche”. This is what we have paid \$12.5 million—and we are proposing to pay \$1.8 million—to secure.

I would also like the hon. Minister to tell us—in anticipation that it is going to turn up sooner or later and this is the capital cost—what is it going to cost the Government to transmit documentaries from the German and other embassies every year? I think it is quite scandalous and I do not see how—of course, if one had a vote, one could be asked to support this. I think the Government is beginning to understand now, a bit better, at least some sections of it, this kind of paranoia to buy a TV station to keep it up your sleeve because you feel that you are being unjustly criticized. It really was a purchase marked by paranoia. It is regrettable that we have to find another \$1.8 million to support it, and I hope the hon. Minister is able to give us some idea, because the cost of running this station which is producing very little valuable output, has to be budgeted for.

Mr. President, I refer next, not to the decrease of \$150 million in relation to the airport, but the fact that we have left \$150 million in the budget for this purpose. When I look at the explanation on page 17, I note that up to the end of June, \$62.9 million was spent on preparatory activities for an airport that, clearly, is not going to be built. That is to say:

“..on clearing and grubbing of the site in preparation for the start of construction and on the earthworks for installation of drainage infrastructure.”

The Government spent \$62.9 million on that and my good friend, Dr. St. Cyr, on whom I have to rely for arithmetic, tells me that means another \$87 million is due to be spent on an airport that is stalled. I think we require some explanation of why quite so much money has been left in the budget—another \$87 million—to be spent this year on preparatory works for an airport that is stalled.

Indeed, the explanation admits that the terminal building contract was the main project element, and as we know, that is stalled. We are not quite sure who is

stalling it because I believe one of the reasons the tapes were requested of the radio stations was the suggestion by someone that the Government had not lost the case against the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, but that there were sections of the Government that won it. That is what provoked the eye of the Director of Telecommunications. It is very important to know why we still have \$87 million in the budget, in relation to an airport that is clearly stalled.

4.20 p.m.

I think it is very important to know why we still have \$87,000,000 in the budget in relation to an airport that is clearly stalled and in my opinion we have no credible explanation from the Government about what is going to happen next. On the one hand we have been told that the contract is going to be terminated and on the other hand it has not been terminated and then we hear all kinds of figures being bandied about on what it is going to cost to terminate it.

So, once more, as I keep pointing out, Mr. President, no one likes to take my advice until it is too late. We have got to give this airport a bush bath sooner or later; I have actually worked out how to do it. You can hire a crop sprayer and instead of putting the crop spraying medicine in the tank you can put the bush medicine in the sprayer and spray the whole airport and let us see if something sensible can happen. It really is absolutely amazing, we are talking about \$87,000,000 to spend on what? Preparatory works? We do not know if the contract is going to be terminated or not.

I entirely agree with what has been said by Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh about accountability. I am never going to reach exhaustion about this airport because I have to use it; but it is astonishing how each successive government gets bogged down in these airport projects and we simply cannot produce a terminal building at a reasonable cost without a lot of hoo ha. I would like an explanation about why we need \$87,000,000 left in the budget to spend on preparatory works.

Then, Mr. President, may I also point out in relation to the contribution of Sen. Carol Cuffy-Dowlath that the \$12,000,000 that was spent on AVM would have funded Almond Drive, would have funded the development of John John, and it would have funded the construction of the core houses for the Demerara Road. So, let us measure the value of pouring more money into the AVM purchase. Find somebody to take it off your hands and let them pay off the VAT.

Then, Mr. President, there is a very disturbing item concerning the Public Utilities Commission at page 30. Now, public utilities are in a twilight world

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through no fault of this Government. When we have our arms twisted by those who really control our destiny, that is to say the external agencies, you do not have to be a genius to work out that you cannot have a privatization programme for the utilities if the privatisor is going to have his rates subject to control by some regulatory agency like the PUC. So, we effectively abolished the PUC in 1994 and that is acknowledged on page 29 of the explanation. We now are proposing, in anticipation of the passage of different regulatory legislation, to spend, if I round it off, \$780,000—that is at page 30—on contracts to hire people, in anticipation that the new legislation dealing with the utilities is going to be passed.

Now, I have a problem with this. The sum is relatively small but I want to refer to it because the justification for hiring these persons is that they are “unable to deal with an issue as complex as the application from T&TEC for a rate increase which application is now before the Public Utilities Commission.” If the reason for expending the money now, even before the legislation has been passed, is to hire people including 12 public utilities analysts to analyze the T&TEC rate application, I find that very strange because the new legislation—and I do not want to be guilty of anticipation—provides absolutely no criterion as to how we are going to measure a rate increase. So, what are we going to be spending \$780,000 to do? For people to analyze an application for a rate increase to a commission that is going to be abolished and the rate increase in respect of which there are no criteria which the analysts can apply to the applications? I think this is very bad Government, to do things like this, to hire people at a time when the infrastructure is not in place, in anticipation of legislation that itself contains no guidelines. I would like the Government to rethink this question of the hiring. I do not know whether they have been hired already but I would like the Government, even if they make the allocation, to rethink whether this is a sensible explanation because you cannot analyze a rate increase in a vacuum. You have got to know what the parameters of the rate increase are which the old legislation, soon to be abolished, provides.

Now, Mr. President, finally I would like to—I would not say much about the National Disaster Relief Fund, other than I thought that some of the families involved in the airport disaster might qualify for the \$25,000 for the slurs on their reputation. Perhaps I should leave that alone.

Coming back to this question of the Government's involvement in the media through AVM. Because it has been raised I would like to associate myself with the remarks of my colleague, Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt and regret that, not for the

first time, our Prime Minister—not the personality but the person occupying the office of Prime Minister—has been treated with disrespect in a situation in which we are internationally embarrassed. I would just like to say we all have to watch our contents and we all have to watch how we treat each other. This booing thing that has started did not start two nights ago, it has happened at boxing matches, it has happened at calypso tents and whoever is not in government at the time, of course, is quite pleased that it happens and holds it up as an example of the unpopularity of the opposing side. It did not happen now, Mr. President, and let me repeat, we must all watch our contents. I say that because I notice now—it is creeping into the debate in the Senate, which I think should be above that—that people who disagree with each other describe the other party as an element. I notice that it is creeping into the debate today. That is where all this booing and disrespect starts, if we are not able to disagree with each other, however forcefully, without using this pejorative language. I think it was a disgraceful night for the country and I would like to be associated with the remarks of Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt.

Thank you, Sir.

4.28 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.58 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Nathaniel Moore: Mr. President, I feel constrained to make a contribution in this debate this afternoon. First, I want to commend, through you, Sen. Alfred on her contribution. I want the other Senators in the Opposition to take serious note of her approach and general contribution.

For one, she was not afraid to comment fairly and, I believe, impartially on the report. To me, what she said showed a certain level of independence and objectivity. In her contribution, I noticed she had two reservations which were: Why only now the increased allocations for Tobago? Her remark was, she was well satisfied with the allocation but in her view it came a little late, within the rainy season which makes it difficult to work. The other reservation was, she felt, perhaps, there was not enough dialogue between the Minister of Finance and the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly.

I would like to make a few observations, perhaps also touching on some of the ideas or concerns mentioned by Sen. Alfred. I refer to Act No. 40 of 1996, which is the legislation that has brought into being the present Tobago House of Assembly. In section 25 of that Act, we have certain responsibilities given to the

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Tobago House of Assembly. I am actually making this observation in light of the number of projects which the Senator mentioned she was happy about, that were at least brought to Tobago and to remind her and other Senators that, in fact, Act 40 of 1996 is the basis of much of this action in the budget.

In section 25 we see that the House of Assembly is:

“...responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy in respect of the matters set out in the Fifth Schedule...”

I would touch on one or two of them, but I would like to read further into the record the second part of section 25:

- “(3) For the better performance of its functions, the Assembly is hereby empowered to do all such acts and take all such steps as may be necessary for, or incidental to the exercise of its powers or for the discharge of its duties and in particular, the Assembly may —
 - (a) devise mechanisms to ensure the protection and security of property, buildings or other assets under its control;
 - (b) enter into such contracts as it deems fit for the efficient discharge of its functions;
 - (c) obtain from international donors any grant, aid or technical assistance.
- (4) Where a statutory authority or a state enterprise provides services in Tobago, that authority or enterprise shall, in exercising its duties in relation to those services, act in accordance with the policies or programmes of the Assembly...”

5.05 p.m.

During the course of the debate this afternoon, some of the areas in the Fifth Schedule were dealt with, such as the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs and Ministry of Health, which would take care of the hospitals, and the Ministry of Education which includes the curriculum.

Mr. President, to be fair, the point I am making is that some of the increases reflected are mere transfers of programmes from under one particular ministry under the Central Government to the Tobago House of Assembly. For example, from the Ministry of Health \$3 million is transferred for the construction of a

hospital; under the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, we had an allocation for an indoor sports complex and swimming pool and the construction of schools under the Ministry of Education.

Therefore, the original allocations were not as low as it appeared. What I mean is that the allocations for Tobago were originally larger than they seemed from the portion allocated to the Tobago House of Assembly for all these projects or most of them that were to be done in Tobago under different ministries.

I hasten to say that I, too, like Sen. Alfred, am very heartened about the level of allocations to Tobago. I do not think that at any time in the recent history of the Tobago House of Assembly—surely not in the experience in the life of this Assembly—have we had allocations for development of this magnitude. I must say that it does reflect the level of commitment that this Government has for the welfare of Tobago. Very often the Prime Minister or Ministers speak of Government's commitment to the development of Tobago, and to be quite frank, one can see that the sentiments expressed are actually translated in the allocations made to Tobago.

Mr. President, the apparent lateness of the allocation was observed, but the Tobago House of Assembly was aware that allocations were made for these projects in Tobago under different ministries. In all fairness, I cannot blame the Government for delaying the allocations. In other words, it is not that the allocations are late, but since they were placed under different ministries there were teething problems with transfer from one area to another which took some time with periods of dialoguing which took place and so forth. So, I cannot really blame the Government, as such, for what appears to be a delay in making these allocations.

Mr. President, I must reassure the Senate that there is a certain provision—I cannot now put my hand on it—in the Act which permits us to use these funds even though they are a little late. They would still be there for us to use early in the next season when we hope the weather would be quite favourable to outdoor construction. This is one redeeming feature in the way the allocations are made for the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. President, generally, I am heartened by the cordial relationship which exists between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly which is not based on any kind of inferiority or subjugation. We have had mutual consultation between Members of the Tobago House of Assembly, particularly the Chief Secretary, Ministers of Government and the Prime Minister himself and there are meetings with these people very often.

I do not know of any time in the past history of the Tobago House of Assembly when this kind of dialoguing was so free and almost spontaneous. We are very happy for this state of affairs, and hope that not only will it continue in the present term, but that the Opposition would learn something from this kind of relationship. That is one of the reasons I made this contribution; to draw the attention of the Opposition to the fact that they need to do that. Not only as a testimony to the fairness of this Government, but also as an admonition to Members of the Opposition that if by some fortune they should get back into Government, they would continue to understand the benefits of maintaining cordial relationships with Tobago, whether the representatives of Tobago are from within their party or not. I think any sensible government in Trinidad and Tobago, at this time, would see the need for actually working hand in hand with Tobago.

Sen. Alfred: Mr. President, I thank the Senator for giving way. I would just make one point of clarification in respect of what he said about never in the history has there been such cordial relationship between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. I must point out that there was indeed a more than cordial relationship between the then Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning and the Chairman of the Tobago House of Assembly, Mr. Denoon, to the extent that some persons were saying that Mr. Denoon was a PNM.

5.15 p.m.

Sen. N. Moore: I remember those days and what was said. I remember also something that I said a while ago—and it may be a bit invidious to repeat it—about the nature of cordial relationship and not subjugation. I do not want to comment too much upon that because, in Tobago, we knew the claim for this relationship. We knew it was not exactly as it was said. I assure the Senator that was one of the reasons why the same gentleman had lost favour with the electorate in Tobago. The kind of relationship was not the kind of cordiality that the majority of Tobago wanted. Not that we did not want a cordial relationship but we were not getting enough for the cordiality. That was the problem.

I return to the point I was making about the great benefits of having this cordial relationship with Tobago. We are sensing that people are learning in the country that the politics must change. We cannot continue this kind of antagonism and pulling and so forth. We have heard Sen. Mc Kenzie say very often that Tobago is too small for political divisions. There is a great disadvantage in breaking up Tobago into this party and that party, and when one is ready the

person is over on the other side, because, according to political behaviour, one cannot use the man on the other side.

Some time in the life of the national Parliament some major group in Trinidad may really have to depend on Tobago to operate as it ought to. This should be a sobering thought to us as representatives of the people; that, at some time, no matter where Tobago falls, some group in Trinidad may want to visit Tobago and depend on it for having a strong and useful Central Government. We see the need for this kind of relationship and we all would benefit.

We are seeing the need for a different type of politics in the country. The people need to be educated. We do not have to get at one another's throats because we are sitting on different sides of the House. That is why I like this Upper House in that although there may be differences at times, there is this atmosphere which is very reassuring. We could let it spread so that the people who come under our influence within the various parties can understand what we are aspiring to do and what the future must hold for our politics in this country.

Mr. President, as a representative from Tobago, I am heartened over the increases allotted to the Tobago House of Assembly and to the continued relationship, and we are hoping that it will continue mutually and respectfully so that we do not have at any time to force anybody's hand. Mr. President, with an understanding of the situation, we could deal with each other as equal partners so that when Tobago develops to the extent that there is an excess of earnings to pour into the national coffers, we could say that it is good that we have indeed developed that kind of relationship and that the dreams and hopes of some of the people who, in the past, have been talking about separation did not come through.

Mr. President, I thank you for this opportunity and I support the Bill.

Sen. Philip Marshall: Mr. President, may I add to the words of previous Senators in welcoming you back. This amendment to the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill is supported by considerable details. It was also very instructive sitting on this side and hearing Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat's contribution. I guess I learnt the meaning of political football. I would just like to reinforce the importance of the contributions of previous Senators, that in particular of Sen. Daly and Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh on the importance of accountability. I know the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is probably wary of me making one or two suggestions in the format of the budget appropriation.

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When the Minister presented his budget, he talked about an additional sum of money that may represent \$142 million. However, one must remember that this additional sum is made of additional expenditure on the one hand and a reduction on the other hand; that this sum should also be split between development expenditure and recurrent expenditure. In other words, we could be given a further breakdown on what are the additional net items of additional recurrent expenditure as opposed to reduced items from the development expenditure.

The reason I am making the point is that if there is a reduction in development expenditure, it is more in nature of a timing variance. We are still going to spend the money but it is that we are not spending it in this fiscal year, so there really has not been a reduction in terms of the overall spending from the Treasury. That would be a point which would certainly improve the format. We heard Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh talk about ever increasing cost overruns. What I think would add to the presentation is where certain project items cross one fiscal period to another, it would be good if we could have the cumulative expenditure and the cumulative variance, and not just see the additional appropriation in the specific current fiscal year. We would see from the life of the project, to its completion, what was the total cumulative variance. This would be good so that we could monitor what we are getting for the additional money.

I refer to certain comments raised by Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh on the report of the Auditor General in the light of the question of accountability when one reviews the performance of state agencies. The Senator raised the point; how do we deal with the issue of corporate governance?

Let me just refer to some of the points from the Auditor General: Inventories. Net provision totalling \$42 million were not verified. It does not mean that these inventories were missing. The source documents were missing and the inventories were not capable of being verified. There is also another situation of creditors of about \$15 million which were liabilities not verified because of documents missing. Another statement is that the balance in the loan from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago differed. The Public Transport Service Corporation had the Government as being owed nearly \$29 million more than the Comptroller of Accounts had as being owed by the Corporation. Why is that figure and liability overstated by \$29 million? That could be the source of deliberate error—I better not say anything before I am accused of accusing anyone of dishonesty—that could be a very important issue. Maybe, in the payments to the

Comptroller of Accounts, one could have interest being accrued from the source payer when, in fact, no interest is due on a loan therefore opening the accounts to some form of misappropriation. The point is: how do we change the question of accountability? How do we change corporate governance? I know this is one of Sen. Mark's bees in his bonnet and I would like to put forward some suggestions.

Mr. President, state agencies and state-owned enterprises control the vast majority of the resources in this country. The executive management represent the taxpayers in the execution of their functions. The Companies Act really deals with directors' accountabilities in the case of a quoted company on the stock exchange. State agencies and enterprises may therefore not come under the same ambit of directors' responsibilities and reporting in legal terms.

5.25 p.m.

We, and the Government in the broadest sense must make sure that the appointed directors to state boards and agencies and the executive management be held accountable. It is very difficult for the Minister of Finance to come here and attempt to explain any variances concerning operations over which he has no direct control. How can a Minister really be held "responsible" for explaining variances? In other words, he really has to put the history to the Lower House, to get the additional funding.

We must ensure that when we appoint persons to state boards they must understand their role in terms of accountability, and their most important function is to assess the performance of the appointed chief executive officer. Why can we not have a system for the persons who are appointed to head these organizations in terms of executive management whereby their pay is at risk? In other words, reward them when they succeed and punish them when they fail to carry out the duties for which they are responsible.

This may mean a total restructuring of the remuneration package because one can see a chief executive officer heading a major organization feeling that he is being under-paid, feeling that there is so much political or indirect interference that he may not be held accountable for the actual results. I am saying to pay them more, make them accountable and if they fail, do not renew their contracts. Establish very stringent performance benchmarks.

If one were to look at the performance of the Public Transport Service Corporation and take all these cost overruns, or unexplained variances and divide them by the number of passenger seats or miles travelled and the respective cost,

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how does that stack up in terms of how a public transport corporation should be run? How does it stack up against where one decides to out-source or privatize the operation? I am not saying in any terms that privatisation is the answer in every case; it is not privatisation, it is good management. I believe that with a better system of governance and monitoring of performance, we could have governmental agencies—because they are not market-driven type organizations—perform just as well, as long as there is the correct management. In each case when putting forward reasons for increases, we must therefore, also accompany the statement with what the expected outputs are.

When the Minister of Public Administration and Information went to New Zealand, I know that one of the lessons which he learnt in the model of governance was that when budget allocations are given to ministries, the accountability is not on the basis of what one was given, what was not spent and, therefore, what was spent and what should be returned to the treasury, completely disregarding what was actually produced.

In the New Zealand model, outputs and budgetary allowances are established for each unit of output. For example, in the Ministry of Health, the director of a major hospital facility may be told in the year which has just ended to staff the hospital with 10,000 patient bed nights and the allowable cost and budget expenditure is \$500 per patient bed night, so based on what is actually produced and delivered to the community, your allowable budget is "x" dollars, explain to us the variance based on your actual units of physical output. Instead of having a situation in our system whereby somebody could spend less than the budget allocation, but produce far less in terms of actual output and his unit cost per production could be twice that of the previous person in a previous fiscal year and he is actually congratulated for spending less and putting money in the treasury, when, in fact, it has cost the community more.

I know this is one of the things which the Government said it will do, and there is nothing more important than to demonstrate to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago clear accountability, transparency and measurement. If there is that measurement, people's perceived unhappiness, with whatever inequities they may see from their personal situation, will be removed and we would have a much clearer ability for the community and the citizens of the day to understand where the Government is going. I repeat, let us not cut development expenditure for the sake of meeting the budget. I know that the Minister of Finance has done a good job in terms of the fiscal surpluses that have been realised, and when one cuts back

one's development expenditure, the intended outputs are reduced in terms of the results in the future.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has also brought, in terms of the bidding rounds which have just been completed, significant new bonuses that this country has not seen before, I believe it is in the vicinity of TT \$500 million, which is nearly US \$100 million. In the budget presentation where we have significant differences and improvements in expectations, those favourable variances, whether they be oil prices, or other sundry moneys received from exploration activities, should be put aside so that we do not lose the whole net variance in one global figure.

I know that the question of reporting is on the slate of continuous improvement by the Minister of Finance and we do hope that the whole area of governance will proceed along the lines that I am suggesting.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Mahadeo Jagmohan: Mr. President, I also join with the other Senators in expressing my appreciation to see you back in the Senate as President. I also wish to commend all Senators who have spoken on the Bill, because I think the intention is to bring about improvement in every sense of the word. The Bill which is before us, and the budget which was presented earlier this year, have a connection; one cannot go without the other.

We observe that there were allocations for a certain number of civil service positions in every ministry and up to this day, a very important post, that of deputy permanent secretary remains unfilled in every ministry. My understanding is that none of these positions is yet filled and we are strongly advocating this for the sake of getting Government's policies implemented expeditiously, because the policies of the Government when implemented, will redound to the interest of everyone in the country.

I hope that the hon. Minister of Public Administration and Information is not holding out on those posts because it was not his, or his Government's idea. He brought pieces of legislation in the past which were by the last government and we gave it support, and we are therefore pleading with the Government, through the Minister of Public Administration and Information, and particularly the Minister of Finance to fill these vacancies of deputy permanent secretaries in all the ministries. I do not know if the difficulty is in finding suitable candidates, but a number of the persons who are Administrative Officers V can fit in very well. They are actually deputy permanent secretaries at the moment, so give them more responsibility.

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5.35 p.m.

I wish, very briefly, to touch on the Ministry of Education. It is a pity the hon. Minister is not here. The Ministry of Education has, indeed, and quite rightly so, a very large allocation with increases. I raised this matter with the Minister of Education in another place and he was very sympathetic. He said he had the idea that primary schools, financed largely by the state and managed by the denominational boards, were experiencing tremendous difficulties with respect to theft, burglary and anything else one could think about.

The Ministry of Education's allocation has certain moneys from which security could be provided for some of the high-risk schools. The Minister of National Security could surely have an input in implementing such a programme. In the high-risk schools, theft, break-ins, replacement of fittings and school stocks cost much more than it would cost to have security guards. We are advocating this strongly, Mr. President, and we hope that the Government pays attention to this.

May I make a suggestion, Mr. President? I am sure the chief representative of the labour movement on the Government Benches would agree—one may not want to implement the hiring of staff immediately for this purpose but in the short run—that employees from the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Local Government could do some kind of watchman work at denominational schools. I am sure this can work. The workers may or may not be precepted, but I am sure they could be employed as watchmen for the time-being.

With regard to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Local Government, indeed, in all the labour-oriented ministries what we observe—maybe I should say all the Government ministries whether there are daily-paid or monthly-paid employees—is that the collective agreements for public servants and daily-paid workers are due for biennial review and that biennial period has lapsed very badly. Some of the ministries and departments have not completed the filling of vacancies and the resigning of permanent cadres as is provided for by the collective agreement. Each collective agreement is the law of the land because it is structured and carried about as a result of the Industrial Relations Act. When negotiations are completed these industrial agreements are then registered with the Industrial Court and they, therefore, become part of the law of the land.

Sen. Cabrera: Mr. President, I thank the hon. Senator for giving way. Is he saying that all collective agreements within the public service are, in fact, subject to biennial review?

Sen. M. Jagmohan: Mr. President, I am glad the hon. Senator raised that because he has a genuine nexus in the matter, he is a president general of a trade union. If I said all, I am sorry, I meant to say a number of them. Because of the lack of completing the review, particularly, in the Ministry of Local Government, workers' morale has gone very low and people with low morale cannot produce efficiently and effectively in terms of work.

We plead with the Government—not for the interest of the People's National Movement but for the entire nation—to get on with the job. The Minister of Local Government acts in a way—I am sorry to say—that appears to be irresponsible. Wherever the majority recognized union agrees on 450 permanent workers of about 32 categories, and 200 regular workers in Local Government, and the date for signing the document is put in place, the Minister calls and says to throw that out the window, that is to be dealt with at another time with his direction. This is what is happening with the Ministry of Local Government. I am not talking by guess and I am not trying to inflate my ego but I should be an expert of some kind in that area. [*Desk thumping*]

With respect to the Regional Health Authorities, I do not to talk about some of the things of which the other Senators spoke. However, with respect to the workers, sometimes in the hospitals—San Fernando is one of them—those who come under the Chief Personnel Officer get paid on schedule, every 10 days, and those who come under the Regional Health Authorities, who were employed sometime recently, have to wait an additional 10 days before they get their wages. This is a very bad situation and we plead with the Minister of Public Administration and Information to listen to what I am saying; we are pleading with the Minister to step in and have a smooth flow of employees receiving their wages.

I now refer to the Ministry of Works and Transport. I am sorry the Minister is not here today. He is my good friend, we grew up in the same village. Mr. President, in order to have peace, stability and respect in the Unemployment Relief Programme, a small core of workers should be immediately declared as regular workers and made permanent six months or a year afterwards. If this is done the workers would have a kind of loyalty for that department and some of the things that take place, which are not too savory to mention, may stop. I am talking about a small core of workers—they go by regions and every region can start with a small number of 25 workers—to be made permanent. Mr. President, you know they would become unionized thereafter and that would be a nice thing. [*Interruption*] I am talking on the Bill, Sir.

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I now make a small plug in housing. The Parliamentary Secretary, the very charming lady, dramatized her contribution in a manner that is difficult to criticize. *[Laughter] [Interruption]* We, on this side, are again saying that the Government has not, up to this moment, displayed any knowledge or brought out any facts that there is a housing policy by which it is working. It is a *vaille que vaille* business, like crazy ants—develop land there; say something about squatter out there; and pay very heavy consultancy fees. The National Housing Authority and the Government can also use the expertise of the architects and engineers from the Drainage Division of the ministry—*[Interruption]* Who, Dr. Lasse? “Me eh meddle with he.” As I was saying, there are enough engineers and architects in the public service who can do consultancy work for housing in Trinidad and Tobago, if they are commissioned. Unless they are commissioned, however, they cannot proceed to do this. So when I see \$6 million here and \$3 million there for consultancy fees, that is a waste of money.

Something is wrong with the Minister of Housing and Settlements. He talks about core houses and starter houses: Where are the core houses and starter houses? Can anyone show us one of them anywhere? We want to see them. If they are good we would commend the Government, but we see none.

5.45 p.m.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements did not go to India but soon after the return of the Prime Minister—I am sorry I have to mention it in this way but it has to be said—an agency or an Indian delegation came here to give some information on cheap housing for the community. I took the trouble to go to see the display and read and study some of the literature, but 90 per cent of what they were saying was about sewer disposal system—latrine—and so forth. They did not have much information on housing and that was unfortunate; they should have told us more about housing.

With regard to the distribution process of the houses that are near completion under the auspices of the National Housing Authority and the Ministry of Housing and Settlements, why are these houses built and then locked up, gathering dust, and now looking old as though they have to be repainted? What is the delay in distributing some of these houses? I think the Government should speed up this process.

With respect to the John John Towers, they have gotten enough beating already by everybody “chooking” their mouth there. I heard some legal language just now; that there is no proof, a while ago—and when lawyers talk about proof one has to be careful because that is serious business. I am now saying there is proof—I am sure the Ministers here would see Cabinet Notes, time after time—but when the fire destroyed their homes, the John John Towers were built for the fire victims and nobody else. [*Desk thumping*] All in all I am saying, those houses must be distributed quickly to meet the needs of the people and let us stop politicking about them.

The Senators opposite are very nice gentlemen and ladies, I have no problem with that, but they are not going, you know. [*Laughter*] I had the privilege of seeing a certain white paper recently, and the author seemed to be the Minister of Public Administration and Information. Mr. President, do you know what I realized? All the policies of the last PNM Government have been put in there and introduced as though they are the work of this Government. [*Interruption*] Forging and copying are serious matters, Sir.

With respect to the Ministry of Social Development there is much we can say about social development but we have a difficulty on this side. This is because new bureaucratic red tape has been introduced. The applications from needy applicants for government assistance are being bottle-necked, they are taking much too long to get cleared, so that the very poor who are in need could get some kind of assistance. I think somebody has to bring this to the attention of the Minister of Social Development.

I raised this matter in the Senate before and we see the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives getting some extra money to do what they have to do, and we see the focus on labour and co-operative studies at the Cipriani Labour College. We made an appeal before and we again, request, appeal, beg the Government to think of the poorest of the poor, not people who are a little less than millionaires who tell you that they are poor. Let us think about the poorest of the poor and set up a branch of the Cipriani Labour College, on a permanent basis, in San Fernando to focus on labour and co-operatives. What does the Minister say to that? Do that now! If you do not do that now, you would be still telling the people from Point Fortin, Erin and sometimes from Cedros, Rio Claro and Tobago to go to Valsayn and at nights when classes are over at 10.00 p.m. they stand in the road for another two hours not knowing when they would reach home. If the Government sets that up in San Fernando—do not put it by the San Fernando Technical Institute as I

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said before, and do not put it in the Teacher's Training College in Corinth, put it in another area that is within walking distance to the bus station and taxi-stands in San Fernando and then you would be assisting the people. Otherwise, it would be *[Interruption]* I do not always hear well. Let me see what kind of body language or response I would receive from the Minister of Finance at this time.

Mr. President, I am about to end with this last point. We see all kinds of measures for different people: People in range 60 and upwards in the public service, we have measures in the budget to benefit them. Teachers got a small amount but not enough for the time being. The Government said that it is settling something for doctors but they are giving free overtime work and so forth. We are wondering now, the poorest of the poor—those who are squatters and live in shacks and those who rent a single room in a dilapidated building—why has the Minister of Finance not introduced measures in his Variation of Appropriation Bill to lower the cost of staple foodstuffs, so that those people could feel wanted and appreciated in this society. I see none of that has taken place. *[Interruption]* The Minister of Finance has power in his hands, it is not his money, it is the state's purse he is handling, but he has the power to do several things. As a matter of fact, the entire Government, Opposition, Independent and everybody—*[Interruption]* The money and the millions we talked about is not our money, it is the money of the entire nation.

I want to say when the money comes to the Treasury—Sen. Moore alluded to something similar, the natural resources of a country bring in much revenue to the Treasury and in the words of a very great man, Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, world renowned, he belaboured the point across the country—I used to listen, I was a little fellow then—that the natural resources of a country belong to all the people and must be properly distributed. When all the money reaches the Treasury then it becomes the property of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and they must be given due consideration. *[Desk thumping]* You see that Senator who is heckling me out there was a PNM Member, she had loved Mr. Manning, Mr. Chambers and Dr. Williams. Now she has fallen out of grace, look how she is heckling me. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, we know that the Minister has his technocrats to help him but he calls the shots; he can go back now and cause something to happen so the poorest of the poor would feel relieved by some kind of measure, particularly transportation, food and over-the-counter medicine that they need daily.

I thank you, Mr. President.

5.55 p.m.

Sen. Dr. Eric St. Cyr: Mr. President, I would have liked to have heard something about the \$39 million concerning Petrotrin from the affable and distinguished Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, but I do not know whether we will still hear something about that. I do know that sometimes the small numbers carry a big policy weight or policy thrust behind them. In my brief remarks, I want to touch on three issues looking at the larger numbers that came up in these appropriations and variations.

Let me begin by saying a word of congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism and to his staff. The overall picture I get is of a budget and a budgetary process which is very well in control. I want to compliment the hon. Minister on the integrity and accuracy of the budgetary process. If I may illustrate, a variation of \$142 million additional expenditure out of \$12 billion plus, that is about 1.25 per cent which is very accurate indeed; the reduction of \$162 million, just about 1.5 per cent variance there; and the increases of \$304 million, about 2.5 per cent are all, indeed, very commendable. I speak, also, with a little background of how the process works and I think that all are to be commended.

The increases of \$142 million stem largely from increases in emoluments, and my understanding of how this works leads me to say that the increase is not a genuine increase at all, since one never anticipates what a negotiated salary increase would be to make provision for it. That would be to show one's hand, as it were. By and large, even the increase of \$142 million—of which over \$100 million was an increase in emoluments—I would take as showing no increase in the overall budget. That really reinforces my point on the accuracy.

I wish to comment on two things. The first is the provision for the national disaster fund which is a new item. I think the Government is to be congratulated on this innovation. Starting with \$10 million is wise, because as it were, one creeps up on a problem with which one is not familiar, and that is good sense. I would hope that from day one, the staff and the committee put in charge would be charged with the mandate of developing an overall policy for such a fund.

It might be that they would develop in terms of the types of disasters that we have had, and are likely to have, and the overall losses. They would develop an overall target fund. They would probably work out whether it should depreciate and attach risks and so forth, but they should also monitor the nature of the losses

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and start building up an information kit that, in the next three to five years, would enable them to come up with an overall policy for a national disaster fund. They may also think of how that fund would be held, whether locally or abroad, since where one deals with small island economies, one does not want to hold one's investment reserves where they would also be at risk. I am saying that this is an excellent idea, and I want to suggest that we proceed very wisely as we develop this area.

The third point I want to make—and I do not know why I am so generous today, because it is also very complimentary—is that the decreases of \$162 million were all from the development programme. I know that the hon. Minister is very firm in his conviction that we have to get an increasing portion of the total budget into the capital and development expenditures. I was very pleased in going through the list of reallocations from the moneys not spent on the airport, to see that practically all of it went into other development projects. This is very wise indeed.

Philosophically, I wonder whether a large number of small development projects really do not have a bigger overall impact in the country than, perhaps, one large project. I do know that there is a certain amount of pride attached to certain large projects. Mr. President, I would not spoil my mood today by saying anything on the other side, but to say that I am really heartened by what I see before me today, and wish to offer my congratulations.

I thank you, Sir.

6.05 p.m.

Sen. Vincent Cabrera: Mr. President, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. I rise, of course, in support of the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation Bill before us. My close associate, Sen. Jagmohan, did give the impression in his contribution that this Government was guilty of not reviewing the collective agreements for daily paid employees on a biennial basis.

I want to state quite clearly, through you, Mr. President, to the members of this Senate, that in Trinidad and Tobago the industrial relations system is one based on law and is fixed within a legislative framework. As a practitioner myself, the law states that no collective agreement could be less than three years. In other words, there is no question of reviewing a collective agreement unless three years have passed and the maximum is five years. If two parties—

Sen. Jagmohan: Mr. President, I am grateful to the Senator for giving way. Whilst what he is saying is applicable to some situations, the collective agreements that cover all the daily paid workers in the public sector, inclusive of the Water and Sewerage Authority, the Tourist Board and all the major Ministries—Works and Transport, Local Government, Health, Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—are all two-year agreements. They become due for review at the end of two years, that is law too.

Sen. V. Cabrera: I do believe again, Sir, that I wish to stand firmly by what I have just said. I will get to what the Senator is speaking about. It is not the review of the collective agreement. The law states—and there are attorneys on your side—the only time one can go below two years is in the case of the construction industry where, because of the nature of a contract for construction, it may be less than two years, but I am certain that it does not apply to the daily-paid employees of the Government. I want to advise the Opposition that when they are bringing national spokesmen on industrial relations, they must carefully choose those spokesmen. One cannot come here and mislead the nation into believing that there is a responsibility on the part of the Government to review collective agreements every two years.

I will go on to make the statement that, if any two parties seek to change what is in a registered collective agreement, the Industrial Court will, in fact, sanction both of them. I speak, Sir, as a practitioner, there are practitioners not only on the Government and the Opposition sides, but also on the Independent Benches.

What the goodly Senator is referring to is a review which has been historically done or was supposed to be done by the ministries themselves as to how the work is going and so forth. In fact, I am advised that these reviews went by the wayside under the previous regime. It is the Minister of Public Administration and Information who has attempted to begin this process, which was promised by the previous regime with the relative unions, of reviewing the work conditions and so forth. Certainly, it has absolutely nothing to do with reviewing collective agreements.

I started my contribution by making the point that industrial relations are fixed within a legislative framework in Trinidad and Tobago, so that it is a compulsory system. As such, once one is talking about collective agreements and reviews, one is using legal terms. Therefore, one cannot review a three-year collective agreement over a two-year period. I thought I would clarify that in terms of responding to the statement which the hon. Senator made. In addition to that, to

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recognize that as far as the industrial relations system goes, in relation to the daily-paid employees in this country—and the daily-paid employees know it—they have never had it so good, in terms of the Government attempting to alleviate the problems which they had faced for years under the previous regime.

I want to go on to make some reference to the John John Towers and to ask: Should we not, once and for all, put to rest this question of the John John Towers? The former regime was in power. If, as they are saying, there was a list of fire victims and these fire victims were supposed to be placed in the John John Towers, if I were them I would have published that list in the newspaper already to prove that what I am saying is true. I am saying there is no list and they cannot publish it. No matter how annoyed they get when this side speaks about it, the fact of the matter is, they are attempting chicanery with this whole situation. *[Laughter]*

I want to compliment very sincerely, Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat for the plans revealed here today in terms of alleviating the conditions of the John John people and their housing. Many of the elements who sit on that side, I want to ask them seriously: Have you ever been into a John John house? I am not talking about the political walk-about that some of you all engage in at times. Have you ever gone into one and sat with the people? What I am saying is that trade union people have to be at all levels in the society. When I look at those John John hills and I see—at a time when man has reached on Mars and at a time when we are going into a new millennium—the condition of those people there, I wonder if the political party that was in charge of this country for years ever had the support of those people. I really wonder about that. So I want to compliment Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat. If there is, in fact, a plan as she has said, to provide proper homes for those people and to remove the eyesore, she should be complimented for that.

Some time ago there was a foreign magazine, I cannot recall the name now, that did a report on Trinidad and Tobago and they carried pictures of the people in the John John shacks, on stilts, as they called it, and many of us protested because we felt that the magazine should not have exposed that part of Trinidad and Tobago to the world. But who do you blame for keeping those people in that kind of condition for so many years? Who do you blame? As I speak here, I remember the days of the 1970s when the many spokesmen of those people were attacking those who they were supposed to attack for having people live in those conditions, and they were put away in jail for a while. I thank Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat for revealing that to us.

Mr. President, I always pay very close attention to what Sen. Daly say, but I think he was a bit unfair in terms of Channel 4. Besides some of the old movies—and I myself like to watch the old westerns—I find at times, for those of us who do not have cable, that when one wants to get something educational to look at, when one does not want to see either violence or some sort of matrimonial breakdown which is now glamorized as the soaps, one can only turn to Channel 4 where one can see something very educational and uplifting, something which one can ask one's children to look at. So although it is limited—and I join with you in asking the relevant Minister to seek to improve the viewing period and what is shown—many educational shows are shown on that channel.

I want to conclude by thanking the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism for his clear and informative presentation. I think by reading the document one can really get an understanding of what the state is trying to do, how the state has attempted to spend the moneys of the people, the taxes they have collected and how they have attempted to deal with that. In so doing, it is not fair to give the impression that the Government is either not carrying out its responsibilities as far as collective agreements are concerned, that the Government's administration in housing is not worthy of a lot of comment or to castigate the Minister of Public Administration and Information that all he is on is propaganda, because I think that Channel 4 is giving national service and we should all note that.

I thank you, Mr. President.

6.15 p.m.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. President, I am not rising to speak as yet so I do not want anyone to get worried.

Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until the conclusion of the matter now before the Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) BILL

Sen. Selwyn John: Mr. President, I will be very, very short. Let me just clarify a statement made a while ago. Sen. Jagmohan might be correct in saying that the Government lapsed in the review of the contract of work between employees and

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themselves. This, however, does not have anything to do with the collective bargaining arrangement nor with the contract of employment of conditions of work and wages of these workers. What has happened—and Sen. Cabrera brought it out—is that because of the lapse of the government which went out, of which Sen. Jagmohan is a member, workers over the years have the problem that the establishment is to be reviewed biennially. Part of the collective agreement requires that, which the then government failed to honour.

Sen. Cabrera is correct. It is only when the UNC/NAR Government of national unity came into power that we were able to get a government that honoured the part of the contract to which those workers were entitled. Yes, we do have some feet dragging on it; some Ministers have interfered. What you have been talking about when you discussed the establishment, you replaced workers who have retired and filled vacancies and now everybody wants to get their child, friend and everyone into posts and employment, and that is a problem.

Sen. Mohammed: Just on a point of clarification. Perhaps the hon. Senator would like to name those Ministers who may have interfered.

Sen. S. John: As I was saying, Mr. President, what has been done since then is an insistence of this Government that every arrangement and contract that is laid down between the employer and the trade union must be honoured. We are gradually fulfilling that. In a matter of 17 months we have almost completed those reviews. Subject to some little problems of getting some areas settled, the matter has been addressed.

Mr. President, on the John John housing issue, a few people want to consider the fact that we have not yet talked about the list of people who were to be allocated those houses that the government which was in power at the time built and was considering its allocation. A list was prepared and should and would be in the National Housing Authority, directing that these are the people who were to get these houses. None of the fire victims were included on that list. We are hearing all sorts of things and we will continue to hear because the politics of it now is that nobody talks about the fire victims. You must now make it available to the people in the area who have been requesting that they be given a chance to acquire those houses. We are now hearing that only five applied.

Let us be honest with ourselves. Let us examine that list. I admire Minister Humphrey on this. Why not use the resources so that far more people would benefit from what the arrangement would be? Sell it at the price you could get—

people have made bids for it—and use that same money to develop the area. I tried on two previous occasions to rise on a point of order when Senators were repeating themselves but then I realized that for the Parliament to raise some of these issues is not really a “true-true” Parliament. Six people in Woodford Square cannot comprise a parliament. I refrain from rising on a point of order but the next time we hear it, Mr. President, you might have to rule me out of order because they cannot repeat themselves continuously like that, go in a so-called parliament, raise an issue and then come here trying to get an answer. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I thank you.

Sen. Penelope Beckles: Mr. President, I turn to the debate dealing with the Finance Bill and I would like to raise two very serious issues. First of all I want to join with Sen. Dr. St. Cyr in complimenting the Minister for that Head dealing with the disaster preparedness fund. I say that because Sen. Moore wanted to suggest—because it could only be a suggestion—that it is not customary for us on this side to compliment the Government for anything. The Senator wanted to suggest that because Sen. Alfred made positive comments in relation to the allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly, that she had an independent mind. I would just let him know that those of us on this side who speak in relation to this Bill, do so in a collective effort and with a collective view. [*Desk thumping*] On several occasions, several of my colleagues and I have complimented the Ministers on many things they have said, but it is also our responsibility, to make constructive criticisms when necessary and we will continue to do so.

As I recall, when the Minister of National Security presented the bill to deal with the fire service amendment, it was a very good bill and we all complimented him. In that bill I had actually suggested that based on the contribution of the Minister of National Security, it would have been advisable to consider looking at the possibility of actually having such a fund. I mentioned the instances in Tobago and Piparo and I complimented the Minister for setting up that item.

Mr. President, the other thing I want to look at is the whole issue of social development as mentioned by my colleague, Sen. Jagmohan. I mention this even though the Minister of Public Administration and Information was saying this is not a budget. I imagine that the purpose behind what we are doing today is to enable certain ministries requiring additional allocations for government projects to have these variations to ensure that those things are completed by the end of 1997.

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When we were in government one of the things we had mentioned was the whole issue of looking again at the financial year. I mention that again, Mr. President, because when I looked at the variation with the explanation as it relates to that of the local government, I think it is a very good and instructive one. I have looked at the figures and the only comment I would make in relation to that is that I think it is quite good to have variations to deal with the areas of drainage and sports. What I have difficulty with, in relation to the area of local government, is that the Minister of Local Government has been giving specific directions to various corporations when those moneys have been allocated by the Ministry of Finance in relation to what projects should and should not be done.

6.25 p.m.

Mr. President, I think we are here agreeing with these several variations. With the passage of the Municipal Corporations Bill under the NAR government, as I understood it, the purpose of that bill, which is now an Act, was to give the regional corporations and boroughs greater autonomy and flexibility so that they would have an almost absolute say in terms of how money allocated to them would be spent.

We now have a situation where the Minister of Local Government is actually writing letters to various corporations telling them which roads can and cannot be fixed. I would imagine that, in the wisdom of the various local government authorities, they would be in the best position to decide which of their bridges, roads and sporting facilities should be fixed. I think the Minister of Local Government should really stop getting involved in the day-to-day running of these organizations after moneys have been allocated to them.

I really believe that ought not to be his function. Yes, he is the Minister of Local Government and I think he ought to have general say, but I think specific dealings in the running of the corporations ought not to be had.

Mr. President, the last area I want to mention is in terms of the whole philosophy of the budget that was initially presented and this variation today. In the *Newsday* of August 6, 1997 it was indicated that consumer prices are up in 1997. I quote from that article:

“Consumer prices as measured by the Retail Price Index increased by 0.6 per cent in the first quarter of 1997...”

In its Quarterly Economic Bulletin, the Central Bank noted that on a year-on-year basis the rate of inflation accelerated to 4.3 per cent at the end of March 1997

compared with 3.5 per cent in the 12 months to March, 1996. Higher prices in the food, drink and tobacco groups were mainly responsible for the increase in the general price level, as each group increased by 1.3 per cent.”

The article went on to say:

“...the Producers’ Price Index increased by 0.8 per cent in the first quarter.”

Mr. President, in the context of what we are discussing today, I thought it was relevant to make reference to the fact that it is an area with which we have to be seriously concerned. I imagine in the context of the variation and the hon. Minister’s statement in his budget, he did mention that uppermost in his mind was the improvement of the quality of life for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and some sort of equitable distribution in terms of our assets.

Whilst the Government is saying that it is doing an excellent job and the economy is growing—certainly in the context of poverty, when Prof. Julian Kenny tabled a Motion in this Senate in relation to poverty, the Government almost insisted, that that Motion be amended for us to take note of its initiatives, but then I looked at an article in the *Daily Express* of Wednesday, August 6, 1997 headlined: “Sick woman sleeping on pavement for two weeks. Health Ministry: No ambulance to move her.”

Mr. President, as I mentioned before, the issue of poverty is not a political one and I think as a country, whether it be Opposition, Government or Independent, we cannot feel proud living in Trinidad and Tobago knowing that a pregnant woman has been lying on a street of Port of Spain and that nobody wants to move her. I will read a portion of this article. It says:

“A woman who appears to be pregnant and very ill has spent the last two weeks lying by the side of the road, next to the Gillette Building on Independence Square, Port of Spain, just across the street from the Ministry of Health.

The woman, who gave her name as Annmarie Joseph, insisted she was not a vagrant and gave her address as Maracas Village, St Joseph.

She explained that she was returning home after being discharged from the Port of Spain General Hospital, but the pains in her legs became too much so she got some cardboard and stayed on the pavement.”

The article is so distressing, because it goes on to say that up to late yesterday, several efforts were made to contact the Red Cross and the Ministry of Health. As

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a matter of fact, the *Daily Express* said it requested and made efforts to speak with the hon. Minister of Health and they were told that he was in conference.

Mr. President, whilst we are discussing the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, we really ought not to feel happy about a situation like this. It is becoming extremely prevalent. I think about two months ago a man was actually rotting under the bridge, close to the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives.

I endorse several of the comments made by other Senators in relation to the whole issue of poverty and social development and I do hope that having made this statement today, when we read or listen to the news tomorrow, some sort of alleviation of this special situation could be dealt with.

As I said in the beginning, particularly in relation to the disaster fund, I compliment the Minister of Finance for that, but I do have some concerns in terms of some of the areas where we have had decreases. I do not want to speak about health and other issues, because I think they have been well addressed by several of my colleagues on this side and the other side.

I thank you.

Sen. Prof. John Spence: Mr. President, given the lateness of the hour and for another reason which I would describe, my comments will be very brief. I apologize in advance, if they are somewhat disjointed.

I received these papers at 12.15 this morning. In fact, when the doorbell rang, I was already in bed and I had to get out of bed to open the door and gate to receive them from the police. Could we have a different method of distributing papers from Parliament? You may ask why am I addressing this issue in a debate on finances. I suppose it would cost money to do this. I understand a carrier system is being contemplated so may I urge that the hon. Minister of Finance provide the financial resources so that a different system of distribution of Senate papers, other than through the police, may be put in place. My justification for mentioning it here is because some money is involved.

With those introductory remarks, may I say that another point struck me in general terms in listening to the debate so far, and I refer to Senators Jagmohan, Beckles, and Cabrera, because they touched on social issues. It is very difficult to address some of these individual variations without a background of what we are trying to achieve.

I listened to an interview with a gentlemen from Singapore on TV4, and I think it was also repeated on the government programmes on the other television stations. His repeated point was that we must have a vision. In fact, he was asked by the interviewer what makes Singapore successful. His comments and advice were that you must have a vision of what you expect to have in your society, and their vision was for a certain degree of progress by a certain number of years, and they have been able to achieve that, basically because they had the vision.

6.35 p.m.

What we do not have, which some of us have urged repeatedly in the past, is a discussion on the socio economic strategy of the Government. We tend to introduce these topics during debates like this or on the budget and that of course is not really appropriate because it detracts from the business at hand, that is looking at the details. Let us urge the Government to have a debate which might come in the form of a motion from the Minister of Finance which may read “that this Senate approves the Government's strategy for socio economic development.” In so doing perhaps you would have to set out the strategy and then we can discuss it.

In response to Sen. Cabrera's proposals for the improvements in the poorer parts of Trinidad and Tobago, praiseworthy as it may be, let us clearly understand that what has been happening over the last 10 to 15 years in Trinidad and Tobago is the rich have been getting richer and the poor have been getting poorer. It is a problem with which every country has been grappling. Basically, I think it is because the economic strategy does not take account of this discrepancy that is occurring and nobody has yet found a way of dealing with it except, perhaps, countries like Singapore. We do not really address ourselves to it in that way and it seems to me perfectly clear that with all the good intentions in the world, unless we address that issue of the structural problems in the economy of these countries and the global village that is causing this continuous dichotomy or divergence between the rich and the poor, we really will go on talking about these problems such as the lady who has been on the sidewalk for the last few weeks and giving examples like that. We really will not be touching the basic problems.

Incidentally, on the score of the person on the sidewalk, it seems to me very, very sad. I agree that the Government should do something, that the hospital should do something, the Red Cross should do something, but what is equally sad is that all the people in Port of Spain have seen that person lying on the sidewalk and nobody has offered her a ride to Maracas Valley or wherever she lives. So, let

us face it, we all are guilty of this. Something is wrong with our society that allows that to continue to happen.

Mr. President, if I could turn to one or two details of the Bill. As I said, having gotten this document rather late, my comments will be rather *ad hoc* and I will just touch on those issues which struck me forcibly when I was able to go through the document rather hurriedly. And this refers to the explanation on the variation of appropriation.

With respect to the Tobago House of Assembly changes, I agree entirely with Sen. Moore that, in fact, basically these are not increases to the Tobago House of Assembly but merely expenditures which have been taking place in Tobago anyhow but for which the responsibility for the expenditure has been transferred to the Tobago House of Assembly. It does seem a pity that it has taken this length of time for that discussion to take place which will allow the transfer and then for them to get on with it. But there is one item here which I think needs a bit more discussion and I hope the hon. Minister will respond when I raise the issue. That is with respect to the tourism action programme. All the other issues are rather construction problems basically so that really, to my mind, it does not matter much whether it is done by an individual ministry or by the Tobago House of Assembly. But when it comes to the tourism action plan, clearly, this is an operational budget of \$6.55M and must involve policy.

Now, what I would like to hear from the Minister is whether this transference means that in some way the policies that would normally have been dictated to by his ministry, because the Minister of Finance is also Minister of Tourism, will now be those policies of the Tobago House of Assembly; and how will the policies of the Tobago House of Assembly with respect to tourism mesh with the policies of his ministry, particularly in regard to the \$6.55M that has been transferred in that regard. I believe that is a little more than just change in supervision of construction; it must involve some aspects of policy.

Perhaps I should not comment on the housing in John John. I have it marked here as one of the things I have a view on but given all the controversy it might be better not to give it. Perhaps I should just say, Mr. President, that it really is very sad that the apartments continue to be unoccupied. I would just ask this question: Are we not possibly treading into a dangerous path if we move people from a different income group into that area? If we are looking for persons who can afford to pay \$300,000 for an apartment—perhaps that value has now escalated because property value certainly has gone up in the last 18 months, so perhaps it is

more like \$400,000 when an independent valuator does it as has been done—are we really going to have peace and harmony in that community by moving people from a higher income group into that area? That is one question. The second question I think I asked when interrupting the Parliamentary Secretary in her contribution was: Do you not, in fact, subsidize housing every where? Is the issue of the very high cost not a separate one to that of providing housing? In other words, if those apartments should have cost \$150,000 and they cost \$300,000 then that is an investigation into inefficiency or corruption or something but should not affect the decision with respect to providing the housing where it should be provided as appropriate.

Mr. President, again going into detailed items it struck me along the way—I must say I have to be sympathetic to the position taken by Sen. Daly with respect to the purchase of AVM. Even though I accept the point which is being made with respect to the quality of the programmes, especially compared with some of the other programmes which you get certainly on cable and, to some extent, on the two other channels.

Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) to some extent is forced, although it is government owned, to programme itself the way it does in response to the fact that it has to be commercially viable and therefore it has to look for sponsors for programmes and those sponsors have certain requirements. That answer is always given when you ask, why do you not have different programming? Well, what I think one has to do is determine whether it is more expensive to buy AVM and run it separately or to subsidize programmes on TTT. In other words, to say to them: “A certain number of programmes we, the Government, will pay for. You do not have to find advertisements for these” and therefore the programmes can be put over on TTT.

Incidentally, originally TTT had another set of channels, what has become of those? Do they still exist? And if so, why can they not be used rather than setting up a separate station and a separate studio? So I do feel that questions have to be asked about the cost of purchasing that television station and also of running it.

I have to comment on a certain personal embarrassment with respect to this television station because I understand that they keep running an old programme, 10 years old with a portrait of myself when I, hopefully, looked a lot younger than I do now. The population now may be getting a bit fed up of seeing Spence every couple of weeks on this programme. So, certainly they should get some new programmes as well. That probably applies to some other programmes that they run no different from my own.

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I must say I was a bit worried to see the reasons given for the Ministry of Health Sector Reform Programme being behind time. Let us just look at the reasons: signing by the Ministry of Finance of the Memorandum of Understanding. There must surely be something more than just that. There must be some explanation as to why they have not signed; it cannot be just the signing. The hiring of staff. Why cannot staff be hired? Have the advertisements gone out or is there some deeper reason? Hiring of the consulting firm; signing of the contract with NIPDEC; hiring of the health sector reform advisor; engaging an approved firm of independent accountants. All these seem to be things which can be done in a couple of weeks. They do not seem to me to be very weighty reasons for the programme not having progressed. I hope that the hon. Minister can give a little different explanation for the delay in that programme.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. President, I would like to make a comment on the increase in tuition fees for students to the University of the West Indies who are nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. I certainly support the idea of delaying the increase to 20 per cent by the provision that is made here, but certainly I would make the point that I am not at all in favour of the increase from 15 to 20 per cent. I think, honestly, if we look at the world today, as I was saying earlier on, and think of the fact that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and people in the poorer brackets are finding it more difficult, therefore, to educate themselves, and the only escape from poverty is this education, then what are we doing by increasing the fees to university students? In fact, quite honestly, we should not be charging fees at all to university students.

There is the dilemma of the economic system that one is running, having a certain effect, and then one is not alleviating that effect by providing the means for the population to be educated in order for those sections of it who are disadvantaged to escape from poverty. In fact, we should be having grants for people to go to university. I have said this before.

We spend \$6 million a year on scholarships for bright people who can probably afford it because many of them come from homes that could afford to pay for their children's education anyhow. So here we spend a substantial sum of money, giving national awards. Give them a medal; give them a day with the President, or what have you. We spend the money, giving those people scholarships; sending them all over the world; the best brains we have for the six top winners, and then there are

other people whom we charge 20 per cent fees to come to university—17 per cent, then in the future, 20 per cent.

Surely that cannot be right, especially in view of what is happening in the world. At a time when the incomes were more evenly distributed and more people could have afforded, okay, but there is less justification now. So certainly in this regard I would have been much happier had the Minister of Finance provided the resources to reduce the 15 per cent to 10 per cent or to zero. I think, really, we have to be extremely careful. That is why we need to have policy discussions.

A comment was made about the policies in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information being the previous government's policies. At least I must say in the case of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources there was no such pretense, because the policy document that I was given, the present White Paper, is dated May 1995. So clearly there was no pretense as to when that was formulated. But I criticized it in 1995 as well. So let us have some discussion on policy.

Sen. Mark: On a point of clarification, Mr. President. I do not think Sen. Prof. Spence should allow my goodly friend to mislead him on the question of our White Paper. There is no linkage between the past administration's and this new document. In fact, the last administration never produced a document. What you had was talk and talk. So I want to set the record straight that there was no duplication. It is a new initiative by this Government.

Sen. Prof. J. Spence: Mr. President, through you, thank you very much, hon. Minister. I certainly withdraw my comment in view of your explanation. Of course, the comment I made about the White Paper on Agriculture is in fact valid and I can show you the document if you are interested.

Sen. Mohammed: Mr. President, just on a point of further clarification. Only last night I was privy to information given by the former Minister of Public Administration who actually referred to specific Cabinet notes that had those bits of information relating to the White Paper. So it is untrue for the hon. Minister to get up and deny that what is in the present White Paper are not matters that were dealt with previously and that were in the pipeline.

Sen. Prof. J. Spence: Mr. President, I am sorry to have introduced the subject. I really just meant it as an aside. I withdraw it. I certainly do not intend to pursue it. *[Interruption]*

Mr. President: Please allow the Senator to continue his contribution.

Sen. Prof. J. Spence: I would like to comment on the improvement works at the Queen's Park Savannah. I think this is praiseworthy. I would just like to ask the question as to whether this means further construction on the savannah, because it is not very clear to me, and you know some of us have rather strong views about whether we are doing more by way of constructing in the savannah—this is at page 27—especially as it says, to facilitate National Carnival Commission's shows throughout the year.

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs did have some idea of a road right through the savannah, from Jerningham Avenue to All Saint's Church, so I would just like to be reassured that these improvements do not include that sort of development because I certainly would not be very happy about it.

Finally, I would like to comment on the Ministry of Tourism's additional allocation at page 31 of the document on Explanations, with respect to the air service between Trinidad and Tobago. Incidentally, this reminds me, I would just like to make a comment—and I am sorry that Sen. Moore is not here, but he did make the comment about the Government in Trinidad, in his reference to the discussion between Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. He did refer to the Government in Trinidad and the Tobago House of Assembly. I think we ought to be very careful every time we are referring to the Government in Trinidad, to refer to it as the Government in Trinidad and Tobago, otherwise it gives the impression that Trinidad has a government and Tobago has the Tobago House of Assembly.

I might just, as another aside, ask that the forms that we are given for immigration be changed so that one can write one's citizenship as Trinidad and Tobago. The problem is that the space is too small, so of course, everybody writes, Trinidadian, except myself, I must say. I am very careful to take up two lines, saying, Trinidad and Tobago. But could we please have the customs and immigration forms revised so that at least we can say what we are, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

With respect to the allocation for facilitating flying from Barbados to Tobago, could we please facilitate flying from Trinidad to Tobago? I tried to get to Tobago a few weeks ago and it really was unbelievable, the difficulty in getting a flight over to Tobago and back. Eventually I got some help from Tidco. If I were going for a vacation I would love to go to Tobago, but quite frankly, it is easier for me to go to Barbados. I can get a flight at any time; I can get back at any time; there is no hassle.

Surely we have to do something about the flights between Trinidad and Tobago before we talk. I am surprised that if the Government's permission were necessary, that permission would have been given for Air Caribbean to fly to Grenada and Barbados and all over the place and the bridge from Tobago to Trinidad is not properly serviced.

First of all, you can never telephone through to the Air Caribbean office in Port of Spain. I had people in the THA in Tobago trying to call to see if they could assist with flights, but they told me the line is always busy. I had to go to Piarco to try to book the passages, and then, of course, when I could book there, because I could only go after working hours, the people whom I wanted to see at the THA in Tobago could not be available on that day, so I then had to return, because you cannot telephone through to the office. Surely at least they should demand that they have a certain number of telephone lines in the Air Caribbean office, if they have the monopoly for flying from Trinidad to Tobago, especially as this item says: "Marketing of Domestic Tourism." That means people holidaying in Tobago, and certainly they are not going to be encouraged to do that under the present circumstances.

Mr. President, if I seemed to have been critical of certain items, I would like to go back and support what Sen. Dr. St. Cyr has said with respect to the way that the Minister of Finance manages the income and expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago. I have absolutely no quarrel with the way he manages the outflow and inflow of funds. As Sen. Dr. St. Cyr said, it is excellent. My difference, perhaps, is with the overall policy. I think that is really why I keep saying, we must have a thorough discussion on that, and since we only have Private Members' Day once a month, it would be much easier if it could come as a motion from the Government, to approve their policy and then we can have a thorough discussion. I think that we would be able, perhaps, at that stage, to go further than just saying, "yes, it is very good accounting. Congratulations. You are an excellent accountant, but let us now discuss the social and economic policy."

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Dave Cowie: Mr. President, it is my privilege, after a rather lengthy respite, to have this opportunity to address this honourable Senate again, albeit on a temporary basis. I would seek, respectfully, to limit my contribution to two particularly sensitive areas which have engaged the attention of our colleagues on both sides during the course of this debate.

6.55 p.m.

In fact, the first is to make reference to the tradition of difficulty and hardship, in respect of the Ministry of Health, having been aptly described—if I may quote my colleagues—in the most understandably medical terms, namely, ‘endemic, chronic and afflicted’. The reallocations into and out of this sector are reflective, in my respectful submission, of the most careful consideration and advisement. We on this side fully intend to upstage and displace that tradition of hardship and difficulty. It is not a question of appropriation or variation merely, but one of approach.

Indeed, the debacles that have affected that Ministry historically—in fact, they are a feature to which successive administrations, principally those which have derived their existence from the party which now occupies the Front Bench on the other side, are no strangers whatsoever. In fact, their familiarity with this sordid state of affairs is, perhaps, what has bred a measure of contempt for any meaningful action being taken on the part of anyone else, or, being taken by themselves during their dispensation.

Suffice it to say that the most conversant of these former dispensations with the health sector problems was led by someone whose tenure, unfortunately, ended with his demise in office. If we can recall, he was actually, and actively being beset by marching militant nurses shortly before his last sitting in the elected Chamber of this honourable Parliament. Such was his distress at the demonstrations with which he was confronted approximately 16 years ago, I believe, that this might have expedited his departure in an ambulance; if I recall correctly.

Mr. President, in my respectful submission, the then incumbent regime lost its leader in very dire circumstances, and at a time when the health sector was on the boil—if I may describe it as such. This dispensation’s leader, firstly of business in this House, as well as several of its permanent and temporary constituents—and most formidably, if I may say so myself, the Prime Minister of this present Government—are past masters of the art and practice of industrial relations. They are not likely to be either deterred or put off by any measure of industrial action, disruption or diversion.

In fact, the very last incumbent government’s regime, from whom my colleagues on the other side’s Front Bench have been salvaged—or I should say from the wreckage of which they have been reconstituted—up to their displacement in 1995, continued to preside over an unfortunate scenario in which

over-zealous management administrators seem to be confronting medical doctors at a purportedly professional level.

We would all recall the impasse that occurred between the Port of Spain General Hospital's administrator and Dr. Neville Jankie and the San Fernando General Hospital's administrator and Dr. Trinidad. I do not know if it was geopolitically inspired, but it certainly was very diverse in its incidence, both in north and in south.

What has apparently taken place is that perversity has been rife, mischief has been rife and political ignorance has been rife of all. These incidents, cumulatively, have been a basis for chaos in no uncertain measure. What causes all this to stand out even more conspicuously is the fact that health is one of the most consumer-oriented ministries. So, one cannot but note the dichotomies that we have been the victims of.

This current administration has therefore sought to grasp the nettle firmly and fearlessly, nor will it default in its duty to the public by recourse to half measures. Now, in the context of industrial relations, joint conciliation is clearly preferable to compulsory arbitration, but certainly the reckless endangerment of human life—without encroaching on a *sub judice* matter—is preferable to absolutely nothing.

What is currently underway, therefore, is that we are seeking to iron out the kinks and the crimps and to rationalize the anomalies that have been encoded in a shoddily-thought-out legislative framework enacted by the former government, the regional health authorities' legislation. We must unfortunately, sustain some of the pangs of that regime's lack of conscience and, hopefully, we are now experiencing the final agonies of that regime's dereliction in that area.

Now, on a parting note, as I depart from the question of health, and in response to my colleague, Sen. Beckles, I must say that the viciousness of that administration has not only been the agent but also the host of the human despair, dereliction and degradation to which she referred. In fact, that kind of treatment has been meted out on a massive scale and the principals among the victims have been their own supporters. That kind of cruel and inhumane circumstance is precisely what we are about the business of dealing with. It is that inhumanity out of which this dispensation would seek to extricate the society.

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[SEN. COWIE]

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Indeed, if I may say so, it is a credit to the full extent of the population that has refused to endorse a political preference, in terms of my friends on the other side, that they themselves have refused to follow that party into political vagrancy.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed: Mr. President, I would just like to join my colleagues in welcoming you back to the Senate as President. My intentions this evening were very noble indeed, when I saw so many top-ranking members of the UNC's executive sitting in the Senate here today. I intended to pay them a very special welcome. However, after listening to the very vicious contribution of the Deputy Political Leader of the party that is presently in Government—who knows one day he can be Prime Minister of this country—I am taken with trepidation, as a certain individual said many years ago. He used the word “vicious” and it certainly is appropriate to describe his contribution this evening.

7.05 p.m.

It has been bugging me in recent times that every time a comment or a criticism is made in this country, members of the United National Congress point fingers and blame the People's National Movement. If the rain falls too heavily, the PNM is to be blamed for it.

Notwithstanding that, if I may get on with my contribution this evening, which is to deal with the Variation of Appropriation Bill, we have heard much from so many Senators with respect to this particular piece of legislation that is before us. I myself have just a few brief remarks to make with regard to some of the proposed allocations under this particular Bill.

When I look at the explanations which have been offered, I see an increase in allocation in the sum of \$3,200,000 for the Ministry of Works and Transport. That particular allocation is in respect of the reconstruction of the San Fernando Jetty and development of the harbour front. We on this side appreciate the developments that have been taking place insofar as our energy sector is concerned. I know for a fact that up until 1995 when the PNM was in office, many initiatives were being taken with respect to bringing Trinidad and Tobago closer to our neighbour, Venezuela. Last week we were fortunate to have present in the Senate the Minister of Foreign Affairs whom we had not seen for some time.

I made the comment about him going underground since the OAS fiasco, as my colleague has put it. We are gratified indeed to see that only this week the

Venezuelan ambassador returned to Trinidad and Tobago. We hope and pray that indeed this will be an indication that our relationship would continue and the very many projects which were on stream will also continue. I make this comment especially in relation to this particular allocation which deals with improvements to the San Fernando Jetty.

One of the initiatives that I know for a fact was being pursued was the twinning of cities in Venezuela with Trinidad and Tobago, moreso in San Fernando. We welcome the plans to make improvements with regard to the jetty and the harbour front. In making those improvements however, I raise the issue of improvements which were being planned with respect to Harris Promenade. A significant amount of attention had been paid by the former administration, and there were plans afoot to refurbish or rebuild the Harris Promenade and make it similar to the Brian Lara Promenade, so that San Fernando would have really been upgraded. I know the Chairman of the United National Congress, who is sitting as a temporary Senator, would welcome any move that would improve the city of San Fernando. I ask whether those plans will be on stream as well.

Mr. President, I join with those Senators who have commented on the allocation of funds for the Ministry of Public Administration and Information in respect of the acquisition of the AVM channel. Nearly every week when I speak in this Senate I make the point that I do not have access to cable television and, therefore, I am stuck with channels two, four and six. Maybe, it is my timing that is bad but I am sure, like so many others in the society, we have had enough of the propaganda. When one puts on one's television it is propaganda and more propaganda. Maybe, it is my bad timing but whenever I tune in to my television set I am always tuning in to either the Minister of Works and Transport or some other Minister in some other part of the country. I know this is their thrust and emphasis with respect to governing Trinidad and Tobago; public relations is really high on the agenda. I say this in the context of the opening remarks the Minister of Finance made that this mid-term review is about shifting priorities. We thought if the Minister were shifting his priorities, he would really have shifted and kept them in line with what he said when the budget was presented in December when he spoke about a total quality nation and about putting people first. My colleagues have made their remarks insofar as the social services are concerned. Very little attention is indeed being paid to this particular area.

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Without being partisan on this issue, governments in the past have paid their price for disregarding this very important sector in our country. We need, and I urge this Government to please focus more attention on these social services.

My colleague referred to the situation with a pregnant woman on the street. Two nights ago I was passing along St. Vincent Street and just opposite the Twin Towers, one could see three or four persons sleeping in front of the Twin Towers. How can a Prime Minister sit on the 17th floor and there are citizens lying on the streets night after night? These are the issues that anybody who is in power should focus on, to alleviate the plight of these persons in need.

There is another comment I would like to make about which so much has been said already. We see that there is a decrease in the allocation to the Ministry of Works and Transport in the sum of \$150 million. This stems from the airport infrastructure development programme. This is indeed a very thorny issue. We know the history behind this particular project. Sen. Daly made the remark about the need for a “bush bath”.

Under the PNM administration there were many hiccups and problems. In fact, under the PNM administration there was a Commission of Enquiry which resulted in the stopping of the actual project. Prior to the PNM demitting office, it is a fact that things were put in place for the continuation of this project, which at that time in 1995 would have cost about US \$72 million. It was just a question of getting on with the contracts and with the works. Lo and behold, the Government changed and for months one did not know what transpired behind the scenes and only to be told some time in September of 1996 that a task force was going to deal with how to proceed with this particular project. We know that earlier this year there was in fact the Deyalsingh Committee which was appointed to look into it.

I distinctly remember hearing the hon. Prime Minister making a statement about where the chips fall they may lie. When the report was actually presented the entire population was led into believing that some decisive action was going to be taken. Today, we are left with more questions unanswered, and there are still many issues to be resolved with respect to this airport project. I join with our Leader of the People’s National Movement in calling for a public commission of enquiry to investigate this airport project.

The report has suggested that there are many issues that still need to be investigated, and a previous speaker mentioned how taxpayers' money is being

used. Now is the time to get the answers to the burning questions so that less taxpayers' money would have to be paid in the end.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. President, when the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism was dealing with the national disaster relief fund at the start of his contribution, he made a remark to me in passing about giving me a package to go to Montserrat. I find it so insensitive of him to make such a comment because it shows that he is already looking at ways and means of making money out of the plight of the poor people in Montserrat who have experienced such a tragic event, or maybe, it is just his nature. He does not care. It is so insensitive. The Minister also made a remark sometime ago that he never took a vow of poverty. This shows a high level of insensitivity and callousness and it is regrettable to hear him make such remarks. To compound matters, whilst he was making his contribution, he could not even remember whether it was an earthquake or a volcano which took place in Piparo, and they talk of caring for people when so many have been suffering. It only shows it is just lip service, talk and more talk, but I wonder how much he really cares.

Mr. President, I turn to the area of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs with an allocation for works at the Queen's Park Savannah. I remember just recently we dealt with a matter with a contract being awarded to do work there, which was referred to the Public Accounts Committee and we have not been hearing anything on that particular matter. I just wonder who will get this contract to improve the savannah. While I am on this issue of the savannah, two nights ago, I was at the savannah when this very unfortunate episode in the history of Trinidad and Tobago took place and I agree with Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt and Sen. Daly on their remarks about the booing of the leader of the nation in such a forum. This is another clear-cut instance where those on the other side are quick to point fingers and blame the People's National Movement for instigating that kind of incident and I, as a Member of the PNM, wish to put on record that as far as I am aware, the PNM as a political organization has had no involvement in what I consider to be a very spontaneous reaction. The Government should look at itself and I say this in the context of Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt's comment that there is need for education, because the example should come from the top and our leaders should be the ones to do so.

I was there, and it was most unfortunate that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago would seek to make remarks about those who are divisive and those who have their self-interest to protect at such a gathering. It was not appropriate.

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To point fingers at us when, as far as I can tell, it was a very spontaneous reaction that I witnessed, and it is not that I, or the People's National Movement condone it, but Mr. President, they must look at themselves.

I distinctly remember a few months ago there were celebrations taking place at Fyzabad and if I am not mistaken, I saw a television shot with the wife of no less a person than the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago booing on a platform. If the example does not come from the top, how does one expect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to behave in a manner that is being suggested that they do? Our leaders have to take stock and I am making this appeal, because this is a Government that has spoken so much about national unity. It is mere lip service because whenever they open their mouths they are causing more polarization and divisiveness in our society. I say this in the context of the grants to improve the savannah because this is a recent incident which took place there, and I wish to put on record that the People's National Movement had absolutely nothing to do with that, it was spontaneous. PNM leaders in the past had been booed too, so there is need to take stock.

In respect of the Ministry of Tourism, Sen. Prof. Spence made some comments with which I tend to agree with regard to the initiatives to be supported in 1997, and the need to focus on our air transportation between Trinidad and Tobago and Air Caribbean's service between the two islands.

Mr. President, it took me five days to get a confirmed flight to go to Tobago tomorrow, and I know of persons who were able to get flights but were not sure of their return. I know of other persons who have attempted in desperation, to get a boat ticket to go to Tobago, and I was shocked to hear that the Panorama which used to take six hours is now taking eight hours because only two of its engines are working.

The UNC is in Government now, but regardless of who is in Government, transportation between Trinidad and Tobago is a thorny area and we have to put our collective wisdom together and see how we can arrive at some formula to resolve these problems. If one has to get a head of cabbage, or a pound of tomatoes in Tobago, one has to depend on the shipment that has to come from Trinidad and it takes many hours to get to Tobago. We sympathize with those who have to go through that, but we really hope that some immediate attention would be focussed in that direction in terms of improving the transportation link between Trinidad and Tobago. How can we talk about boosting tourism internationally, when I, as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago cannot get to Tobago easily? It is

hypocrisy. We are going to spend millions of dollars to attract tourists and these basic infrastructural matters are not attended to.

There is one last issue with which I would deal and that is the marketing of domestic tourism. Mayaro is a place which is very close to my heart, I have noted the point already, but I wish that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism will focus some attention to that area. There are a number of school children who are on vacation during this July/August period whose parents look forward to taking them to Mayaro where they can spend a week or so of the vacation period. In recent times, there have been reports coming out of Mayaro of a spate of criminal activities going on in the area, and I wish to make this plea for some increased patrol there and I urge the Minister to look at Mayaro as a place to be marketed both at home and abroad.

Thank you, Mr. President.

7.25 p.m.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. President, I did not think, having been in the other place presenting this very Bill, that I would have still been here at this hour. But, to me, it has been a very interesting day. It has been a long day, but as I said, a very interesting day. I thank all Senators who made a contribution to this Bill.

Let me state very clearly for the records, that whilst there is a perception or some thinking among some Senators that there is no vote on the Bill, in the true sense, certainly this Government listens. As Minister of Finance, I have taken pains to be very careful to listen to the comments made on both Benches, and in particular I paid very careful attention to the comments made by the Independent Senators.

Clearly the question of a social economic policy is of vital importance to us; the way we present our information. May I state—if Senators would give me a second to blow my own trumpet—that I have taken pains to make sure that there are at least 32 pages of explanation. I must apologize, Sen. Prof. Spence for the late delivery, but you will understand that this was only finalized on Monday evening very late. We have attempted to give sufficient explanation to make the debate fairly lively, and to make sure that people understood, in clear terms, what we are trying to do with respect to each head.

Let me also state that I may have miscommunicated somewhat. What I am attempting to do today is to regularize our development programme in terms of having the opportunity—a few months more experience with it—to re-order

priorities and not to change them as such, but merely to say that those projects which look as though they are going to need a little more funds, would get more. Those projects which look as though they would not need additional funds, we would reduce them by that amount. So that re-ordering our priorities do not necessarily mean that we change our approach to the capital budget or that we have sacrificed the capital budget. What we have done is said, for instance, the airport project would not need so much money, so let us reduce the amount of money from there and spend it in areas where we know we would achieve much more.

In a sense, it is a clear attempt by Government to push the capital programme much further. In addition to that, I am also saying here that I need some extra money for the recurrent budget, and the amount I need is exactly \$142 million. As a general statement, therefore, you would recall that when I presented the budget I indicated that we hoped to realize a surplus of about \$269 million and what hon. Senators are seeing here is the possibility of a reduced surplus from \$269 million by \$142 million to, roughly, \$127 million.

I cannot give any firm undertaking that I would achieve anything better, but I can assure this honourable Senate that my intent is to continue to curtail recurrent expenditure as far as I can. Without being able to make that commitment, I will say that my own objective at this time is to seek a surplus at the end of the year of over \$200 million. As I said, I hope to achieve that if I can cut the recurrent expenditure and not the development budget, hence my need to come here and say I need to shift money around from different ministries. I am reducing some and increasing others.

Having said that, therefore, and having hoped that the explanations given have been adequate, I will now attempt to address some of the issues that have been raised on an individual basis.

Sen. Mannette raised the question of health. I think that the Government has clearly demonstrated that it is prepared to tackle issues head on. We do not, necessarily, want confrontation, we do not want conflict but we are not going to move from it. However, we need to resolve these issues. We have done that in every negotiation we have done. Incidentally, the reason I am here asking for more money is for precisely what Dr. St. Cyr has said, that I did not want to telegraph where we are coming from, obviously. In no form of negotiations is one going to say: "Let me put money in the budget." Then people would say: "Well fine, we want that, plus more." It would completely compromise the ability of the Chief Personnel Officer to negotiate in good faith.

I think there is one major negotiation to be completed which is the public services; we have finalized with the teachers, police, fire and prison services, as I have said. In terms of health, because we regard health to be so critical, we have set up a tripartite arrangement whereby the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Administration and Information and the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives are meeting tomorrow morning with the respective unions and all the stakeholders, to ensure that we find some solution to the problem taking place at the San Fernando General Hospital. We do not want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to suffer, health-wise, because of conflict that seems to be coming about between the doctors and the Government. We are anxious to settle and we are hoping that we could demonstrate our good faith by meeting tomorrow morning in an atmosphere that would, hopefully, bring a conclusion to that problem.

Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt talked a bit about Servol. This Government has long recognized the good work that Servol has done. As far back as in the presentation of the budget I said to Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt: "I cannot do it now, but I undertake that somewhere during the mid-term I would look at it again and if I could afford it I would do it." I met with Fr. Jerry Pantin myself and I know the kind of work that is being done. I have been given some ideas about the areas in which the Servol work is being done. Senators would have an opportunity to see the number of centres that they have opened—I do not seem to find it immediately, but I know that I have been provided with some details as to some of the Servol centres. I am sure that members of Servol are going to be quite pleased to be able to get additional funding so that they could continue the work that they are doing, particularly with respect to the adolescent programme which allows them the opportunity to work very closely with youths; to take them in and keep them off the streets, to train and develop them. On page 25, there are 11 specific locations given.

As I said before, I know the work they have done is very good. As a government, we are committed to the role that NGOs play and we feel that rather than government having to do this work, it is more cost-effective for these NGOs, who have a proven track record, to be given the work. It is in that context that I come here to ask to give Servol an extra \$2.723 million so that they can meet their obligations and honour the money they asked for. Hon. Senators should bear in mind that they had asked for that as the original request this year. So in essence, all I am doing is topping up what they were given so that we could meet their original request.

I do not want to get into too many details on the next item that Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt raised and that is the question of the treatment meted out by certain sections of the society. Mr. President, I want to assure Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt that I was there too and I do not want to pass any judgment as to whether it was a partisan or pro-PNM crowd, I would merely tell you the facts as I know it. I was there when the Leader of the Opposition walked in and that particular section got up and “rayed”. That was by accident; that was a spontaneous reaction from a certain section of the crowd, who are not partisan. Right? I was there when the Master of Ceremonies announced every single dignitary. There was not that kind of roar for the President, the visiting President of Ghana, whom I thought deserved it because he was not provoking that kind of spontaneity. However, the minute the Leader of the Opposition was mentioned it started again. It was not a partisan crowd. Right? *[Interruption]* I was there!

Every speaker who addressed him—because all the speakers who were there, including the Prime Minister, recognized his presence. But every time his name was called, this same section of the audience raised an uproar. And it was not a partisan crowd. I agree with you. It just happened to be spontaneous. Somehow or the other the Opposition leader who brought his own people got a spontaneous applause. Would you not agree? I am not passing any judgment, I was there. If it was not stage-managed or arranged, it was the best spontaneity I have ever seen since Cecil B. De Mille. *[Laughter]* But, believe you me, I am not going to say it was a partisan crowd, I leave that up to your judgment. Seeing that we both saw the same thing, I think that the Opposition leader is better than Cecil B. De Mille. He really could do it.

7.35 p.m.

Sen. Alfred talked a little about the Tobago House of Assembly and I am glad that my colleague who has left tried to correct some of the notions that were given. We are quite happy to work with the Tobago House of Assembly. I need, quickly, to put on record, some of the chronology of events that took place as to what brought us here to do what we are doing now with respect to the Tobago House of Assembly.

I presented the budget here before the Tobago House of Assembly Act, 1996 had been passed. At that time, I came to both Houses of Parliament and I got expenditure with current and capital approved by different ministries, including the Tobago House of Assembly as a separate heading. The Tobago House of Assembly Act came into being on December 9, or somewhere around there, and

that attempted to give a little more financial independence to Tobago for it to be responsible for its affairs.

In the meantime, moneys had been allocated to different Heads in different ministries that really pertained to the Tobago House of Assembly. I am seeking now—because it is the first opportunity I had to come to Parliament—to move it from these Heads and put it back under the Tobago House of Assembly. That does not mean that the moneys were not given to it or that it is being directly given to it late so that it cannot spend it, as Sen. Alfred suggested. What has happened is that it was residing under those Heads and I now have the first convenient opportunity to move it from those Heads and put it under the Tobago House of Assembly. So it is not a question of a late allocation, it was merely a convenient form of doing it previously and it is merely following what the Tobago House of Assembly Act is seeking to do at this time. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, had those activities started within the Ministries? Because if the dry season had come and the money was allocated, it is only the individual ministries which would have started the work in those various areas. If not, why not?

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I have to assume Sen. Spence, I really cannot tell you with any degree of certainty that they have all started. I have to assume the fact that they were not reduced or removed—remember I said that this is a reordering of priority and I have to assume that they were all started and there is a very good prospect of them finishing before the end of the year, hence the reason for moving it from the various ministries and putting it in the Tobago House of Assembly. To my mind, it is just an accounting convenience, but I would assume that they would have started the different sectors, such as health or agriculture, but I merely mean moving the money from agriculture and putting it in the Tobago House of Assembly.

In practical terms, we would have assigned that money to the Tobago House of Assembly Act or the Tobago House of Assembly for action but it would have come out of those different Heads. For me, it is more convenient to put it back under Tobago so when it is spent, it is easy for us to know that it was at the Tobago House of Assembly. I can only make the assumption, it may very well be that all was spent or most of it and that these projects had started.

The AVM purchase seemed to have attracted some comments. I want to assure this honourable Senate that we did not buy AVM because it was up for sale and

[HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

that Government should just go into the business of owning more media. When we looked at the AVM assets and some of the policies and projects we want to pursue, particularly, in respect to distance learning, the AVM assets had a particular fit. We felt that with the purchase of the AVM assets, we could certainly pursue our own policy of trying to get distance education and have people learn without necessarily having to leave their own homes. In other words, we would use television as a means of educating people in terms of either formal or informal education. Whilst we have not quite determined exactly how it is going to operate, we do not plan to operate this as a commercial television station. It is a plan to use that together with looking at the Rudrinath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. There may be a role for ICN or there may not be. Certainly, the Information Division is going to be—we are trying to put it together with the Ministry of Education and the Ministers in the Ministry of the Prime Minister and have an opportunity to push this distance learning forward using those assets. We could not pursue our distance learning without those assets, and we also felt that if we allow these assets to go into the wrong hands and we cannot get access to it, by the time we are ready to put our programmes in place, we would have to go and re-acquire these assets in any case.

[Interruption]

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, I apologize again for the lateness and so forth. I hope that some of this which you are now stating is going to come into being in my Motion on Tertiary Education and would be displayed for us to comment on.

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I would give the undertaking to make sure that someone makes some statement on this. I am not the person to give the policy. I am familiar with what is being done merely because I have taken the pains to understand at Cabinet level, precisely what we are going to do with these assets. It was through nothing more than a mistake, or that we forgot to include the cost of value added tax and that is why I have to come back and ask for the question of the value added tax

The question of the airport project balance was also raised by Sen. Daly and I would like to raise a little point about that. We have another five months in the year in which we hope that we could get the airport project started. No decision has been taken yet as to precisely how we are going to unstick it. I used Sen. Daly's words, because he thinks that it has been stalled and can go nowhere. We had to reserve some balance of funds there if we had any hope to be able to settle between now and then. It is not going to be frittered away. We are going to ensure

that we hold ourselves accountable for the process by which we are going to get it. If there has been some money already spent in a project of this size, one must recognize that all the design and engineering fees would have had to be paid up front.

We all know that even to design a house, you need some money up front with which to pay for the design fees for engineering, architecture and so forth. There has been some fees paid and some work done as described here, in terms of the grubbing, scrubbing and the preparation of the land and so forth. I can give the undertaking, as I said, that if we can unlock this one, at least I would have had some moneys reserved. Let us think about the adverse situation. If I had said that we reserve no money for it and we found a way to do it, then we would have been stymied because we would not have had any allocation reserved for that.

Sen. Daly also asked about the Public Utilities Commission increase. I got a little confused with Sen. Daly's comment that we are going to be undoing the Public Utilities Commission, so do not give it any staff and we are going to have a new Regulated Industries Commission. I am not too sure if I understand and appreciate the difference between one and the other. I do know that one is going to replace the other.

I also know that there is an application before the Public Utilities Commission to have a rate increase for T&TEC. I know that the previous administration had wound down the operations of the Public Utilities Commission so much so that they have no staff to entertain this application. Therefore, what Cabinet has decided to do, is to allocate some moneys for some staff so at least they can get the process started. There is certainly some basis under which they entertain these applications. I assume that if we get these policy analysts at least they can start analysing the data presented to them by T&TEC and if it is that during the transition, the Public Utilities Commission is done away with and the Regulated Industries Commission takes its place, these people would automatically go to the Regulated Industries Commission. I do not understand Sen. Daly's point that there is not enough in the law or in the proposed Bill to suggest how it is going to be done, but I would assume that the Regulated Industries Commission would have the same powers, duties and functions as the Public Utilities Commission, or maybe even more.

Sen. Marshall had thought that we had not given sufficient detail. If one tries to read the explanations for variations by themselves, one probably could get very confused. I would suggest that it has to be read in the light of all the other

schedules given and if it seems to have confused him, I am very sorry about that. Just to summarize in two lines, I am changing some moneys from some ministries in the capital programme by reducing those and increasing those in other ministries but by the same amount, that is, \$205,432,174. In other words, the total amount being reduced comes up to \$205 million and the total amount that is being increased is the same amount. I am also asking this Senate for the provision of additional funds in the recurrent expenditure by \$142 million. That is basically the two things I am asking for this evening.

7.45 p.m.

I was rather pleased to hear the Senator talk about accountability. As the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, I take my responsibility for accountability among the various ministries very seriously. So much so that I have had discussions with both the Minister of Public Administration and Information and the Prime Minister with a view to seeing if we can analyze the Auditor General's report. I know some of it sounds 'wishy washy' in terms of not being able to find documents, but I am more concerned about the fact that we get value for money. It is something I have been very strong on as the Minister of Finance, that we do get value for our money in terms of spending the public purse.

Both the Minister of Public Administration and Information and myself will be getting together very soon to analyze this report to see if there is any true meat in it. If it is just a question of accounting records, that is easy to address. If it is carelessness and negligence, or if it is fraud perpetrated on the Government or the public service, we will deal with that seriously and harshly.

Sen. Jagmohan talked about the Deputy Permanent Secretary. We are pursuing the line, but we have done it in accordance with the strict rules of the public service. It has gone to the Director of Public Administration (DPA) for implementation, and we are taking the pains to ensure that we put the best possible people that we can. We have had a report from the DPA recently that shows where they have reached with this issue. We are hoping to have the people selected and on board before the end of the year. It is not that we are not pursuing it.

Let me thank Sen. Dr. St. Cyr for his very kind comments. I am certainly going to try my best to continue to provide sufficient information. If there is any way we can improve on the quality, either in terms of presentation—I really do not want to confuse people by giving them too much information, but to give enough explanation to each Head, literally, so that we can sit and understand how we will be going about achieving our financial and economic objectives.

I was really pleased to hear Sen. Prof. Spence comment that he would have liked us to debate a social economic policy and it is something I will give further thought to, particularly in the line of preparing for the next budget. I understand his concern about the national disaster fund, in particular. It does not make sense having funds here and then here is destroyed, because the funds which were meant to help restore the country would also be destroyed. I am not sure if the funds are large enough for us, but when we get to that stage, we will consider having these funds held outside. If it is a very serious national disaster, at least there is something we can count on from outside which is held in reserve to help us start the process again.

As I said, I give the undertaking that we will not sacrifice our development programme and we are hoping to achieve our macro-economic objectives in light of what we set for ourselves. We are certainly not going back to deficit budgets. We are committed to having surpluses. We are committed to meeting the social objectives that we set for ourselves, in terms of making sure that our budget addresses those who are least able to take care of themselves. It may not always span out the way it seems, but I can tell you, we are committed to having a minimum percentage of our budget each year, allocated to the social sector and those who need help the most; like Sen. Jagmohan said, "the poorest of the poor". We are committed to that and trying to assist.

I will welcome, incidentally—and I make this in a very sincere form, if I can—any comments that any Senator from the Front and Back Bench may have with respect to proposals on the budget. I will welcome them and undertake to entertain them carefully. If it is affordable or something that we think we want to pursue, as long as it does not run counter to our own policies, I would be happy to take it on board.

On a final note, I think I need to clear up the question of Queen's Park Savannah. This expenditure has already been incurred. The Queen's Park Savannah created some problems when the Independence Day parade on August 31 came around. The front section of the forecourt had to be removed because it blocked the view of those in the back and they could not see the parade. When it was time for the parade, the forecourt had to be removed, and when carnival came around, the covering for the forecourt had to be put back, because it is one of the most principal parts used for carnival shows.

Two things have been done here. We are trying to improve on the quality of the seating—I think this is mentioned here—and we have redesigned the front. I

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[HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

think I am addressing Sen. Prof. Spence's concern about the road. This figure is merely payments outstanding to people, where they have redesigned the forecourt and raised it a bit. Therefore, there is no longer the need to take it down and put it back up. It has been arched a little bit to bring the water down and run it off the side. They have also changed the seats. All of this has nothing to do with running any road through the Queen's Park Savannah, or any contract that is given to friends. I have no idea who got those contracts. This is being done by me on behalf of the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs.

Mr. President, with these very few words, I beg to move that the Bill entitled "An Act to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1997", be now read a second time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 63, I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed, That the Bill be now read a third time and passed.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. President, before moving to adjourn this sitting, may I inform fellow Senators that we would be proceeding on recess, either on August 12, 1997 or August 19, 1997. I would like to alert all fellow Senators that we are going into recess until October 3, 1997, and our last sitting ought to be on Tuesday, August 19, 1997. As I said, it could come before, but definitely, the final sitting should be on August 19, 1997.

Sen. Prof. Spence: When do we break the session?

Hon. W. Mark: On November 20, 1997. Mr. President, I would also like to advise fellow Senators that we are going to proceed with a Bill entitled "An Act to make provision with respect of the Scheme relating to Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters within the Commonwealth and to facilitate its operation in Trinidad and Tobago and to make provision concerning mutual

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assistance in criminal matters between Trinidad and Tobago and countries other than Commonwealth countries". We will also deal with a Bill entitled "An Act to amend the Statutes Act, Chap. 3:02". This will be on next Tuesday.

Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, August 12, 1997 at 1.30 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.55 p.m.