

SENATE*Tuesday, December 30, 1997*

The Senate met at 10.03 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I anticipate another late sitting today and we will, therefore, cater for three breaks: lunch 12.30 to 1.15 p.m.; tea, 4.30 to 5.00 p.m.; and if we go beyond 10.00 p.m., as we think, then supper at 7.30 to 8.15 p.m.

PAPER LAID

Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 1996. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung)*]

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[Third day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [December 29, 1997]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.***Sen. Prof. J. Spence:** Mr. President, could I ask how much time I have used up?

Mr. President: You spoke for 23 minutes yesterday so you have 25-plus minutes left.

Sen. Prof. J. Spence: Mr. President, I was trying to make the point with respect to the general macro-economic situation. One factor which seemed to get less consideration than others was the rate of exchange and I felt that we should somehow solve the problem that seems to put us on a merry-go-round of increasing reserve requirements and interest rates and then having to reduce them again. The Minister, in his presentation, said he would rely on other market instruments to solve this problem other than reserve requirements, but a week

later, of course, we see the Central Bank again increase reserve requirements. I would be grateful if the Minister could amplify on these other instruments and indicate how he thinks they are going to solve that particular problem.

With respect to savings, I am a bit in disagreement with the emphasis put on savings alone. It seems to me that savings in itself would not solve the problems, we really should be talking about savings and investment. I am interested in seeing the figures which indicate in relation to Gross Domestic Product, what level the present investment is disaggregating investment of external sources, foreign investment and local investment. I was at the Economic Association Seminar recently which suggested that our level of investment was 15 per cent. Unfortunately, that is put on investment over Gross Domestic Product but it did not say whether this was local or total investment. I suspect it was total. It means that if our savings rate is 17 per cent and local investment is 5 per cent, a small proportion of the local savings is, in fact, going to investment. We really need to look at that issue rather closely.

I suspect that, at least, a substantial proportion of local savings is held in interest-earning accounts in the bank. It has been suggested that we should remove the tax on these interest rates in order to encourage more savings but, again, it depends on what is done with those savings. I have had discussions with bank managers on this issue and their position is that we cannot use those back deposits for long-term investment because they are short-term savings and, therefore, they can be withdrawn at any time. The fact that they continue over a long period at more or less the same level or an increasing level does not seem to affect the issue. It seems to me that is another problem that should be addressed. It is not outside the realms of our wits to solve that problem.

Could the Government give some form of guarantee to the banks that if they use these short-term savings and long-term investments and investments go wrong, that in some way Government could step in and rescue them from such situations? The problem is that as long as investments do not go into long-term savings they are used by the banks to lend for consumer spending and, again, that puts pressure on the rate of exchange. That is an issue with respect to savings that we do not address. We just say the level of savings should be 25 per cent. Twenty-five per cent what, to use on consumer spending in the future or to invest in productive enterprises to earn more foreign exchange?

Earlier on I mentioned the situation of poverty which we are all aware of and certainly the philosophy of the budget is well on target with respect to the need to

address poverty. Certainly, the measure given by increasing the old age pension, though not quite enough, was good. They are really palliative measures, they address the symptoms and not the cause. It seems that all over the world our new market-driven economies are struggling with the problem that the system seems to have a built-in structure that causes an increase in poverty which we cannot solve. In a small place like this, surely we should put our minds on how to solve the problem in the longer term.

Part of solving the problem is being able to define the extent of the problem and that is why sometime ago we were discussing the Bill which was passed before the Beijing Conference in order to ensure that the contribution of women to the Gross Domestic Product was assessed separately. I am interested in having passed that Bill and I felt at the time that this was all a public relations effort for the Beijing Conference, that Trinidad could go to the conference and say we have passed legislation because nothing has been done.

Here we have another budget and, again, there is no disaggregation of the contribution of women to the Gross Domestic Product—unpaid work done mainly by women. I was able to get attached to that piece of legislation, that the Government should hold periodically, a minimum of every three years, a household survey. That too is part of legislation which no doubt we would just ignore. Unless we do that household survey we really would be not in a position to determine exactly the level of poverty and the structure of the poor. Dr. Mahabir, in the Economic Association Seminar, disaggregated them into three categories: the transient poor as we refer to them, the middle category and then the more chronic poor who seem not to be able to get out of their situation at all. That household survey is extremely important.

Another issue to address, what we refer to as the transient poor—people out of work and hope to get employment shortly—is unemployment insurance. I understand that the UNC manifesto in 1995 suggested that they would look at unemployment insurance. I have not heard anything about that in the last three budget presentations or, indeed, in between so, perhaps, we should hear something about that as well. Certainly, this is one of the ways of addressing transient poverty. Basically what we need to do is look at ways of increasing production, both to address the rate of exchange and the question of unemployment and poverty. That means production outside of the energy sector.

I was really impressed with the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries' contribution. It scared me a bit because it seems to be saying that although oil

reserves are increasing, we have substantial reserves of natural gas and we are diversifying the energy sector outside of oil into natural gas. That is more independent of the world market prices so, in effect, we would be putting ourselves against changes in the price of oil. That is good for us in the short-term but in the longer term, unless we knew that favourable situation to diversify out of natural gas as well, our grandchildren would be facing this problem that we have suffered from periodically. We pay lip-service to that but I do not really see the substantial efforts. Discussions take place in other countries as to what level of government intervention there should be and the big thing now is that the state must get smaller and the private sector bigger. I do not think that we have reached a situation that we can avoid state intervention in a substantial way on different matters.

10.15 a.m.

I would refer to a suggestion made by Sen. Dr. St. Cyr in 1987 when we were in the midst of our crisis. Dr. St. Cyr at that time, suggested what the government should have done was to call in 20 of their most successful export manufactures and ask them what is needed to double their export potential. What can the Government do, what concessions, what incentives, what removal of bureaucratic constraints and so forth? Let us concentrate on increasing your productivity because you are already there, and then carry the others along with you. Quite frankly, I still believe that approach is what is needed. We need to have a more personal, direct contact between the Government and individual entrepreneurs, those who are successful, to see what they are doing and so forth, to get them moving. During that period and before, Sen. Dr. St. Cyr was pressing the view that services was the area that we should get involved in to gain in the real world. He was 20 years ahead of his time, I suppose.

With respect to trade, much emphasis is being placed on Latin America, and so it should be, because that is where we are geographically; but what about India and China? I was talking with Lloyd Best recently and he raised this point and I think it is certainly valid. The markets in India and China are so vast that the production of Trinidad and Tobago is an absolute drop in the ocean compared to their imports. Surely we should use the historic links which we have with India, certainly to develop the possibility of markets there which could absorb any production that we could think of making in the future outside of the energy sector, and the same with China. We have links with China.

I was quite interested some time ago to be told that a Trinidadian Chinese who migrated to Canada was sending money back to his village. I assumed this was Toco or Moruga, but not a bit of it. It was a village in China where his parents came from. So even in that small community there are these links which people exploit and certainly in the case of China, there is much international support that we can give them which they need at this time, which could be bartered for a market for our goods. This means that we have to further our initiatives on the part of the Government than our private sector may be doing. We still do not have a private sector which shows that initiative. As I mentioned last night, the private sector's solution to the rate of exchange problem is to say the Government must fix it or the Central Bank must fix it. They must put more money in. Where is the money going to come from for the Government to fix it?

With respect to funding for all these various things that one may have discussed, I still continue to be opposed to the debt forgiveness of Guyana with no exchange equity. Why did we not exchange for large stacks of concessionary land to take timber out of their forest for use and development? If there is going to be any further debt forgiveness for Guyana I am against it—from the beginning.

We should have never found ourselves in the Paris Club agreement which means that any time they make a decision to forgive we have to forgive. Perhaps, the Minister should say whether this is so or not.

Another mention in the budget with which I have a great deal of interest is that of a community college. I have renewed the private Members' Motion on tertiary education so we will be discussing this again shortly, I hope. In the meanwhile I would just like to say that this has been mentioned but nowhere has there been any amplification of it from any of the Government speakers. I hoped that the hon. Minister of Planning and Development would have amplified this, but he did not.

I just got hold of the contribution of the Minister of Education in the House and he does not mention it at all. What does it mean just to mention the college? If this means that there is going to be a new institution set up under NIHERST, then I think that is an absolute waste of money and the \$7 million could be best put into other uses. If it means that we are going to look at our old tertiary educational system as I have suggested, and rationalize and integrate it, then that is a different matter altogether, but nobody has said that. What is the point mentioning that you are giving \$7 million and the Minister of Education and Minister of Planning and Development making their contributions and not saying anything about it? I hope

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that when we have that debate we will be able to explore that fully. My own position is that we should have a technical university.

What will happen is that the graduates of that institution will still want to go on to the University of the West Indies. Unless we construct it in such a way that it is attractive to young people—that is not to say that we must be offering university degrees only. In fact, a technical university, if set up, would have a very limited offer in its university level. We would have the whole range of tertiary level activities, certainly in the vocational side. Do you know there is discussion going on in the UK now of the sort of degrees that should be offered by the universities and they are offering a university degree in all sorts of areas that have not been offered before. They are even doing a nodey degrees. Nodey is the child's character in the United Kingdom. The academics say they are Nodey's degrees. The point I am making is that in many countries—the United States long ago had degrees in many things. You can do a degree on the steelpan in the United States which you cannot do in Trinidad and Tobago. If you have your own institution in Trinidad and Tobago as opposed to a regional one, you might be able to use more initiatives in the sort of offerings that you can make.

Mr. President, I do not want to say too much about agriculture because I have a motion on this which is coming up, I hope, in the not too distant future. I wish to respond to one or two issues which came up in the Budget and indeed, in the contribution of Sen. Tota-Maharaj.

The School Feeding Programme has been mentioned. I am fully in support of expansion but I really feel we have to do it in a comprehensive way and not just to add a little bit at a time because, by doing it in this way, we do not achieve the real objective of giving a shot in the arm to the farmers to produce towards the School Feeding Programme. I would like to see full expansion of this programme.

Earlier this year, the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources asked Prof. Kenny and me to sit on a committee to look at possibilities for the School Feeding Programme which, of course, we did very readily. We recommended that a programme be drawn up by a consultant on a plan of action; not another study, not another proposal, but a plan of action for implementing that programme. The emphasis was on the plan of action. We suggested that another US \$100,000 would be needed for this sort of activity. Apparently, the Government could not find the US \$100,000 for this facility. Quite honestly, if you cannot find this money to set up a school feeding programme in order to stimulate the agricultural production, then you pay lip service every time you speak to the

importance of the agricultural sector. I really think that is the limit. Instead of which the programme was given to NAMDEVCO to draw up this action plan. Prof. Kenny and myself met with the chairman of NAMDEVCO and he was to report back to us in a month. That was nine months ago, so forget NAMDEVCO, and let us be serious about what we want to do. Let the Minister of Finance find the money to employ somebody or some firm that can do the job and set up a proper school feeding programme which would feed back into the farming system.

With respect to the incentives programme which was being expounded by the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in the lower House and here last night by Sen. Tota-Maharaj, there are two matters I wish to begin with. First of all, there is not much that is new in that incentive programme. It is very similar, with minor changes to the issue of bringing water which I think is important. I welcome that but by and large it is the same incentive programme. To come to this Senate and to say here is a proposal which has not yet gone to Cabinet. What does that mean? It is a farce. It means nothing at all because without knowing whether the Government has made these proposals as part of its policy, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the parliamentary secretary are saying to the Parliament these are proposals which we do not know whether our own Government of which we are a part, is going to implement. They should never have brought them if they were not yet approved.

When one examines them now more carefully some of them cannot be approved because I do not think any thought has been given to the fact that there are conditionalities for the IDB Agricultural Sector Loan. For example, there is a cap to the subsidy that you can put on rice, yet one of the proposals is to increase the subsidy on rice which already has a cap. How are we going to increase the cap on the total? That means we are paying less to our farmers. If we are increasing the price per kilo then we have to be allowed to pay it in only kilos. Honestly, I am all for subsidy. I have said this repeatedly and I think the fact that we have to remove subsidies is a pity but, nevertheless, one subsidy that I have always said repeatedly in this Senate is too high, is the subsidy on rice. What we are doing here is propping up inefficiency which we are now going to increase—and that is a small farmer production—and rice is not the sort of crop that can be proceeded with on five-acre lots of land.

10.25 a.m.

Rice is a large scale crop and this has been proven in Trinidad. Caroni (1975) Limited did it and then people went into the Nariva Swamp. Unfortunately, that

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created environmental problems. Nevertheless, in principle, they took the technology Caroni (1975) Limited had shown them and applied it on a large scale. Of course, they made much money because the price they got for the rice was set with the small farmer production which was more costly. They got it both ways. They did not pay any money for the land and they capitalized on the rice subsidy. Why are we talking about increasing the rice subsidy?

I would like to see the justification. When we say these things we should give some justification and say how it would be managed with the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB). Are we going to accept the loan or alter the conditionalities? In principle, I agree that incentives should be given to the agricultural sector. It is extremely important to look at the price of the end product. That is why I have been suggesting a hidden subsidy through the School Feeding Programme. That would not get us in trouble with the agencies because we would be doing a social service by paying a higher price to our farmers.

I think we should look at the proposal made by the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism to give incentives similar to those given for tourism. I was extremely disappointed when the Parliamentary Secretary stated that this was not intended. I would like to know what incentive there was for the tourism industry, that we would give which does not involve the banks having a tax free profit, so they can lower the rate of interest. I do not know if the Parliamentary Secretary realizes that the interest rates which the farmers have to pay the Agricultural Development Bank are higher than what investors in the hotels can get in the tourism industry. I hoped that the hon. Minister would have taken this on board. Last night when the Parliamentary Secretary stated that this was not the case, in referring to an article in the *TNT Mirror* that I have not seen, I was disappointed. I hope that would be looked at again. It is important that we go in that direction.

I am not suggesting that we should shut down the bank, but we should open another window for farmers. Perhaps, the Agricultural Development Bank will continue to serve small farmers at this very high rate of interest, and let those who are coming in on a large scale with capital intensive farming to help boost production substantially, go to the commercial banks, where I am sure they will get very good service. Their business would not be discussed in public.

Sen. Dr. St. Cyr has discussed the issue of Caroni (1975) Limited. I think we would discuss it again in the debate on the motion on agriculture, because it refers to Caroni (1975) Limited. I have repeatedly said that we should create sizeable farms out of the lands at Caroni, whether they be sugar cane farms or citrus farms.

This goes back to the report of 1978—1979 on the sugar industry. Regretfully, the PNM government was in power at the time and it was never implemented. When the Prime Minister became a minister in 1987, I raised the question with him. He was not there very long. We went into the Tripartite Agreement which I never agreed with. I did not think it was a good idea. Now we are in a complete state of confusion.

Clearly, there are differences between 1978 and 1998. All the things set out here are still not valid. Last night I looked at the recommendations again. The principles there of creating sizeable farms with a good income for individual farmers, efficient production of cane, diversified uses of the cane, sugar and the land could be accepted, and the whole process could be updated. Those are the main principles which were enunciated there. That is the way we need to go with Caroni (1975) Limited and it could hold the key to the agricultural thrust in the country.

One thing I am against and would resist as strongly as I can, is the thought of divesting Caroni (1975) Limited along with its land. As Sen. Dr. St. Cyr has pointed out, this is the only area of flat, good, arable land left in Trinidad and Tobago. Certainly, that should not be alienated. We got it back in 1975 from foreign sources. To whom are we going to divest Caroni (1975) Limited? If I were an investor I would look at the land and be sure to buy that company, in spite of its indebtedness, because the value is in the land.

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Prof. J. Spence: Thank you, Mr. President.

We should ensure that land is not alienated again. My position is that we should give long-term leases depending on the crop. We should transfer the land owned by Caroni (1975) Limited to the state, then lease it back to the company.

The same is true of the land owned by the oil company. When Petrotrin was set up, my understanding was that the land was not vested, deliberately, in Petrotrin, so that it could not be divested if Petrotrin were ever divested. I was rather disappointed last night when in conversation with the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, to discover that land is now being transferred from Trintoc and

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Trintopoc to Petrotrin. My position is the same there. That land should have been transferred to the state and leased back to the oil company. It is not alienated from the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I feel very strongly about that.

We are in a very favourable position in this country. In many of the Latin American countries, most of the land is owned by the private sector. By historic accident, we happen to have a situation where the state owns a great deal of the forest reserve and the arable land. Let us not alienate it from the state. We divest too much of our assets and put it into recurrent expenditure, without putting the money which we get into capital work. We should not continue with that, especially when it comes to a valuable asset like land. Look at what is happening in Tobago.

Since I do not have much time I would skip some points I intended to make in the agricultural field and leave it for later on. In passing, it is interesting to me that all the agricultural increases which have occurred in the various sectors have been due to Government effort, but the decreases in production have been due to bad weather.

Build the cultural centre, but not on land situated at Orange Grove! This is good agricultural land. All along the foothills of the Northern Range, buildings and houses were erected. There should be some central processing facility at Orange Grove for the produce coming out of the Orange Grove Estate. I am in favour of a cultural centre, but not there. Put it further east where the soil is not suitable for anything, but buildings. We build houses on the best agricultural land and put the farms at Wallerfield which is stone. We continue to do it! The PNM government did that and now we want to move the village from Piarco and put it in Orange Grove on the best agricultural land. There are two things I disagree with soundly. One is that aspect of erecting houses on good agricultural land, and the other is the North Coast Road which would lead to the destruction in the eastern part of the island.

I do not know if I would agree with my colleagues with respect to Tobago. I realize that the population there is small and, therefore, in some sense, a proportion of the national investment for Tobago should be related to the size of the population. I also recognize that being an island is insufficient argument for having additional resources. I would look at it from a completely different point of view. The fact that Tobago is an island gives us certain advantages with respect to how we may develop and project it. There is a certain amount of power, separate from the rest of the country that gives us some possibilities which we might exploit.

10.35 a.m.

For four years, I have been pressing that Tobago be declared a conservation island, and the hon. Minister of Finance has been very supportive from the time I first raised the issue. We should have international recognition of the fact that Tobago will be developed on the basis of conservation, so that its tourism thrust should have that as its background. I hope we will get through all the bureaucratic impediments to having this project properly studied. Inter American Development Bank has given some money, the Minister of Tourism has given some money, and it still has not gotten off the ground.

Let us think of having Tobago as a quality part of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us not think of it as Tobago wanting to be separate or wanting more money than it can have. Let us say that in Trinidad and Tobago, there will be one part of the country which we will concentrate on developing in a certain way. We want that tourism thrust to come from Tobago, but we want it to come along certain lines, which will be sustainable and different from any of the other tourism industries in the Caribbean. We will not have the risk of next week some tourist deciding that Cuba or Barbados is better because there are lovely beaches, Spanish music and so forth. We will have something unique in Tobago.

There are certain other things which should go with this. We want to encourage a more mature choice: persons who are more conscious about their health. Therefore, it is extremely important that, in Tobago at least, the health services function effectively. Perhaps when we get them to function well there, we can see what we can do with the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us forget about size of population and all the rest of it and look at it from a completely different angle. Let us say that this is a part of Trinidad and Tobago that we would like to use as our model for quality, integration of agriculture with tourism, and our model for tourism conservation.

When the IADB representative was here recently and we were discussing the concept of the conservation of Tobago and the way we wanted to approach it, his response was that we should really do that in Trinidad as well before going into the tourism industry. However, that is beside the point. Let us do it in Tobago.

I support a much more substantial investment in Tobago. I think that being an island, there is a good chance of producing a model part of the country. There is a population with a somewhat different outlook to Trinidad. Crime has not yet quite gotten out of hand—although if we do not do something fast, it will. For all those

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reasons, I certainly urge that we think very seriously about deciding that Tobago will be [*Inaudible*]. That has nothing to do with Tobago being more independent and all the rest of it. Because we have decided that we want a tourism industry and think that Tobago is the best place to start, we must do it in the right way, otherwise, if we get it wrong, within a few years, the things that attract people to the island would have been lost and people would no longer be attracted there.

I support very strongly additional resources being put into infrastructure in Tobago—water, electricity, health services and so forth. I also support subsidies to a proper air and seabridge to make sure that we are able to travel back and forth from that island.

Quite frankly, with someone like myself, who is in a cardiac position, I feel more comfortable going to Barbados rather than Tobago. If I have an emergency, the only way I can get to Mount Hope from Tobago is by helicopter which will take some time. In Barbados, I can get in a car and go to Queen's Hospital very quickly. There must really be health care services in Tobago if we want to attract more mature folk.

Mr. President, I would like to say a bit about the Botanic Gardens. I went through the estimates and I do not see any provision for expansion of the zoological gardens, although it has been publicly declared that \$16 million will be spent on the expansion of the zoo. I do not know where this \$16 million will come from because, as I said, I cannot find it in the budget. Perhaps it is an expectation which they have of the Government.

The botanic gardens started off in all of the British colonies as systems which fed into the agricultural sector. I just want to read, very quickly, an extract from a study called, *A History of the Botanic Gardens in Trinidad and Tobago, 1818 to Present*, by Nirmala Ramlogan, in partial fulfillment of the B.A. in History:

The Economic Contribution of the Botanic Gardens

“The predominant economic activity of the Botanic Gardens has always been agriculture. Consequently, the work of the Botanic Gardens especially during the period 1818 to 1908 was geared towards the contribution to the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago but more importantly to the mother country. From its inception the Botanic Gardens set about fulfilling its objectives in making Trinidad and Tobago more economically viable. The various administrators attempted to achieve this through several methods which included the publication and distribution of information, the construction

and utilization of the Herbarium, meteorology centre, nurseries and experiment stations. As a result the Botanic Gardens was able to play an influential role in effecting Trinidad and Tobago's transition from the mercantilist to the *laissez faire* system."

It goes on to give the early history of the botanic gardens.

We then went through a period in which the botanic gardens was of lesser importance because the Department of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agriculture had developed. This happened all over the world. What is happening now is a new look at the botanic gardens, and all over the world botanic gardens are being recognized as having dual functions. One, they are national parks, but also, they can add very strongly to efforts in the conservation of plant species which, as we all know, is being rapidly lost in various parts of the world. This is the vision I think we should now have for the botanic gardens here.

A few of us are trying to form a "Friends of the Botanic Gardens" group that will help to promote this point of view. If we look at it in that context, then the constant alienation of land from the botanic gardens here for other purposes certainly will not add to that potential of it being used for conservation. What has been happening over the years is that the Zoological Society is expanding and asking for more and more land. The recent request is for five acres of land. If that were the end of it, that might be all right, but there is absolutely no reason to suppose that in another five or 10 years' time, they would not ask for another five acres. [*Inaudible*] Do we really in this modern age want to have animals confined in very small spaces as we have in the zoo here?

Sen. Prof. Kenny has proposed, and I support it fully, that it is time for us to look at the possibility of a zoo of a different kind, which might be located in central Trinidad, perhaps on 100 acres of land, and we have many areas suitable for that owned by the Government, or we can purchase from the private sector. We can have the [*Inaudible*] type. It is a place where the animals roam.

We are about to import one or two elephants and a giraffe. Where will we put them in the botanic gardens? Surely, this is a time to look for a more expansive area in another part of the country. If that \$16 million is going to be used by the zoo, it should be used for setting up a new zoo. We can retain something of what is there: perhaps the larger cages can be used for birds so that, at least, they have more space in which to fly. We can have butterfly cages. There are some very interesting butterflies in Trinidad and Tobago. We can have fish and so forth. Let us get the large animals out of that space into open spaces.

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This is something we should look at very seriously. Unfortunately, the zoological expansion in the gardens seems to have the backing of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. That may be one of its impediments. I would really like to be on the wall of a Cabinet meeting because I suspect that when a Minister comes in with a proposal, it is like being at a university committee meeting. A professor comes with some idea and many people do not agree with it, but because Professor "X" proposed it, they do not say anything. Instead, they come out of the meeting and say, "You know, I do not agree with that." Why did they not say that at the meeting? I am sure that happens at Cabinet meetings.

Mr. President: Sen. Prof. Spence, you have two more minutes.

Sen. Prof. J. Spence: Mr. President, I wanted to end by making two quick comments about time. I have an article here which says, "US hooked on drug money". It shows how the world economies are absolutely tied in with the drug trade, and showing how the US banks would collapse if the drug trade were suddenly removed from the scene.

10.45 a.m.

The other issue is something which is actually being set up in the United Kingdom and which I think we should certainly look at to help our young people in the crime situation. It is headlined:

"PM's office to include excluded"

What they have done is to set up a special unit in the Prime Minister's office to look at those groups of persons whom they consider to be excluded:

"They include the 5 million in workless households; the 150,000 homeless, and the 100,000 children not attending school."

This unit is specially targeted at groups of persons, for example, who have been thrown out of school or who have not been attending schools; those on the streets and so forth. I think that is what we really need to do in Trinidad and Tobago. It is no use saying that we would put more money into this or that programme, we have to be more specific. Just as we target battered women and so forth, we have to target these groups.

I think there is no better office to put it in than in the Office of the Prime Minister, perhaps, under the Minister of Public Administration and Information so that we can be sure that the Senate could have a good look at what is happening there.

Mr. President, thank you very much.

Sen. Muhummad Shabazz: Mr. President, I first seek guidance according to our prayer, which we said today in this Senate, in making this my maiden speech. I ask for guidance so that I would speak with strength, confidence and to inspire, as the prayer said, confidence in all our citizens.

I have looked at this—well it has been referred to as a budget speech—which has been presented to our Parliament, and to me, and other Senators on this side it is really not. If I want to know what a motion or anything is I look in the dictionary for the meaning. I have looked at this and indeed, this is not a budget. Webster's Dictionary says: It is a financial statement of estimated accounts and expenditure covering a specified future period of time. A plan for financial operations based on such a statement, the need or allotted money for such a purpose.

We know some moneys have been allocated for some things and for some projects, but all are not properly presented, and for some—as the point has been made here before—we have to go back or wait until the Minister of Finance comes sometime later to say exactly how much money will be allocated and how and where it is going to be spent.

Mr. President, I have seen up to page 4 of the budget statement where the Minister of Finance has spoken about the Panday Administration; the budget presentation of the Panday Administration. I would like to let this Government know that it is a government of all the people. We on this side know that this Panday Administration matter is a subliminal way of getting into the minds of the people that it is the Panday Administration and not necessarily the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Nowhere and at no time—and this is a warning and it is in this light I would like to speak with this Government—has the Government given the impression that it is for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It seems to be dealing mainly with the people who support it and their friends. We will make that case as we go along.

Not only that, this Government spoke, all the time—and it is in this light I would like to make this contribution—about a government of national unity, and tried to foist that on our minds. I said, nowhere in this budget statement have I seen the term “national unity” come up. It has been forgotten and the Government has now gone to “total quality nation” and—we started this, “world class nation”. [*Desk thumping*]

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What the Government has tried from the beginning is to get in a whole public relations mode. This is a government of public relations. We know that. As a matter of fact since it brought in a public relations consultant, Members speak differently; they speak softer, they apologize for all the things which they have done, that aggressive manner which Members on that side had, has now changed and they are talking with nice words, quoting Shakespeare, talking about apologia and they are using nice terms. The reason for that is because we are dealing with a nation of educated persons. Persons educated mainly by the People's National Movement. We started it and we will continue to do it when we return to government. I will explain to you, Sir, how soon that will be. *[Interruption]*

Mr. President, I would not even beg for your protection because this is my maiden speech and if the Leader of Government Business is behaving in that manner, I do not want any protection. I went to school with the Minister of Finance and he knows that we stand strong. When anyone wanted to fight with students of the school it was my friends and I who went out while they stayed inside hiding. *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. Kuei Tung: That is true. *[Laughter]*

Sen. M. Shabazz: Thank you. Mr. President, we are dealing with a people, who, when they were in opposition said that their intent was not to make the Government look good, and they never did anything to make the Government look good. They objected to Bills; if we even thought about hanging persons—which we did not think about—they would not support it.

I would like to quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Monday, December 29, 1997.

“State moves on killers

Plan to quit human rights bodies”

The person who probably made the fame and money off human rights and defending the killers is now saved. I have no objection to that. I am not saying it as though I am condemning him, but I am saying that maybe people should be hanged—I am not making an argument for that. I am saying that this person does not have the moral authority to make statements like that *[Desk thumping]*

What can we expect, Mr. President? A man who once said that he did not want to be the Attorney General, but two months later he was the Attorney General. Persons who spoke about the “parasitic oligarchy” are now friends and they are

'liming' with parasitic oligarchies. They are having their meetings and dinners in the homes and places of the parasitic oligarchy.

When Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh spoke yesterday I understood that there must be morals—even though I may not live to the highest moral standard—in all businesses and in all things that we do in this country. *[Desk thumping]* It touched me a lot—and last night at home I thought about it—when Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat in her contribution—I do not think she was saying it towards Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh—made a statement: “Do not confuse the issues with morals. Mr. President, that is where we have to talk when we talk to this Government. *[Desk thumping]*”

They talk about the PNM government. Nepotism is something we tried not to deal with and tried to keep it above board. The meaning of nepotism is: giving favouritism to friends and families. Do you know what we are hearing now, Mr. President? Not because he is a minister's brother he must not work; he was sixth but because he was our friend we must bring him up, and because—and this is where the morals are falling—he is our friend we will extend his time to run the police service, and because the person—who we perceive to be the hardest worker in the service—fell out with somebody, we are not going to extend his time. It is in this scenario, it is in this backdrop we have to look at the budget presentation or the non-budget presentation. *[Desk thumping]* When we talk about PSIP and GDP, the people out there probably understand but probably they do not understand.

10.55 a.m.

Mr. President, do you know when they know that there is money in the land? When a house costs \$4.5 million and for somebody just to have it they would spend an extra \$2.1 million to get it. That is when the average person knows that there is money in the land. Do you know when we know that there is money in the land? When the Government does not want to give teachers more than 2 per cent and gives everybody who is bargaining one per cent and asks for \$4,000 secretly and takes it and puts it into its pockets. That is when we know that there is money in the land. So this educated masses that they are going to be dealing with and feel that they are going to do all the public relations, all the nice talk, all the nice work and get across to them at the end of the day and get back into Government; it is not exactly like that. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, I do not want to interrupt my colleague in his maiden contribution but I think that he is misleading this Parliament when he says

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that teachers got 2 per cent. It is not correct. Secondly, he is misleading this Parliament and the country when he says that the Government took 400 per cent increase secretly. The document was laid in this Parliament. I think that he should get his records and facts straight in addressing this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senator, unless you can substantiate what you are saying you should be careful about the comments and remarks you make.

Sen. M. Shabazz: Mr. President, I think it was not debated in the honourable House, not only that—I would be guided by your ruling

It is in this backdrop that we discuss the budget. The media, all these other things that we look at, as long as you are not taking the position of this Government there are a number of problems that are going to come up but we would go into that as we proceed. Mr. President, let us look at the question of health in the country. We look at health in the backdrop of the money to be spent to deal with health. I think it was Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh who asked: What are we doing about health at this point in time? The point that, yes, there is a lot of money that this Government has and this Government claims that it is because of their prudent management over the last two years. We claim that it is because of the good fortune that you inherited when you came into power that allows you this privilege as you are continuing to move. Not only are we claiming that, we are looking carefully—and one of the Independent Senators made the point—I think juggling may be a good word, to keep the money floating at the present TT \$6.30 or TT \$6.00 to US \$1.00, or whatever it is at this point. We are seeing that you all are making all efforts and we are feeling that at some point in time it is going to get away from you, but we wish you the best in going along.

We look at the health sector. You know when I stand here and talk about AIDS I like to say and make the point that—I live in Laventille and Morvant and I feel a number of people and Government Senators have never really seen an AIDS patient or never had a friend who was an AIDS patient and they do not understand, because if one is in Laventille and one gets AIDS you are really only waiting to die. Treatment for an AIDS patient is anything in the region of \$4,000 or \$5,000 a month. So that I think that they have never seen—I have a friend who jumped off the nine-storey building because he had AIDS. I have had friends whom I have seen reduced from 280 lbs to 130 lbs to 120 lbs. Is not this an important area where money must be spent? They have not told us how much money is going to be spent there. They have not said anything about what they are going to do about AIDS. Nothing about that. They have not said what type of education programmes would

be put forward to build and to raise the morality of the people to stop AIDS from spreading. I guess your best solution is the condom. We know that that would not stop the AIDS crisis; we know that it is only education, proper planning, putting money, having homes, such as life centres like the half-way houses and the homes for the drug addicts that would help AIDS to come into a different position. Maybe, because after having tried hard—and I would discuss that with the hon. Minister of Works and Transport—to make an inroad in Laventille, which may not be perceived to be theirs or their own, and since it is affecting Laventille, PNM territory, it might be said let us leave it like that. I do not know if that is the thinking, but it seems to me that that could be the thinking of this Government; understanding the way that they think and operate.

With respect to Dengue Fever, we have just heard a professor saying that nothing would be done about that, nothing seemed to be able to be done; no medicine, nothing at the hospital for it. Nobody has said anything. On Boxing Day we looked at the television, and saw people waiting in hospitals for hours. You may say that it is the PNM caused that, but we know that if you are in Government two years, it is time to stop blaming us. The last regime started to blame us and kept blaming us to a point where the people could not take them blaming us anymore, so they removed them from power and they brought us back. Maybe it is a nice thing for this country to see what happens when the People's National Movement is not in power. Give everybody else a chance. *[Desk thumping]* Maybe they feel that they may go beyond five years; maybe they would feel that when they are in power they would last for the next 10, 15 or 20 years but somehow, the people speak differently because they seem to miss what we did for them and what we would continue to do for them. *[Desk thumping]* One thing the people understand about us is that we do things with our hearts and not just with our lips; not just make a deal or whatever it is to get into power and only take care of those who belong to us.

I must touch Tobago just a bit. Today, I picked up the newspapers and saw a headline which says, "Tobago better off alone" We have a Senator on our side who I feel does not take that position. I feel that the other Senators from Tobago would not take that position. Some may have to go with their party's loyalty and may support it in talk but not practically. This year is a reaping of some of the seeds that they have sown to keep this Government where it is. I do not know if this Government is operating on the basis that it is the only Government that has been in power in Trinidad and Tobago that has never really won an election.

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Maybe, that is why they have to keep campaigning, keep this public relations going from here until the next elections, because in truth and in fact, they are not like us, we have won a number of elections but they are now looking to win their first election when the next election comes around. They have never won an election and I want to predict and say I think that they would never win an election in this country. *[Interruption]*

Mr. President, let us look at housing in this country. It is a fact that it is only our Government that has built and given houses to the people of this country. Sen. Tota-Maharaj spoke about a housing area that was developed 15 years ago and there was no infrastructure. I want to tell her that that is a Sou Sou Land project that was put down 15 years ago by her own Minister, I believe.

11.05 a.m.

Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat: On a point of correction. It is not a Sou Sou land project.

Sen. M. Shabazz: Point of correction, Mr. President, I accept it. Not only that, including Almond Drive, Ramdial Mahabir Lands, Aranguez, all built by the PNM administration, not the Panday Administration. We started it in any event. You know what they say? They say that we are not going to give out any, not even in John John, the fire victims for whom they should have feelings, not even John John houses they are giving out, but we see them handing out keys in Aranguez. We see them giving out keys in Aranguez because Aranguez is their people. When I say their people, I mean the people who have voted for them because they have a way that when one speaks about their people and our people they twist it into an ethnic thing. We are not about that. So we ask: Why have they not given out Ramdial Mahabir Lands? Why have they not given out John John? Why have they not given out all these other places and they have given out Aranguez so early, even before it is completed?

Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat: On a point of correction again, Ramdial Mahabir Lands have, in fact, been handed out. In any event, the Aranguez project is a joint venture project and is being partially handed out. You see unlike—I do not want to make a statement.

Mr. President: Order, please.

Sen. M. Shabazz: Again, we saw the last administration, not the PNM, the one before, of which they were a part when they had super ministers. Because the Ministry of Housing and Settlements belonged to a super minister. One person in

this Government, this administration, was created as a super minister and I will speak about that as I go along. We see what is happening with super ministers. The point is, that was a super ministry and not a single house was built at that time and that same minister is the Minister of Housing and Settlements. [*Desk thumping*] I want to close that case on housing. I have heard one of the Senators making a statement that the PNM, by keeping these houses at that level and keeping the rent as it did, kept that dependency syndrome among the people and why are they not sent to places where they can plant flowers and food. I did not say you made the statement, ma'am.

Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat: It is important again, that if the hon. Senator is going to quote me, he does so accurately.

Sen. M. Shabazz: I still hear that we have created a dependency syndrome because of the amount of rent being paid. I ask them, now that they have been there for two years, to stop the dependency syndrome. I ask you to stop it. If we created it, you came into Government and the people voted you to stop it. Stop it now! I want to see that and I expect you to stop it because that is what the Government will be all about.

Mr. President, it is a little hard, but I am not calling for any privilege from you. It is hard, hard, hard. They are breaking my concentration. [*Laughter*] I do not want any privilege, I feel I could take this one. Let me go through this fire, so when I am shaped it will be proper.

I want to touch on crime because I might be a little comfortable having served this country as a policeman, moreso in the 1970 period, having defended this country as a policeman. I feel very comfortable, so I will use this point. What is the problem with the police service? A Government that came into power saying, "we will solve crime". When they came into power they said that who did the crime must do the time. We heard it. What is happening with the escalating crime situation? Have they been solving the crime situation? We told them that jeeps and radios—because they bought the radios before the jeeps—to put in jeeps will not solve the situation. We told them that there must be a comprehensive policy. I would like to just put forward some points.

One of the first things I would like them to look at is this; I think this is one of the problems in the service. When we look at the hierarchy of the police service, you know what we are seeing? We are seeing a lot of non-crimefighters running the police service. The commissioner, who has been kept on and who has been

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given an extended year on his time—because, I think they got his birthday correct—is not a crimefighter, he is an administrative person. We look at the deputy commissioners, the Assistant Commissioners of Police, we may have one real crimefighter among them. I am not saying that the administrative people should not be promoted, but you should promote crimefighters and give them a certain kind of authority if you want the crime situation to be solved. Because that is a specific kind of area and you cannot deal with crime if you have spent 30 or 40 years in the service only coming through the office. You have to be out there in the field.

The question of the morale among the policemen is important. When one looks at taking a Commissioner of Police and keeping him on in the way in which it was done, it seemed to have affected people's promotion, how they would move on. Do I have to be a friend of this Government in order to stay in power? What you have done has not helped to raise the people's spirit to continue to work, but in some ways you have helped to weaken that spirit. This Government of national unity has again, brought about a certain kind of division in the police service that seemed not to be able to inspire these men to move forward.

With regard to the question of the detective, what we are now seeing of our policemen—and I have no objection to a policeman being promoted because of his years' service, but maybe, in addition to promoting a policeman because of his years' service, he needs to be promoted on the basis of his ability to do the work. We need to say you have been a good detective, you have solved so many crimes and we are going to promote you on that basis. It must not only be because you are senior to other men that you are going to be promoted.

There is something that may never come back in Trinidad in the police service, but it was an important thing. When we were policemen we were on duty 48 hours per shift. Even when we left our natural tour of duty we still went out there knowing that if we saw a crime being committed we were committed to solving that crime. I do not know if it is true, but today we are hearing that one is going into police stations and because a man is finished working at 6.00 o'clock and he is not sure to get overtime, if a serious crime report comes in at 5.45 p.m. he may not act on it. We need to find ways, education-wise, to boost these people's spirit in order for them to continue to do the work. Where are you spending your money on education? Where are you spending your money on having seminars? I see in the budget that you mentioned training, but what type of training, who are the people being trained?

Maybe we need to look at the fact that a soldier is running the police service or is in charge of it, as the Minister. Maybe we need to look at that. I am not saying it is not working, but maybe we need to look at that. Maybe a policemen should be the Minister of National Security or we should have somebody who is very impartial and will not have to make a decision that will be conflicting. So when the reshuffle comes, if they have to remove anybody, they should look at the Minister of National Security.

Mr. President, let us look at the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP). Maybe I should start off by asking them—perhaps when the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources or the person representing the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is wrapping up—really and truly, what is the difference between URP and Caroni (1975) Limited? I would like it to be answered. In terms of how the people see it and how the people visualize it, what is the real difference between URP and Caroni (1975) Limited? How much money has been given to Caroni (1975) Limited? How much money has been given to the URP? How has the money in either Caroni (1975) Limited or the URP been spent? Has the money in Caroni (1975) Limited been given or is Caroni (1975) Limited being kept as an employment relief programme, and in the city we have an unemployment relief programme? Will somebody please tell me what is the real difference between URP and Caroni (1975) Limited. I would like to hear that addressed while I am here in this Senate.

Not only that, in this backdrop on the Unemployment Relief Programme, I think \$138 million was supposed to be spent, I think it went to \$158 million. I want the goodly Senator to understand, I do not care what you do, as long as you have not paid the people their money they are coming at you. Do not care how friendly they are and may hug you up—I think you understand that in Laventille they will hug you up today and hold your hand tomorrow—as long as you have not paid them their money, as long as you are playing games with them, they will turn against you in a way that even you would not be able to understand. They are fallible.

I must say that I have a certain likeness for the Minister. I got a little lash from him and I understand it. I remember his first words to me when I was in the Unemployment Relief Programme; “Shabazz, we did not come to remove anybody, we came to improve everybody.” Two weeks after I was removed. *[Desk thumping] [Laughter]* I have no objection to that. I understand that maybe by removing me, he improved me. I do not know.

It is on this basis, again, we have to look at the way that this Government operates and the things members say. This is what they have not instilled in the people, the confidence that what they say, they really mean. The people are thinking that it is only public relations. In any event, I was removed and I am now seeing them removing the Minister slowly. I am not saying that I am enjoying it. They are using all the public relations again and they are saying that, now you have been removed there are a number of things in the ministry. Why did they not remove the building of bridges? Why did they not remove other things from the Ministry? Why did they choose that? I have told you—some of it secretly, privately and I will continue to tell you privately.

So that, in truth and in fact, what do we see happening under the Unemployment Relief Programme? They have put URP under a minister who is not even pulling with the corporations, particularly the corporations that are PNM run, that are run by the Opposition that he is not getting along with; they put URP inside of there. So he cannot even handle the work that he has in the corporations, but they gave him much more work to do. But we feel good for that.

Mr. President: I ask you to be careful of how you make references to the Ministers, because you might be imputing some motives there that cannot be entertained.

Sen. M. Shabazz: Mr. President, I will be careful. As we have seen, as we read daily, the corporations are protesting against this Minister. We see it in the newspapers, we see it on the television and more work is given to this Minister. The whole URP portfolio is now put in his hands. Some people believe it is put there in order to create problems and trouble for the PNM corporations, because URP was originally ours, let us deal with it.

The People's National Movement has dealt with DEWD and URP for a number of years, we have the ability to deal with it. [*Desk thumping*] We saw the NAR Government come, and although they were put under pressure with URP, they dealt with it. We see you apparently running from it because, either you were not able to deal with it or because the person who seemed to have been dealing with it seemed to have been getting so much power out of dealing with it, that you had to run and remove it from him.

11.20 a.m.

I do not know if that is the reason, but it appears that way to some of us who are looking on the outside. I spoke about the "super Ministers" and all of

them left the last government and formed their own party. You may not form your own party but you may present a slate in your election and that will create some kind of confusion.

Mr. President, let us look again at agriculture. Sen. Spence made an important point this morning regarding proposals for subsidies on rice, and where you are placing your subsidies in agriculture. Yesterday when I listened to the hon. Senator speak about agriculture I noted something, there was more agriculture for the rural districts, but there was no semblance or thought of anything about what can be done about agriculture in the urban districts. To me, I did not hear anything about that and even if I did, it was really to a very small extent.

It is in this light that I say to the goodly Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, just as agriculture will take care of the rural districts—I will explain that to you as I go along—it is sports and culture that will take care of the people in the urban areas mainly. That is where your big business is going to be.

What do we see in this budget? When we look at sports and culture in the 1998 budget we are told:

"Mr. Speaker, in light of the problems facing our youths, sport is a valuable option for a positive lifestyle, character building and career development.

Sport can take young people from hopelessness to empowerment, enabling them to be responsible, highly motivated, self-reliant individuals, leading productive lives.

In light of this, Government will expand the enabling environment for sport and youth by providing infrastructure, vocational, socio-economic and psychological support services, and well structured and co-ordinated programmes."

That sounds very good. We also see under culture:

"We will also construct a National Centre for the Performing Arts which will house a Theatre and a Conference Centre."

We saw that in the budget the year before but it was not called a National Cultural Commission or an Arts or Performing Centre but a National Arts Centre. They said it would start in 1997 but it did not. We are seeing that it will start in 1998. We are saying maybe it would not start.

For some reason where sports and culture are concerned they seem to make the mistake of tying culture—not as we see it as a national culture—into religion and many times into ethnicity which is a wrong way to go. Trinidad and Tobago has something called a national culture. It is the cultural people who have been the ambassadors of this country, the calypsonians. While they were going into calypso tents and listening to calypsonians singing calypso and laughing in our era, pushing tunes such as "Sinking Ship", "Jahaji bhai" and all the other calypsos, from the time we sing something that seems to speak against them they get annoyed.

I cannot talk about culture from the point of view of just one set of people. I went to Couva and started the Sugar and Energy Festival with the Chamber of Commerce there under Caribbean Prestige Production. We did the first Emancipation Day in Couva under Caribbean Prestige Production. Therefore, we know and understand that when you try to harness culture, the creative minds, you are not only interfering with the creative people but with the creative spirit of all the people. How do we know that?

We look at what happened in culture. Take for instance this music we now call soca. It is a blend of two kinds of music, East Indian and African music in Trinidad and Tobago. The bringing together of the drums, the dholak and all the other instruments in order to come up with soca, which is national music. As a matter of fact, soca is more national than calypso and chutney because it has been the people of Trinidad and Tobago whose music and spirit came together to produce something that was national.

Thus, when you try to stifle that—and we do not mind your stifling it, because when you go to tents this year you will understand what stifling means—if you go to the tents this year. When you try to tell Cro Cro what to sing and you tell him that you do not want him in the competition or say that he should not be in your competition and make these kinds of laws, you will understand as you walk along.

Mr. Minister of Finance, I know that you are a cultural person. You are part of a pan structure, the people I "lime" with understand that. I have seen the hon. Minister playing a pan in the savannah in her first term so I know that she understands what culture is all about. But the hon. Minister—and I want to make it clear—is having difficulty with it. Maybe her cultural ideas, ideology or beliefs have a wider framework which at this time seems to be confusing the issue.

What about things such as the National Carnival Commission? How can they say to this commission that they are going to ensure we take carnival and this

commission to a different level and let us run our show? What do we do? To date, I think no money has been given to the bodies that are supposed to be running carnival.

People, particularly calypsonians who are now coming into this for the first time and should have had some sort of money there already, are still waiting for money. Then at the end of the day, do you know what they are going to say: It is the PNM who caused that. It is that PNM mentality that caused them to fail. They are going to continue knocking and hitting at the People's National Movement for everything that did not work out. They are going to take credit for all the things that work. We have seen that happen with every Government that has come into power since the PNM has been there.

What is happening with NCC? The state should be a facilitator, careful not to impose a cultural philosophy. Because of our rich cultural diversity we must ensure there is multi-culturalism in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Tota-Maharaj: I do not understand that.

Sen. M. Shabazz: We need a large cultural centre. They said that it would be built at Orange Grove, and also at the Princes Building. They have not done anything.

Build a big centre that could take a number of people looking forward to what would happen to Trinidad in the year 2015. Do not build it with the plan that was there before, but do it on a larger scale. So that we would be able to take our cultural richness and enjoy it. Culture is something we must now enjoy rather than try to direct.

I am saying just as they have said, "We are not in power because you promised all these things." We are letting them know that they are not going to fool the people: they will understand. They will tell you as they have told the NAR, "You have only exchanged." They are not doing anything that seems to inspire the people and the population to a higher level. [*Desk thumping*] Do not make promises and not keep them. Make your promises and keep them this time.

Do not have all that money and not spend it or when you do spend, it is in areas that seem to be the people who support you and the people who are your friends. When you write off taxes for hotels in Tobago it must be done for everybody and not just for your friends. You must have a policy for all. We were the only people who seemed to have a policy for all. [*Desk thumping*]

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When we are in Government we are really not the PNM administration, Eric Williams administration, we are the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and we deal with all.

I make this statement correctly and reservedly without apology to anyone. What we see happening in sports and culture is that even though everybody in this country plays sports it is really the Laventille type persons who are the cultural and sporting ambassadors in this country. This is why if you had used the URP money in this direction it would have been better. Let me explain. Look at the Mr. Universe, Miss Universe and the boxing champions Trinidad and Tobago has produced. Look at the Olympic gold medallists and other medallists, the panmen, the calypsonians, the netballers, footballers, the Dwight Yorkes, the Brian Laras, the cricketers, it is really the Laventille type people.

11.30 a.m.

It is really the Laventille type people and since you are not going to be able to put agriculture in the city, put sporting and cultural complexes for the pannist, for calypsonians so that they` can be converted into businesses to help these people make money. I know that you understand the spirit in which I have said it and I know you will look in that direction. It is in no way intended to be racist. That is what they say. You know why they say racist? Because I said it is the Laventille people. How could the term Laventille be a racist term? I cannot understand it.

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. B. Kuei Tung*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. M. Shabazz: Mr. President, thank you and the hon. Minister of Finance, fearless and strong with the boys.

We seem to be hiding something. We cannot talk about a cosmopolitan country and be free to talk about religion, to discuss politics, to discuss social standing and not be able to discuss environmental situations or be able to discuss the question of ethnicity and race from a positive point of view. From the time you talk about it someone puts a tag or label on your shoulder and my intent will never be that. I cannot see an East Indian child or Chinese child crossing the road and not stop my car. I do it because it is a person. I have nothing to deal with Sen. Baksh or Sen. Kuei Tung or Sen. Mark; my feeling towards them is because of

how they treat me. I am not seeing them as Chinese and Indian. When I hear that remark I feel very sad in the Senate to think the minute you talk about some development or some projection of yourself as a person, your intent is only racist; nonsense. I tell you that when you are not fooling the people, as long as you go about that way, do not forget that there will be occasions when you feel that you are really on top of the people and there will be people saying boo. You will say that is PNM attitude not knowing it is people who understand that you are only seeing the thing one way, not willing to look at it another way and because of that, certain pressures are brought on you and all you will end up saying, "is PNM cause that". PNM is not causing all of that.

The problem cannot only be with the People's National Movement, a government that has run this country for 40 years. Have we been all that bad all this time? When they came into power their intent was to push us into the Gulf of Paria and we are still standing here. One speaker said the steel beam would kill us and we are still standing here. When you think we are dead we resurrect and we are coming again and you are still not seeing that beautiful power of the resurrection. You will see it soon again and when you see that lifting power, the glory, you will understand.

Mr. President, I guess, knowing how this Government operates, somebody will meet me outside and apologize for how they are behaving because they like to apologize. They like to fight the media and apologize. They feel it is only men who say that they are sorry, but they are saying sorry so much that people are getting fed up. Being in love means never having to say you are sorry. Try not to say it. They are doing things and saying they are sorry. How long will I take that? The Catholics say sorry shall not be accepted without a firm purpose of amendment. You have to have that firm purpose. They are sorry, they do it again; sorry, they do it again and they only sorry, sorry, sorry. It reminds me of a place in England; Surrey. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, as I have said, what we have seen here is that they like to put the cart before the horse or the radios before the jeeps. Talk about inspiring savings. What is happening with the credit unions, the place where the masses of the people like to save? When are you going to return their incentives? That is something you should look at maybe when you are coming with the next budget or when you reach mid-year and are revising this non-budget that you have produced.

You talk about how many schools you have built and refurbished, how many stations; we started it. I know you do not like to hear "we started it" but we

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started it and we will continue it. We know how you have dealt with the people when you came into power—you gave the Baptist a holiday. Do more for the Baptist. Build the schools, bring them up to a certain status and not just give them that type of a status that you gave them to sit in the Senate. Do more for them.

I look at the question of the \$250,000 to the trade union. One Member here said that what the trade union should be given was \$5 million. I do not know whether they should be given \$50,000, \$100,000, \$250,000, \$5 million or \$10 million, what I want to know is, how you arrived at giving the trade union money when so many other things need money in this country. Not only that, is it, as somebody asked, a hush mouth to stay quiet? Is it not to get vex with the trade union people who are now not taking trade union positions on your side? Why have you given the trade union money? Anybody who gets money deserves it, but why have they been given money? How much more money will they be given in your next budget? Should it not have been given to build another school or another church somewhere in Laventille? Should you not start at this time, mid-way in your operation, a project that we can say, this is a Panday Administration project? Do not finish the library and take credit for it, do not build a station and open it and take credit for it. The Minister of Finance should try, in the next period, to do something to say, after two and a half years this is the initiative of the UNC Government. Let us come to the position where all we can say is that we were thinking about it. Do something this time.

As I have explained, we will bounce back into power again. We will bounce back sooner than they think. We have listened to them, we have looked at what they have said, we have understood what you have said, but we are saying that what we need to see done is in our planning what is allocated for what, where it is allocated, how soon it will be. Bring it in simple terms that the people will understand what you are saying and why you are saying. The hundred dollars that you gave, the question of the computers, all these things look very good to us on this side. But because we are questioning your motives and your morality, because of the history of why you do things, we are wondering if that hundred dollars, since there is no medicine in the hospital, will enable poor people to buy medicine; maybe that is why you gave it to them. But put medicine in the hospital so these people will not have to spend their money to do that.

Mr. President: Senator, again, while the Minister has not taken any objection, you spoke about the Minister's morality. I will have to put a stop to it and I will be very firm if you make any other comments of that nature during the time left.

Sen. M. Shabazz: Mr. President, I must apologize. If that is the impression you got, that was not my intent.

Sen. Gabriel: Surrey is a place in England. *[Laughter]*

Sen. M. Shabazz: Mr. President, I am now falling into the old UNC mold. I must stand firm.

At this point I will really like to wrap up. I would like to say I am happy to have been given this privilege to speak in this honourable Senate and hope that my feelings and sentiments can be seen in the light in which they were presented. To help to inspire this nation on its way to becoming a world class nation and improving the quality of this nation. Peace and God be with you.

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs (Sen. Dr. The Hon. Daphne Phillips): Mr. President, I rise to give full support to the Government's budget proposals for 1998 as outlined in the well-thought-out presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance, Sen. Brian Kuei Tung. I wish to congratulate him on his pragmatic approach and his people orientation to the distribution of the country's resources in a budget which provides opportunity for all. I want to remind this Senate and the national community that in response to the budget 72 per cent of the persons who were polled thought that the budget was a good budget, unlike the opinions that were given just a while ago. I think this indicates something about the perception of the people of Trinidad and Tobago about this budget.

Mr. President I wish to concentrate on those areas for which opportunity has been provided as they relate to my portfolio in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs. I want to correct the notion of the last Senator, Sen. Shabazz. I am not the Minister of Sports and Culture, it is the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs. And, Mr. President, those three areas of the Ministry interrelate and they are all very important areas, I think, in the work that is necessary for this country. In 1998 the budget allocations to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs was \$79 million which is an increase of \$16 million over the allocations for 1997. This sum is reflective of the increased thrust and activity in which the Ministry will engage in 1998. It is indeed a sustained thrust which commenced in 1996 and will continue into 1998.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. President, of this allocation of \$79 million, 23 per cent is earmarked for our physical development programmes; 36 per cent for social programmes; 16 per cent goes to statutory bodies for which the Ministry has responsibility; 10 per cent for goods and services and minor equipment and 15 per cent to personnel expenditure. It means that approximately 85 per cent of that allocation for 1998 will service directly the social needs of our people in the areas of community development, culture, national heritage and gender issues and concerns.

This amount would service programmes in infrastructural community resource development, much of which would be carried out by the National Commission for Self-Help and the Community Development Division. We also engage in education for skilled development of human resource and that is largely carried out by our Community Development Division and our Women's Affairs Division.

We engage as well in cultural development and development of cultural infrastructure that is largely controlled by the Division of Culture. Our portfolio also includes heritage identification and protection and this is largely assigned to the National Archives and the National Museum and we hope soon that the National Trust will come on stream; as well, programmes relating to gender equity and the empowerment of women. We operate in all these areas.

Mr. President, you will observe that we engage in a wide range of activities of a developmental nature. We have an all-embracing portfolio of a developmental nature and we have the potential to touch the lives of almost everyone in Trinidad and Tobago. All these roles, we say, are very important.

Allow me to start with a review of our work in culture because that was one of the areas which was just identified and has been identified by a number of speakers to which I will refer as I go along.

Several new initiatives were announced for the development of creative and performing arts in 1997 and we have been working towards the achievement of these initiatives. One is that the old fire station headquarters had been allocated to the Trinidad Theatre Workshop for its home. This matter is receiving the attention of the State Solicitor's Office. This is the normal procedure to ensure security of tenure to the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. This company, the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, from 1998, will receive for the first time, a subvention from the Ministry to assist in carrying out its developmental work. This is in the budget for 1998, so the promise to the Trinidad Theatre Workshop has been and is being put into effect and, in addition, it will receive a subvention for its work.

In 1997, we also said that we would commence preliminary work on the creation of a centre for the creative and performing arts on the Princes Building ground which was identified in 1997. Preliminary work did take place in this area in that we invited designs and a design brief was prepared and submitted to Cabinet. It was found, however, that the Princess Building ground was not ample and did not contain enough space for the kind of centre that we and all the cultural bodies with which we interfaced thought was necessary. It did not have enough space and there was not enough room for the necessary parking and other facilities associated with such a centre.

This is why Sen. Shabazz has not seen any building started yet because we are looking for adequate space. Cabinet is yet to finalize its decision as to whether the facilities of the Princes Building ground may be used for, what we may call, a cultural centre, a centre for performances and whether we should look at another site for the creative and performing arts centre in all the expanse and extent in which that exists. So, Mr. President, we are still working on that proposal of having a centre for the creative and performing arts. In addition, we may have an additional centre for cultural performances.

A sum of \$300,000 has been allocated in the 1998 budget for work to ensure adequate housing for cultural performances. As we heard from the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Settlements, we are also looking at other options for the site of a proper centre and we take Sen. Prof. John Spence's concern about where that should be housed, but we are looking.

Mr. President, in 1997, we also promised that we would initiate a degree programme in music with emphasis on pan at the University of the West Indies. We promised that would commence in 1997. This, indeed, did commence in the academic year 1997/1998 at the University of the West Indies, the Creative Arts Centre. We supplied support for three full-time lecturers in music, four full scholarships, that is, running for the full period of the programme, which is three to four years, and relevant library materials were provided for the first semester in the sum of \$300,000. This was provided by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs and this is a project to which the Government is committed and will continue in 1998/1999 and beyond. Allocations for this have been placed in the budget. The students commenced their classes in September, 1997.

This is part of a plan of education, emphasizing in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, Division of Culture, the role we see

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as developing through educating and training people in the arts. Pan is our national instrument and we find that was a good way to start. We are not only training people at the degree level but people at all levels through various courses, seminars and our pan conservatory was another project to do just that, to train people at another level in relation to the development of our art form. The pan conservatory was listed as one of the projects for development in 1997, but this has been the subject of rethinking and it has now been subsumed under what we call an Institute for Carnival for which \$100,000 has been allocated in the 1998 budget.

This again emphasizes our vision for the indigenous art forms. Only \$100,000 was allocated for this in the budget. I think it was Sen. Prof. Kenny, who looked at this notion of how serious we were about this Institute of Carnival where only \$100,000 was allocated. I think Sen. Mannelle also raised that point. The thing is that the area of allocation for this institute is still under construction, is to be prepared and the physical place is to be provided, so we do not expect this to come on stream until towards the end of the year when this money will be spent.

Mr. President, another project in the Division of Culture which we had promised in the last budget was the National Steel Orchestra. Preliminary work on the National Steel Orchestra did take place. A number of consultations; we structured the way we thought it should be; the criteria; the administration, *et cetera*. It did run into some hiccups and, therefore, was not launched when we had planned, but the preliminary work has taken place and the membership for the National Steel Orchestra is now being selected. A sum in excess of \$2.8 million has been allocated for the establishment of the National Steel Orchestra which, again, shows our commitment to putting this project in place in 1998. The National Steel Orchestra will offer members full-time employment and offer also sound and comprehensive training for members of this orchestra. We have promised; we are working on it and although it has not been launched yet; we have funding there to put it in place as soon as possible in 1998. Indeed, the procedures have already been identified for the selection of members.

Another project which we started in 1997, perhaps late 1996, was the formation of a national cultural policy. I noted Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh mentioned not hearing anything about the national cultural policy yesterday.

Mr. President, why do we need a national cultural policy? Many people confuse culture with art forms. What we are saying is that culture is much more than just the art forms; culture is a total way of life; culture constitutes all the history of what caused us to be as we are. [*Desk thumping*] It includes our values,

our attitudes, our morals, our philosophy, our thinking as well as our art forms. Indeed, our art forms are products of all the history and all the social and economic processes through which we have come.

So, a national cultural policy is not something we sit down in one day, write and produce. A national cultural policy is one that we have to think about; we have to work with several groups; we have to have a number of consultations; we have to understand where we were and where we want to get to. Policy, as we know, identifies the road we want to go. We want to know where we are and where we want to get to. Our policy will direct us in this way, therefore, a national cultural policy must take into account all of who we are, what we are and how we have emerged over time and where we want to get to.

12.00 noon

Many of the Senators have talked about problems of morality and values in our system. We are all concerned as adults with our young people, where they are going and whether we can structure training and other structural mechanisms to guide them and carry them into the way we think and, perhaps, our national community thinks our young people should go.

Our cultural policy would contain all of these in addition to what we do with our art forms, how we encourage and develop, fund and structure the administration of these art forms, how we influence the morality, the value systems and the attitudes as we go along the road. Our national cultural policy has been taken through its second draft in 1997 which is now before an interim national cultural committee for assessment before it is put out for public consultation in 1998. We expect, therefore, in 1998 to have public consultations on this national policy. We want everybody to contribute to it so that it will have wide public support before we adopt and accept this policy as our national cultural policy for Trinidad and Tobago. It is a process which we are very much engaged in and would want to see to its completion. Our national cultural policy is very much on stream and through this policy we will also look at the administration of what we call culture, which is our art forms—creative and performing arts—including all that is still, perhaps, emerging in our art forms and to some extent, marginalized.

Mr. President, another project we initiated in 1997 is the acquisition of the Naipaul House for preservation by the state. We did announce that the House for Mr. Biswas was so important to us as a national community that Government wanted to preserve it for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This acquisition has

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run into a snag, not because of our doing because, indeed, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs did allocate a sum of \$300,000 to pay for this house but because of land tenure problems identified again, by the State Solicitor's office in the process of acquiring the plot. However, these snags are being addressed and the 1998 budget allows for a sum of money for remedial and upgrading work to maintain that facility. That project is also very much on stream; we have not reneged on our commitment to purchase the Naipaul house.

Mr. President, in 1988 the Culture Division in the Ministry continues to focus on training and development for our art forms. We continue to focus, as well, which we started in 1997, on the whole notion of nationalization of our national days and festivals. We have a number of days and festivals to which we have holidays which we think are important to us as a nation. The last was the holiday which was given to the Baptist community in recognition of their struggle, the need for equity and the struggle that group put up within Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, unlike what our learned Senator has just said, that all we gave was a day, indeed, that community has in fact been given an allocation of 25 acres of land for putting up their various institutions of learning and preservation of the culture and artefacts related to the Baptist community. So it is not only a day and not only the presence of a member of the Baptist community on the Government Benches, but we have done something tangible in terms of this.

Mr. President, we are in the process of nationalizing all our days of festival so the Baptist holiday, Eid, Carnival—although it is not a holiday—Emancipation and all the others celebrated, which we have identified are so important that we should have a holiday for them. Since 1996 we have begun to allocate substantial sums of money, certainly more than has been done in the past.

In 1996 the sum of \$442,000 was allocated to national days and festivals for Trinidad and Tobago for the entire year. In 1997 that vote was increased by approximately 100 per cent to \$800,000. Indeed, we found that some of these festivals were very partially celebrated in some corners of the country by specific groups. What we want to do is make it national, make all our people aware of the total of who we are and celebrate who we are, but to do so in a developmental and educational way.

We in the Ministry have noted a flood of requests for assistance since our initiative in 1996 to substantially increase funding, particularly in certain areas

where, for example, the celebration of Emancipation Day was very, very poorly funded. We have since tried, through the groups, to structure their approach to celebration of these festivals and we are still working with the various groups in this way so as to one, nationalize and two, make these events developmental, educational and participative for all of us. That is a programme in which we are involved. The vote out of which we allocate national days and festivals has been increased somewhat for 1998 from a spending of \$5.2 million in 1997 to \$6.5 million in 1998. I must again emphasize that what we are doing is not feting and drinking. What we are working on with the groups is a developmental programme in all these areas in which we celebrate, including the Baptist day in educational development.

Mr. President, in the area of the Best Village programme within the Division of Culture—I have heard it said in the other place that we want to stop the Best Village programme. In 1996 when we entered office, we instituted initially, with the officers of the Division of Culture and their experience in the programme, a symposium on Best Village. We called in all the people who were actors, tutors, workers and the village people as well to look at what was happening in Best Village, the problems and where we want it to go. We did identify certain changes. In 1997 we again did a fairly good review of Best Village in terms of its funding, in what way the allocation of resources was done, the contract. We thought the idea of Best Village is a good idea, it was not one we wanted to throw away in anyway. In fact, we wanted to deepen and expand and we wanted, really, to have this notion of a best village; best in terms of its environmental cleanliness, in terms of training and participation of its people in the activities. We wanted mass participation in the activities in the food and folk heritage. Mr. President, those who would want to divide and cause trouble were pushing that we wanted to stop Best Village.

The allocation for Best Village in 1997 was no way less than it was the year before. Indeed, for 1998 there is an increase in the overall calculation to non-profit institutions, over which Best Village is funded, by \$1.3 million which can be used to accommodate the planned expansion and deepening of the programme in 1998. So there is absolutely no intention to get rid of the programme. There is the intention to expand it, make it more participative, to make people more trained, to emphasize the folk culture in a developmental way, to do some research and to have some archives.

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Mr. President, the heritage protection is being enhanced through our planned improvement in accommodation called the national archives. An accommodation brief was prepared by our archivist, it was taken to Cabinet, approved in principle and a committee has been formed to look at that brief to see how we can provide new accommodation for our national archives because all of us, particularly students of the University of the West Indies and secondary schools who are doing work and need to use the archives, know that the conditions there are not really the best for the protection of our heritage and so we have engaged upon this process of improving our archives and our heritage protection. We are also doing some upgrade work to the National Museum and Fort San Andres in terms of improving our heritage protection.

12.15 p.m.

We are also commencing in 1998, something we call the Trinidad and Tobago Cariforum Cultural Centre. This is a centre which we are building and creating with international funds, as well as with some Government fund. This is the Government's responsibility to the culture of the Caribbean. It is not only Trinidad and Tobago's culture, but a Caribbean Cultural Institute. Money has been allocated in the budget for the commencement of work on this Caribbean Cariforum Cultural Centre. There will also be some renovations to Queen's Hall and the Naparima Bowl which are our main cultural centres for the time being.

Mr. President, we hope that the National Trust Act will also be operational in 1998, and I note Sen. Prof. Kenny's concern of not seeing an allocation for the trust in the budget. But as one knows, Government funds cannot be allocated to a project which does not exist. Once the trust is put into being and made a functional entity, one will have to identify funds, between the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, for the starting up of the trust. Once the trust is a functional entity, funds will be allocated to it in the next budget.

I turn now to the National Carnival Commission (NCC) where much has been said about what we are trying to do there. We have been taking a new direction for carnival in 1998. There have been great criticisms but also there have been very much approval of what we have been doing. We have taken a bold step but this has been done in the context of our research and information about what has been happening to carnival over the years and where we want to go with it. We have taken this move to take care of some of the perennial problems identified over the years by the actors of carnival: the mas men, the calypsonian, Pan Trinbago and

those groups associated with carnival, and as well, the National Carnival Commission itself. We want to decentralize responsibilities for activities related to carnival—and this has been the quest of the carnival groups for a number of years. We want to contribute to the development of the interest groups involved in carnival and we want to contribute to the development of carnival itself; not only as a period where we dance on the streets but as something which we developed.

In fact, there are carnivals all over the world and everybody is claiming carnival as their own but the Trinidad and Tobago carnival has been replicated all over the world particularly in the North American continent. We want to contribute to the development of carnival itself. We want to develop carnival as an industry and to create opportunities, income earning both at home and abroad, particularly for the carnival artistes as we enjoy ourselves. We also want to develop carnival as an entity, not only for tourism, but through which we can create a number of activities, from research and development activities down to income earning activities which we think should go on all year. We are working at the professionalization of the organization we call NCC as well as on reviewing its activities.

I must say that there has been unprecedented co-operation and goodwill among all the groups which have been involved: Trinidad and Tobago Unified Calypsonians Organization (Tuco), Pan Trinbago, and NCC. We have found a willingness to co-operate among all these groups. We have found that we are beginning to break down all the mistrust that has been created over the years among the groups, and the groups know that they have the full support of Government in their ventures. National Carnival Commission still has overall responsibility for the creation of carnival. Sen. Shabazz said that we gave no money to the carnival bodies. That is not true. This is the first time, that we have been able to fund in the previous year, that is in 1997 we have provided some funding for 1998 so that they can start the work that they have to do. In fact, something like \$2 million has been given.

Mr. President, we are going to monitor the changes, look and work very closely with the groups to see what is the outcome. We are going to assess what has happened and take certain action as is determined and as we see necessary. I am saying that we have had unprecedented co-operation and this is regardless of the consistent bias and unfair reporting that is being done in the press, particularly in one of the dailies by one particular journalist/reporter, designed to create what I think is the appearance of confusion. While, between us we talk, consult, negotiate,

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we see where we are to go and we have agreed, but when one reads the daily newspaper one sees confusion and all kind of chaos being created even before the changes are put in place. Again, these people have their own agenda.

I alert the national community that there is no confusion. There is co-operation. It is change, and this change will bring some degree of concern and we are very closely looking at it. Those are the major areas in the Division of Culture that we have undertaken for 1997 and where we are going in 1998. Most of the criticisms have been unfounded. Perhaps, they have been due to lack of knowledge of what we are doing. Some of the things one is not seeing, but I have tried to outline and they are indeed taking place.

The “Dimanche Gras” in 1998 will be somewhat different. We are completing all the competitions before the “Dimanche Gras” so the competition will take place in calypso, in steelband.

I have an outline of all the activities taking place in Carnival starting on January, 3, 4, 17, 31 and so forth down to February 23 and 24 with the street parade. There is also the organization responsible, all in the schedule of activities, three pages of it. There is no confusion.

The “Dimanche Gras” is going to be a show of excellent quality which does not involve competition. The competitions will all have taken place prior to the Sunday night, and that show will be an excellent one which we can also package for local and international use.

12.25 p.m.

We expect that carnival would be improved. We would monitor, assess, look at the changes and make whatever adjustments are necessary in the future.

I move on to the Division of Women’s Affairs. Some of the objectives which we were using in 1996 and 1997 would be continued in 1998. We wanted to be more relevant to the needs and experiences of women based on their day-to-day activities. We wanted to contribute in concrete terms to the empowerment of women, through training and the creation of job opportunities. We wanted to place greater emphasis on issues of gender, so as to include gender training as a component of our programmes.

We wanted to create male awareness programmes. I remember Sen. Dr. St. Cyr spoke about the need to focus on men. We have found that when we speak about gender, people think we are talking about women. Gender does not mean

women. It is not synonymous with women. It refers to the social and cultural arrangements, habits, practices, roles and attitudes associated with the different sexes. A social role is attributed to a person, if that person is female. When a child is born, if it is a girl we think of the different direction, attitude and role associated with being female. If it is a boy we think of that associated with being male. Gender is not biology. It is social. It is created through our history, culture and religion. There are social roles associated with being male or female.

When we talk about gender issues, they are those issues which are related to being male or female at a certain point in time. Those roles and relationships begin to change because gender itself is dictated by the wider social, economic and political history of our country. We are becoming more democratic and are beginning to understand the notion of equity and equality. That influences our gender roles. Our exposure to education years ago was not as it is today. Females were not educated. Over time, women have been exposed to all levels of education. Sen. Prof. Spence just spoke about some new degrees at the university. Over time, the occupational and educational structures change and different roles are assigned. This notion of equity and equality influence those roles and relationships which are set up between men and women. Gender is a big area. It defines who we are and who we are not.

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. President: The hon. Minister would continue after the lunch break. This Senate is now suspended until 1.15 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Dr. The Hon. D. Phillips: Mr. President, before we broke for lunch, I was dealing with the issue of gender. In this area one of our major programmes was the Domestic Violence Programme which emerged out of a goal to try to be more relevant to the experiences of our women. In 1997, we concentrated on the problem of domestic violence through a programme which was started in 1996, with the creation of a 24-hour toll free domestic violence hot line, with linkages to

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services provided by the police and shelters. That programme was expanded in 1997, through the creation of a Domestic Violence Unit with a full complement of 13 trained and qualified persons, inclusive of the hot line staff that is assigned exclusively to address issues of domestic violence, for both victims and perpetrators.

In 1995, when we entered office, there were four persons in the Division of Women's Affairs. Today, there are 20 persons in that division including two male officers. That emphasizes the importance we put on addressing issues in relation to women and gender. The unit has introduced a community-based training programme centred around gender and violence issues. It has created a pilot community-based focus preventative group in Rio Claro. It has participated in reform of the Domestic Violence Act. Those activities were initiated by the ministry. It has just completed its last leg of public consultations.

We also created a male awareness programme highlighting issues of male violence, as well as a male support group to handle the broader male issues which I just described. We have engaged that unit in a public awareness programme in several communities, through the use of popular theatre. We have done this in collaboration with the Creative Arts Centre of the University of the West Indies. We have also funded the showing of plays to heighten awareness of these issues.

We have also conducted training of hot line staff and community police on issues relating to handling the domestic violence problems. We started the training of police before the community police unit was created. In 1998, we intend to stabilize the Domestic Violence Programme through the provision of improved physical facilities and expand those projects which have been started. In the budget money is allocated for that. The budget also provides an increase of \$500,000 over the 1997 allocation for programmes in these areas.

Other projects of the unit would include the training of hot line staff on database construction. In this regard, we have benefited from some institutional strengthening where we obtained computers from an IDB grant. We have the production of brochures for information and booklets for the public. This project has started with funds from the Canadian Equity Fund. It shows we have been attracting international funders who see our programme is good and what we are doing is beneficial.

1.20 p.m.

We have created community-based focus groups and conduct training workshops, which we started in Rio Claro in 1997 because we think that in the communities we need to look at the prevention of violence. We want to replicate those groups in nine areas in Trinidad in 1998, starting with St. George East, Couva and San Juan, in the first quarter. We also have another project—the creation of a database from our domestic violence demographic and social data. We do have data from that domestic violence line which has been running for a little over one year now.

In 1998, we intend to expand our male programme to include a gender-sensitive project for men, a pilot drop-in centre for men, in collaboration with the Family Planning Association. Out of that project, we will examine the feasibility of developing a counselling facility for men in domestic violence and related matters. Towards the end of 1998, we plan to host a national rally for men under the theme, “Men United Against Violence”.

Other projects of the Division of Women’s Affairs include a Women’s Enhancement and Leadership Institute. This is one of the projects to which we intend to apply the \$25 million allocated for single mothers. Because of the limited time, we will expand on that at some later date.

We have as well, planned for 1998, a Women’s Health and Empowerment Conference, which is to coincide with International Women’s Day, 1998, because we are aware that gender and other socio-economic issues affect the health of people and women’s health is a particular entity within this. We would like to examine those health issues and look at what we need to do for our women in that regard.

Another project for 1998, is community-based training and skilled development for women, as well as homework centres for children. Again, we wish to apply part of that \$25 million in that regard. Just one aside here, Mr. President, we want to assure the national population that we are not about encouraging the breakdown of families. That is not the purpose of the fund for single mothers. There is an existing reality with which we are dealing. Indeed, we want to break the cycle of poverty and dependency that is part of the creation of this particular phenomenon. We want to break that cycle of abuse and dependency, and this is the reason for the fund to develop and train mothers and children.

Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt: Could the Minister, before she gets off that topic, expand a little on the uses of the fund for women? The Minister talked about a leadership enhancement programme, which does not seem to be consistent with empowering women to become self-sufficient economically and income-generating.

Sen. Dr. The Hon. D. Phillips: Mr. President, there are two things: I have such little time and I have so much more to say. Secondly, this is a new fund for which we are now creating projects. From this ministry, two of the projects we will propose for this fund are from the empowerment programme. That programme, which we have already launched, as we envisage it, will deal with taking women after they have their skills and doing an enhancement programme. I am sorry. I cannot expand on that any more because of the limited time.

We want to finalize our national gender policy, which is already in draft form for acceptance. With regard to general analysis and gender-sensitive data collection techniques, we started, in 1997, a forced workshop on gender-sensitive data collection. We have had all the collection agencies, the Central Statistical Office and others, international as well as local, and all the ministries were brought together in a workshop to start that process of gender-sensitive data collection. Indeed, we would like to implement the Unremunerated Work Bill, which was passed some time ago, so we are working with CSO on how to do the household surveys through gender-sensitive collection techniques.

The area of community development, we think, is probably one of the most important areas because it is in the community that several of these things, of which we are speaking, will take place. Our community development officers also co-ordinate a number of projects from other ministries and agencies, non-government agencies and so forth, and we think that community development is one of the areas in which opportunities can and will be provided for other people.

We are focussing on the creation of mechanisms in the community, so I would mention just a bit about the village council movement. We think that the village council is a very good idea. The problem is that some village councils are not functional. We want to get them functional. Some of them are very politicized. We want to depoliticize them; democratize the whole institution within the community and get it functional.

In this regard, we have done a number of things, one of which is to have a programme of improved management of community centres through the

appointment of wardens, to whom we will pay a stipend. We have identified 70 such centres for 1998.

At the community level as well, we have been creating community-based management. There are 12 community complexes in which we have put community boards and management. We are employing people in the community to run these institutions, to keep them operational and functional so that community work will take place. We are aware of the importance of community work. We are contributing to community employment as well as to the use of community facilities in a non-political way.

Mr. President, we have been looking at the legalization, empowering of the community organization to do many of the things referred to by Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie last night, and to deal with some of the decisions about what takes place in the community. We are all aware that at the community level many of our problems can be solved if we really get our communities working. So community development is an important issue.

1.30 p.m.

Mr. President, in this area, the community centre programme is important. In 1997, we did a survey of all our community centres, in terms of status and use. We have about 210 of them and we have started a programme of rebuilding and repair, some of which has been done by the Ministry of Works and Transport. We have been working on getting the community centres operational and have been providing centres where there are none. In that review we have identified how many centres there are and which ones will be refurbished and repaired each year.

There is the Geriatric/Adolescent Partnership Programme which we met, which was introduced by the past administration. This year, 1997, we started an agency for the graduates of this programme, where the public could request persons to serve the elderly; to give the elderly the care they require. That agency is operational and very functional. We have also added an advanced level training programme to this Geriatric/Adolescent Partnership Programme for the year 1998.

We want to expand, as well, the Relief Centre Programme which was commonly known as the Soup Kitchens. We have added an additional aspect of training and orienting persons out of the soup kitchen mentality. We have some persons graduating out of that into self-sufficiency.

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The regional complexes have been brought off the ground. We experimented with new initiatives with a community-based management of these complexes, in 1997, and construction of community centres were started. Overall, our community education programme is to cost \$500,000, in 1998.

Work has also been done with the National Commission for Self-Help. This organization has been very instrumental in improving the community structures. We did 220 structures in 1997, for the sum of about \$10 million, and in 1998, that funding has been increased to \$16 million, so that more work could be done.

A sports centre programme of the Small Business Development Company is also very functional having trained, this year, 150 apprentices and we hope to train 300 next year. The funding has been increased proportionately to get these results.

These are some of the things we are doing in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs. They are very dynamic and interesting with a wide range of possibilities of what can be done in our country in those important areas.

Mr. President, I know my time is up but I wish you and your family, hon. Senators, as well as Members of the House of Representatives and the national community, the very best of health for 1998, for well-being, for development and for prosperity.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Mr. President, I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate on the 1998 Budget Statement. I understand that in a proposed new parliamentary calendar, Senators will not be denied the time to digest the budget statement, to unravel the figures and sort out the supporting documents, and to do the research necessary to make useful contribution to this most important exercise in the parliamentary year. I will not belabour the point.

There are three very broad parts to my contribution. One of them wants to look at two elements in the 1998 Budget Statement which do not, finally, balance one another. The second part wants to comment on a number of particular issues, including the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation, savings, agriculture, education and so forth. The third part with which I want to begin—in view of the fact that the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs has just spoken, and remembering Sen. Shabazz's contribution this morning—has to do with culture.

I begin this section on culture with a quote from the 1998 Budget Statement concerning a national cultural policy and a national cultural commission. The hon. Minister said:

“We will formulate a National Cultural Policy which will create opportunity for our people to work together, make the best use of our diversity, and to develop culture as an economic product.”

Mr. President, I repeat, “...to develop culture as an economic product.” It goes on:

“As part of this policy framework a National Cultural Commission will be established as the umbrella body for cultural organizations.”

Mr. President, I sympathize with the intention in a very general way, although I would put it differently. I would say: National cultural policy might help to defend the culture from incursions from abroad and from distortions from within. That, to me would be the importance of a national cultural policy, if, we were able to define one.

I suggest, Mr. President, that formulating a national cultural policy is an impossible dream. It is an impossible dream because culture is a dynamic, wide-ranging, self-directing, very human phenomenon. A culture is the total expression of a people or a society. It takes many different forms. It manifests itself in many different spheres of activity. It is to be seen in the attitude and behaviour of individuals, of groups, of the society or of a society in the making. It is in some kind of relationship with other cultures in the world which exist at the same time; synchronic. It is connected to, has been influenced, and is still influencable by its own past; diachronic. Culture is always changing in surprising ways, and being itself in surprising ways. Culture is evolutionary and conservative at one and the same time. The very reasons the hon. Minister is giving for wanting to formulate a cultural policy are the reasons I am giving for saying: We cannot and we do not want to.

To formulate a cultural policy, one would have to take a restricted view of what culture is, and one would have to frame a policy limited to that restricted view of culture. Sen. Shabazz spoke of the danger of declaring a cultural policy that is sure to be less free than the culture that is already dynamically in the making.

I think that the Minister of Finance, as Minister of Finance, is not really interested in those questions. He is interested in developing culture as an economic

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product; as something to sell. I am sure he appreciates that, neither in their day to day lives, nor in their customs and ceremonies, nor in their craft, nor in their artistic expressions are the practitioners of a culture motivated by market forces. There is a very large element and it is the most important element of self-expression and self-discovery in a culture.

1.40 p.m.

This brings us to the real problem—how to preserve the integrity of culture as the conscious and unconscious self-expression of a people, while developing it as an economic product. How to ensure that the business of culture does not diminish or denature culture itself. It is a difficult question and I want to propose to the Minister that some tinkering with terminology and some clearer definition of his projects might better serve the purpose of getting business out of culture.

I want to show you two versions of the limbo dance but only in words. *[Laughter]* In the first instance, the dancer's compressing of the body into such small space is a therapeutic re-creation of the close shelving of the enslaved Africans, like so many loaves of bread, in the hold of the slaveships. The movement from one side of the limbo pole to the other stands for the crossing of the Middle Passage. The break up of the body and its miraculous reconstitution on the other side speaks of the cultural survival and rebirth of a people. The whole dance calls to mind the shape-shifting capacities of the West African Anancy figure, whose ability to live by his wits and outsmart those who are more powerful than himself, helps enslaved persons to retain their sense of possibility in the most extreme situations.

You could even look at the word "limbo" and see in it, a suggestion about the limbo conditions of transported peoples with a pun on the word "limb", suggesting human limbs or branches as well as the many legs of Anancy, the spider God. Mr. President, if you saw this version of the dance that I am talking about you would be seeing art. The limbo dance you might see in a big hotel is quite different. It would have some art and then, maybe, a suggestion of cultural significance, but I think it would be called "entertainment." It would have been designed for a specific audience in a specific context. Its overall shape and structure if it were well done would, of course, show a high degree of skill in packaging and delivering. This entertainment would have drawn upon the culture for the raw material that is used to make itself an entertainment, but it would be very clear that this was an entertainment drawing upon the culture. It was not the culture. Similarly, the art I spoke about a while ago would also be drawing upon the

culture. I do not think the best of our limbo dancers, when they are doing the limbo dance, realize they are doing what I say they are doing.

There is then culture which is the self-expression of a people, its past, its present and its future, which comes out consciously and unconsciously; and there is, in relation to such expression the things we call art and entertainment. I want to state that although I have chosen an illustration that helps me to establish the difference between art and entertainment, I do not want to open an impossible gap between them. Art and entertainment exist in relation to one another; art and entertainment have always learnt from one another, and sometimes you cannot be sure if it is art or entertainment. David Rudder's performance would be classified under entertainment, but it is a lesson for all entertainers because it is both entertainment and high art which you can take in subliminally, intellectually, through the music and the rhythms, or through the words.

To repeat: although I am making a convenient distinction for the purpose of the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, between art and entertainment and talking about the relationship between art and entertainment on the one hand and the culture-base on the other, I am not trying to say that art is a totally different animal from entertainment. I would like to suggest that if a Minister wants to develop culture as an economic product, one way of doing it is to create conditions for the development of the entertainment industry. There must be an institution for the development of the entertainment industry and at the same time there must be an institution that creates conditions for the development of art and artistes.

Mr. President, what I am really proposing is that we forget this, possibly, undemocratic business of trying to formulate a national cultural policy; forget the establishment of a National Cultural Commission, not least, because it would have that horrible acronym, NCC. Forget all of that, and establish an institution like EIDECO, which is responsible for putting together the entertainment industry that draws upon the culture, and establish simultaneously, an Arts Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to talk a little about EIDECO, which means Entertainment Industry Development and Export Company of Trinidad and Tobago. In May 1995, the Tourism and Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (TIDCO) organized a two-day seminar to bring together all the major stakeholders in the entertainment industry. After six months of meetings and consultations, a second seminar was held.

In December 1996, EIDECO was established. It was launched on July 24, 1997 and there was a feature address by the Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday, who offered encouragement and who seemed to promise that there were possibilities in such areas as the programming of fiscal and regulatory measures pertaining to the importation, manufacture and export of creative products.

1.50 p.m.

Mr. President, since that time, EIDECO has formed a good working relationship with TIDCO, so much so that one could easily form the impression that it is a branch of TIDCO. Or, that it is an autonomous Government body working in liaison with TIDCO.

Mr. President, I am going on about EIDECO because everybody has now begun to realize the importance of the entertainment industry as a revenue earning element in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. There is a very useful report, *The Entertainment Sector of Trinidad and Tobago: Implementing an Export Strategy*, prepared for TIDCO by Ralph Henry and Keith Nurse, October 1996. What is clear from that report is that there is almost \$1 billion a year to be earned out of the entertainment industry. I would just like to quote from page 13 of the report, what they say concerning reggae. It states:

“Reggae's transition from a local artform to a global one was not automatic nor did it occur without some amount of corporate manipulation and reconfiguration...”

So the thing had to be manipulated. It goes on:

“It is estimated that reggae sales in the US between 1992 and 1993 were US \$270 million dollars. In the UK, of the approximately US \$2.0 billion in music sales, it is estimated that 4.5% of the single sales and 7% of the album sales is of music performed or written by Jamaicans. Jamaica also releases more ‘45’ recordings per capita than anywhere else in the world. ...conservative estimates put Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton and Patra annual incomes between US \$250,000 and \$750,000 and the Bob Marley estate earnings from royalties and merchandising are US \$250,000.”

Mr. President, we are talking about an industry that is really a gold mine. Something that would bring occupation, not only to the artistes or performers, but to people involved in the recording industry and in the distribution of recordings.

Mr. President, I do not want to go on and on, but I do want to read a more bit from the brochure put out by EIDECO.

“In 1995, the entertainment industry earned TT \$253 million...”

It was seventh in the table of domestic exports. According to people in the industry, these earnings are only a fraction of the real earnings.

So, what we need is an organization that will give the artists, the performers, the bands, everybody involved in this entertainment industry, not only the opportunity to earn, but the confidence that their earnings may be repatriated to Trinidad and Tobago. The revenue loss and the loss in real money in the country, because we do not have an organization which controls, encourages and participates with the entertainment industry, are enormous. So I believe that the time has come for Government to either take EIDECO and build on it or turn EIDECO into a corporation, an autonomous body responsible for organizing the entertainment industry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, one of the most important elements in the entertainment industry, in carnival and almost everything that happens on the weekend is the music industry. I think that if we are going to deal with EIDECO or if we are going to set up a body to be responsible for co-ordinating the entertainment industry, to help turn some parts of the culture into economic products, we need, not only a recording industry, we need a film industry.

I am going to talk a little about the recording industry. In the budget the hon. Minister spoke of how there is going to be an institute of carnival, and he intimated that a recording studio for use by local artists will also be part of the institute. The recording industry is crucial for export, and for the development of artists. Not to make any bones about it, I think it is time that the Government takes steps to acquire the Caribbean Sound Basin which is known to be one of the finest recording studios in the world and one to which international artists come regularly to make their recordings.

At present, there are about 20 small recording studios in this country. All of them have some kind of relationship with Caribbean Sound Basin. According to Mr. Scoon, who is president of REACT, the creative people are in the smaller studios, but the recording facilities at Caribbean Sound Basin are out of this world and beyond all of them. So they all depend upon it. If they want to get a big sound, they cut their tracks and go to the Sound Basin. If they want to clean up their music, any kind of editing, they go to the Sound Basin. There are two Liam

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Teague CDs, one done by Engine Room Recordings and one done by Caribbean Sound Basin. If one listens to them one will hear how wonderful the facilities at the Caribbean Sound Basin are.

I do not know what the politics of the thing is, I do not know what it is going to cost, but I am pretty certain that the Government cannot, today, put up enough money and muster the right expertise to set up a recording studio of the quality of Caribbean Sound Basin. We do not need another recording studio. What we need is a manufacturing location attached to the recording studio and the space is present at Caribbean Sound Basin to permit this. If we do not move quickly, we may get the ground floor of Caribbean Sound Basin as our recording studio and we will have a foreign embassy on top of our heads and a commercial establishment above. We need to buy this thing quickly before the two floors are rented out that we might need for expansion of the recording industry.

Mr. President, I speak about a manufacturing location. It is true that the cost of manufacturing a CD is very cheap, US 95 cents per CD if you are doing 1,000 and over, and US 50 cents for the labelling. So I do not think that there is an economic argument for our saying we want to produce the CDs here, but every other argument that has to do with controlling your industry with timing the appearance of the recordings and encouraging the artist in the country to produce, everything else is in favour of our setting up a recording manufacturing plant in this country for CDs. I am told by people in the industry that the raw material is a downstream petroleum product. I am told that it will require US \$2 million in investment to set up the plant.

So, to close this section of my contribution, I would just like to summarize. I think it will be very difficult to form a national cultural policy. I think that instead of a National Cultural Commission we should form a Trinidad and Tobago Arts Council and we should form a body like EIDECO responsible for the entertainment industry; that we should recognize the difference between art and entertainment; recognize the connections between them and recognize the ways in which art and entertainment draw upon a rich and evolving cultural base.

The third specific proposal in support of developing the entertainment industry is that the Government should acquire the Caribbean Sound Basin which would then, I hope, at least go into partnership with the Recording Industry to develop facilities at the Caribbean Sound Basin in the interest of the recording industry of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the first section of my presentation.

In the next section I want to make some very rapid comments on a number of particular issues. I do not know enough about economics to argue in the way big economists would argue about the decisions concerning the Unit Trust Corporation. All I can say about the Unit Trust Corporation is that I put my money in it because I have the impression that it is run by servants of the state and these people who run the company are not owners of the company. They get a salary coming from the profits of the company, they do not have any temptation to take risks with my money. So when I put my money there, I am not a big investor, I just want to make sure that if I put in \$1,000 I will get back \$1,000, but I am getting enough interest to keep the value of my money up. I am not speculating. If my mattress was safe I would put my money under the mattress. If I could stop it from devaluing I would keep it home. I just want to stop my money from devaluing and there are many people with \$2,000 or \$3,000 who have confidence that the Unit Trust Corporation is not run by a bunch of sharks who are out to make quick money.

As an ignorant common man, I just get the feeling that when they divest this thing and sell out the Unit Trust Corporation, the big sharks are going to grab it. These fellows are out to make profits. It is true, I may have a little \$2,000 in it, but I have no say and I have no way of controlling these fellows who are making all kinds of decisions about my money. My money will now, for the first time, be at risk.

2.05 p.m.

Mr. President, that problem I have with the Unit Trust Corporation is a problem with the whole so-called divestment policy of the Government. The generalization I would like to make is, if you are going to divest I want to see that there are regulations to prevent commercial giants or conglomerates from taking over. I want to see a system that would ensure that every citizen of this country who wants to buy shares in a state enterprise on the market has an equal chance with the big boys in the financial sector. If I cannot get those guarantees, I would have to believe that the divestment policy would be one to sell the thing to your partners.

Going back to the Unit Trust Corporation, I have a serious question. Why trouble something that is not troubling you? The Unit Trust Corporation is not a draw upon Government money and is not troubling anybody. It has a very good reputation. If you want to divest something, divest Petrotrin, look at things that are making trouble and divest them. But the Unit Trust Corporation is going along very well and because of this you want to sell it to your partners.

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In general, I think it is good for a Government to divest and to ensure that the population has a share in the assets of the country. I think the divestment policy should proceed by dealing with the industries that are in trouble first. I would like to ensure a democratization of this divestment. We have to make it good by a quota system or some system of allocation which ensures that every citizen who is willing and able is entitled to the same number of shares as other privileged individuals or corporations.

On the question of savings, it has been drawn to my attention by a number of people that the issues of mortgage and approved pension relief have caused some problems for some citizens. I will like to quote from a letter from someone who has been badly affected:

For this year (1997) the maximum amount that could be claimed by an individual towards mortgage payment plus contributions towards approved pension plans etc. has been \$18000.

The honourable Minister of Finance, in his budget speech for 1998, said that he was "**CREATING**" an incentive for saving by separating the mortgage interest payments to a maximum of \$18000 and contributions to approved pension plans etc. to a maximum of \$12000. This would, of course, mean that a person who pays \$18000 towards mortgage interest payments **and** \$12000 towards contributions to approved pension funds etc. will be able to claim a relief of \$30000 for the year 1998.

However, in the case of a person who has no mortgage interest payments, the contributions towards approved pension funds etc. have reduced from \$18000 in 1997 to \$12000 in 1998.

Further, in the case of any individual who has a mortgage interest payment of less than \$6000 (For example \$5500)..."

There is also a loss. The main point is that "individuals who are occupying rented accommodations are at a serious disadvantage" in that they have now lost the \$18000 and are down to \$12000. I have a feeling that it may not have been the intention of the Minister to bring this kind of oppression to people. If it is an oversight I do hope he would try to remedy it.

Still on the questions of savings, Mr. President, I just want to float a suggestion, regarding the tax on savings. I find it very hard that after I have paid my income tax and my dues, deprived myself and put my money in an account to

make 4 or 5 per cent interest, I now have to pay tax on that interest. I am being taxed twice because already I am a pay-as-you-earn citizen who is carrying this country on my back.

I feel the Government should take steps and make provision that all citizens who suffer pay-as-you-earn should not have to pay interest on savings accounts that are related to their pay-as-you-earn salary. It would be very difficult to prove that it is their pay-as-you-earn salary, but what you might need to do is set an annual limit on savings, "You are making \$40,000 a year, do not tell me that you are saving more than five. We are a hard government and we do not allow anybody to save more than five."

Therefore, with respect to the savings of pay-as-you-earn citizens up to a certain percentage of salary, savings that are put in savings accounts, there should be provision that you would not have to pay interest. I do not believe that is a very difficult measure to put in place. I think that if the Minister is serious about the culture of savings then he should give thought to that.

On agriculture, my eyes nearly fell out when I read on page 16 of the budget statement this wonderful piece of news:

"To further stimulate output in the agriculture sector, we will develop a comprehensive incentives programme for agriculture. This programme will not be unlike that which currently obtains in the tourism sector."

Mr. President, the grammar is a bit funny and I do not know if it is evasive, but "not unlike" must mean "would be like". If the Minister is undertaking to give agriculture the same financial incentive and encouragement as he is going to give to the tourism sector, then the farmers of this country should play red this year with Peter Minshall, joy.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Hon. Senators, there seems to be some doubt on that.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Mr. President, is the hon. Senator saying that there is doubt about the syntax, the language or the intention? [*Laughter*].

I find it very interesting that the Minister should link agriculture and tourism like this. Well, if that is what he is going to do, he is going to give to agriculture what he is giving to tourism, then I should have been much warmer in my congratulations than I was initially. But the taste of the pudding is in the eating.

Everyone had his say about Caroni (1975) Limited and I am going to have mine by bringing in Dr. Eric Williams. I do think that shortly before he died, he got Caroni (1975) Limited right. I have a manuscript from Dr. O'Neil Lewis which Sen. St. Cyr referred to and which was published in the newspaper. I would like to read what Dr. Williams was planning to do about Caroni (1975) Limited. These are the words of Dr. O'Neil Lewis:

"In what was, possibly, his last address as Political Leader to a special convention of the PNM on January 25, 1981 to mark the Party's 25th anniversary, Dr. Williams addressed some remarks on the future of the industry, as he saw it.

He listed five "very simple, but stark basic" facts that had to be borne in mind:

- (a) The competition from beet sugar...;
- (b) The competition of artificial sweeteners;
- (c) a cost of production in excess of \$2,700 per ton...;
- (d) injection by the State of some \$500 m. into the company...;
- (e) a projection of a State subsidy of some \$1,500 m. over the next five years—"

2.15 p.m.

Dr. Williams disclosed that in that situation the Cabinet had before it a proposal to proceed forthwith with proposals contained in the party's 1976 election manifesto as follows:

- “(1) separation of cultivation of cane from the manufacture of sugar;
- (2) divestment of most of our sugar lands to the cane farmers themselves. Other lands suitable for agriculture being assigned to livestock and food production with priority to bona fide Caroni (1975) Limited workers;
- (3) manufacturing companies to bargain for cane farmers' sugar on the basis of partnership between state, sugar workers and cane farmers with the ultimate divestment in accordance with government's policies; and
- (4) most important of all, proceeding to white sugar and ending our dependence on foreign refineries.”

Dr. Williams gave that address on January 25, 1981. Two months later, on March 29, 1981, he was dead.

Mr. President, what I hoped he was going to say as well—I think all of that still has not been said—and what I find nobody wants to talk about, but I will, even if they call me a commie—is what I find wrong with Caroni (1975) Limited is that it does not have a monopoly on rum. It seems a private enterprise has raked off the most profitable side of the sugar industry. Fernandez and Angostura are making rum and making money and Caroni (1975) Limited is making losses. So why should Caroni (1975) Limited, which is producing the molasses, let its molasses go to private enterprise to make money? Caroni (1975) Limited should be the rum making facility in this country. If those companies want to buy molasses they may have to pay a little more. We have to protect it. We cannot say we are trade liberalized and let them bring the molasses from elsewhere.

I do not know why it is, over all these years, long before we had trade liberalization, it was not seen that the rum market is a very big market and that Caroni (1975) Limited can pay for itself through rum. Why is Caroni (1975) Limited not the major rum producer in Trinidad and Tobago? Why is the rum producing allowed to go off to private enterprise, the same private enterprise which complains that you are subsidizing Caroni (1975) Limited? You must subsidize it. The only thing Caroni (1975) Limited has to make money from is taken away by the ‘big boys’. Caroni (1975) Limited must starve! Mr. President, that is my view on Caroni (1975) Limited and I feel that if governments are brave and if they are willing to risk losing their new friends, they will take steps to turn Caroni (1975) Limited into the rum producer that it ought to be.

Mr. President, I want to come to education. Before I come to education I have to give the part of my presentation that I said was pointing to a lack of balance between the two main elements in the budget.

Let me begin by congratulating the Minister on a presentation that does show an awareness of the issues affecting daily life in our country. Let me congratulate him for his grasp of the world economic situation and the imperatives of the global economy. But as I congratulate him for that, I want to look at the true priorities that seem to exist in the budget; the two declared priorities. My argument is that one of them is verbal and the other is practical. The first declared priority would be understood if I am allowed to quote from his own statements. I am going to leave these quotes hanging as touchstones by which to measure or test the budget proposals. These are important quotes because they show that the Minister is very aware of the social issues facing the country. He knows what—

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. Prof. J. Spence*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Thank you very much, Mr. President and Senators.

These quotations and allusions show that the hon. Minister knows what to do and what to say. He begins by admitting economic and social imbalance in the country. He makes a reference to the fact that one-third of the population lives under the poverty line. He promises that the budget is going to be consumer friendly in its priorities and he ended up by saying "no new taxes". He spoke about the budget as being a comprehensive blue print for human development, savings and asset building for the masses of the country. He spoke of ensuring that the greatest good and the fullest opportunity will come to the largest number of people in our society. He spoke about broadening the culture of savings among our people. He spoke of expanding the base of asset holding in this country to include all sections of the society without exclusion. These are very fine professions. When I read that I am thrilled. I say, "What! The man gone commie too".

Well, Mr. President, in the budget we see a number of small gestures in the direction of these great aims and we have to be thankful for these small mercies. I thank the Minister for increasing old age pensions. I thank him unreservedly for the assistance to single mothers and delinking of the mortgage and pension contribution allowances. I thank him for the low cost housing, the community based employment and the suggestion that there is going to be more regionalization of the economy. I thank him for the minimum wage. I thank him—but I do not know what use it is going to be—for the computer for civil servants. I do not know what they are going to do with a computer, it will be great fun, I am sure the children will enjoy themselves. It is not going to improve the efficiency of the civil service; I can tell you that. But if the Government has the money and wants to subsidize all civil servants having a computer in their house, the children will have fun, that is good. I would like to suggest that if that is going on, the Government should form its own importing company and import those computers and do not let any middle men get the profits. [*Interruption*] Were the companies set up already? [*Interruption*] Oh! Literary men move kind of slow. That is the first declared intention of the budget. Something to do with redressing the social imbalance in the country.

The second priority which is quite frightening, although we have got a generation that is not frightened by it, is the construction of a competitive export-led engine for meaningful expansion and for sustainable growth which, when translated, means to turn the country into a business environment for local and foreign investors. Those are the two stated aims in the budget. One of them to redress the social imbalance and the other to turn the country into a business environment. Those two aims, as they are expressed and enacted in the budget, are incompatible with each other.

The budget statement boasts that billions of dollars of international investment have flowed into our economy generating thousands of new jobs. What thousands of new jobs? Construction jobs associated with oil company development are not permanent jobs, they are just playing the beauty of numbers. It boasts that at the macro-economic level we have had an accumulated increase in GDP growth at the level of 6.7 during the last year. What does the GDP prove? All it does is tell the outside world that this is a good business spot, come and make money. It does not mean that the people of the country are well off or that the standard of living is rising. That is not what it means at all. The GDP is a shop window thing to encourage investors. It is not a statement about how your people live.

Sen. Daly: How you have to go through a nasty airport. *[Laughter]*

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: When you call the GDP figure, you should tell me how much of that actually stays here; how much GTECH is carrying home; how much Atlantic is carrying home and it is going to be cut by about 50 per cent.

Yes, we have a nice GDP, but for all the nice GDP one-third of the people in the country are living under the poverty line. It could be that I am unfair to the Minister because one of the unhappy things about the budget is that it is not comprehensive or specific enough in its details for me to know whether these stated aims of rebalancing the society are going to be fulfilled. We need to see mechanisms and we need systems. We do not want trickle downs. We want to see mechanisms and systems to change the basic fact that over one-third of the population lives below the poverty line. We want to see mechanisms and systems to deal with the social problems arising from the fact that one-third of the population lives under the poverty line. Problems in health, food, education and employment.

Sen. Daly: And Dengue fever.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Dengue fever. We want to transform the society by removing social and economic imbalances and we want to transform it at root. We do not want a little trickle down and a little hand out and a hundred dollars there. All the evidence of the budget suggests that we are into the Thatcherite trickle down philosophy.

Mr. President, in the last 10 minutes that I have—*[Laughter]* I want to come—

Mr. President: The hon. Senator has five more minutes.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: —to the very troubled question of education. It is true that more money has been allocated to education, but if you look at the figure and at what is going to be done with the money, there is no sign of any cash commitment to reforming the educational system. The educational system is in complete need of revision, not only because what is there is rotten, but because there are new challenges to be faced by the society and people need to be trained, equipped and educated. Those challenges are nowhere spelt out and nowhere in the budget do we see that the allocation for education is aiming to equip people.

2.30 p.m.

There is nothing about the Common Entrance examination. There is nothing about the primary school curriculum which has to be dumped. There is nothing about all the students who fall out from the primary system. There is nothing about the 20,000 people who only get five years of secondary education. There is nothing about the shift system. There is nothing about the junior secondary schools needing to be phased out. There is nothing about the fact that only 3,000 people go on to 'A' levels. There is nothing about the fact that only a fraction of those go to university. There is nothing. There is little money being spent on early childhood education. There is nothing about the new approach to the delivery of the primary school curriculum; there is nothing about the need to develop more variety in secondary school education. There is nothing about the need to spend money on the development of training and skills and of integrating that with the more conventional education system. There is nothing about tertiary expansion, except a putrid little statement that we are going to have a community college in imitation of American community colleges, as if we wish to perpetuate the conditions in America that have made community colleges necessary there.

We have had a long debate about tertiary education—aborted, of course—in which men and women proposed the establishment of a technical university of

Trinidad and Tobago and the revamping of the secondary system to work in sync with that, and now what we get is this reheated stuff about the community college. So, a lot of money is being allocated to education, but a lot of money is being allocated towards the maintenance of a rotting *status quo*.

Mr. President, you would find that when you talk about education, you see coming together a whole set of problems that this society has to spend more than the education budget to deal with them. These problems include the rights of children; the art of parenting; the maintenance of family life; the problem of poverty; the problem of crime. These problems are so tightly interrelated that when one starts to talk about education, one has to think about them.

Mr. President, because I am running out of time, I am just going to quote one paragraph from a book that I commend to the Government called *CHILDREN FIRST WHAT SOCIETY MUST DO—AND IS NOT DOING—FOR CHILDREN TODAY* by Penelope Leach. I quote from page 172:

“Children are the largest minority group in society and the minority that is most subject to discrimination and least recognised as being so. There is no equivalent to equal-opportunities legislation for children. No demands are made on their behalf for political correctness; even those who decry ageism seldom include children, certainly not pre-adolescents. Somehow we have allowed children to be unthinkingly excluded from otherwise universal human rights, and that means that the special needs that go with being very young are not met as of right but at the whim of adults.”

So that a revised educational system would bear in mind the rights of children; it will also bear in mind the problem of poverty. Page 188 states:

“...The more we learn, the clearer it becomes that, in post-industrial societies at least, poverty is the biggest risk of all. This is not to suggest,.. that poor children cannot or do not become healthy, happy, productive adults. Rather it is to suggest that there are barriers, large or small, between every baby and the eventual realisation of her full potential for contented, creative citizenship and whatever the nature of those barriers, poverty makes them more difficult to surmount...”

In study after study, conducted in country after country, family poverty has been shown to be inexorably correlated with premature delivery; postnatal, infant and child mortality; malnutrition and ill-health; childhood neglect; educational failure; truancy; delinquency; school-age pregnancies and the birth of babies who are the victim of premature delivery,...”

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Mr. President, what I am trying to say is when I look at the amount of money that is being spent on education in this country and what are the plans for education in this country, I realize that there is absolutely no thought or no vision about the needs of the young people of our country and that education is still being treated as something that exists in a separate world, in a separate sphere from the real world.

We have got to develop an educational policy which recognizes that the problems in this country are multiple, problems which are poverty related and the poverty base ties in the problem of education with crime, health and everything else. Mr. President, if we believe in our society and in the future of our society, our belief has to show itself in an allocation of money and a delivery of plans to transform the society from the bottom up and we begin by ensuring that we get an educational system for everybody. That will be the beginning of our independence.

I thank you.

Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed: Mr. President, one Charles Louis Desecondat is quoted to have said that the deterioration of every government begins with the decay of the principles on which it is founded. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my brother and colleague, Sen. Shabazz, on his maiden contribution in the Senate this morning, because his was the voice of the people, just as we are sitting in this Chamber now and hearing the voices of the people outside. I am sure that up to this time they have not received their money.

Mr. President, this Government of transparency and accountability has once again short-changed the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Over the last few days we have read in the newspapers, the various comments about the manner in which the budget debate unfolded in the other place. Since this UNC coalition Government came into office, this is its third budget. We all remember only too well the very first budget debate which went on until 7.00 o'clock the next morning; then last year, again, that debate went on until the very wee hours of the morning and this year they have played cat and mouse in the other place. An entire debate took place without any response from the other side with respect to significant questions raised. I refer specifically to the Public Sector Investment Programme. They talk about accountability and transparency!

I wish to put on the record our displeasure at the fact that last night when we were having discussions about who would speak and how the sequence of speakers would take place, the Leader of Government Business in the Senate saw

it fit to dictate to us, to tell us if we were not putting in another speaker, he would have the debate wound up. I view that as irresponsibility of the highest order. It is just so typical of them. The truth of the matter is they prefer not to have a debate because they know that we are exposing the sham of this budget as we have done in the past.

Mr. President, my brother, Sen. Shabazz, sought this morning to give a definition of a budget. He quoted from Webster's dictionary. I want to quote from a book about an individual who is today the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. He is viewed by many as though he is the local Mahatma. This is the hon. Basdeo Panday, in a book entitled *Basdeo Panday An Enigma Answered*, on page 9, on what is a budget. I hope his Minister of Finance is listening carefully. He says here:

"...a Budget is the annual expression of such a Plan. It is the occasion on which the Government reviews its past performance, notes changes in the objective societal conditions and modifies its strategy and tactics, if needs be. But the Budget, nonetheless, remains an integral part of an overall policy and programme, a clearly thought-out plan—not an isolated incident devoid of philosophical and ideological content."

It is my respectful submission this afternoon that the 1998 Budget Statement is certainly an isolated incident that is devoid of philosophical and ideological content. It amounts to nothing more than a political speech, not a budget. As usual, it is deceptive, it is illusory and it is designed to seduce the nation. In effect, it is nothing short of a mamaguy budget and another one of their public relations gimmicks.

Like Prof. Ramchand, I am no economist, but I wish to point out one or two aspects of the first few pages of this budget that deal with some macro issues. On page 3 of the budget statement which was presented on Friday, December 12, 1997, the hon. Minister of Finance boasts that:

"By the end of June this year, unemployment was down to 14.5 %; the lowest level in thirteen years, in this country,..."

At page 4, he boasts that:

"The inflation rate is now at the lowest level in three decades."

And at page 5, he refers to:

"...an accumulative increase in GDP growth of the level of 6.7 per cent during the last 2 years,..."

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Mr. President, yesterday we had the pleasure of having the hon. Minister of Planning and Development grace us with his presence in the Senate Chamber and, if I recall correctly, the hon. Minister stated that we have stabilized inflation; we have generated fiscal incentives; we have carried out structural reforms in the country; we have opened up the economy; we have gone for more private sector involvement; we have opened up to more competition. He is quite correct to say “we” because we have done so. It is not this UNC coalition of, Mr. President, with all due respect, I think the most appropriate word to describe the coalition now, is a coalition of froghoppers. They are not the ones who are to be held responsible for all these ingredients existing in the country; it is the former administrations of both the People's National Movement and the National Alliance for Reconstruction; not them at all.

Mr. President, we remember very well in the mid 1980s under the regime of the late Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. George Chambers, that some very significant belt tightening measures were being instituted and when the National Alliance for Reconstruction came into power in 1986, they, too, continued with the International Monetary Fund programmes and policies and, under the former PNM administration, it was under the Manning administration that there was an actual turnaround of the economy and we saw actual growth in the economy beginning to take place. I want to apologize up front for always having to go back, but I need to do this in order to set the record straight.

2.45 p.m.

Senators who were in the Parliament at that time would remember the theme of the People's National Movement 1993 budget which was presented by the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Wendell Mottley—and I am sure the Leader of Government Business will remember this—was from stabilization to growth and it is deception of the worst form for the present Minister of Finance to come to this Parliament and state an accumulated increase in the Gross Domestic Product growth at the level of 6.7 during the last three years. He is boasting about it as though since coming into power there has, in fact, been continuous growth.

In fact, when we remove the fluff we will see that there has been an actual decline in Gross Domestic Product between 1996 and 1997. When one compared the growth rate, in 1995 the economic growth was 3.8 per cent as compared with 3.6 per cent in 1994 under the People's National Movement. However, in 1995 under this present coalition Government, the Gross Domestic Product has declined

to 3.2 per cent as compared to 3.5 per cent in 1996. I trust that the hon. Minister of Finance will correct me in his winding up if I am wrong.

Mr. President, the short point is that it is the PNM Government which has put this economy on the growth path and this present Government is the mere inheritor. Already we are seeing very serious signs that it is squandering the economic gains that we have been making over the years of structural adjustment. I have to query the Government's boast about the inflation rate. Yesterday my colleague, Sen. Jagmohan went to great detail to highlight the rising cost of food prices as he referred to basic, specific food items and has shown how the prices have increased over the last two years and now this budget. I am sure that all persons involved in business would agree that the impact of this budget is that the cost of business is going to be more expensive from here onwards. Obviously this is going to cause the inflation rate to go up, if anything. In fact, in looking at the newspapers yesterday, I saw a statement by the Bankers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago on prevailing monetary conditions. What this association is informing the public is that interest rates are likely to increase and this has come about because of recent events with respect to trying to keep the foreign exchange rates stable. It is a very bleak picture, Mr. President, contrary to what the hon. Minister of Finance has sought to project in his budget statement. There is an obsession for blaming the People's National Movement for everything that goes wrong and Sen. Shabazz exposed the Government this morning.

Mr. President, on page 6 of the Minister's budget statement, I quote:

“After thirty-five years of political independence, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are only now getting ready for the take off to true economic independence.”

The Minister goes further on page 7 that is why I say it is a political speech, not a budget:

“The fact, is Mr. Speaker, this sort of data provides compelling evidence that for more than three decades, this country was atrociously managed, and short changed by the Party which is now in Opposition.”

This is the Minister of Finance who was once a minister under the People's National Movement and this is the kind of ingratitude which he is displaying.

Mr. President, for the records, I wish to reiterate that the People's National Movement has given to this country, 34 years of very sound, stable government

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and has transformed this economy into a sophisticated, industrialized nation. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries cannot deny that. The National Alliance for Reconstruction has also contributed towards this. The Government is always so quick to make the comment that the PNM squandered \$60 billion during the boom period. It is not in the budget statement but that is part of the propaganda campaign that has been entrenched in the minds of people over the years. I just wish to send a reminder that as they sit in the twin towers and overlook the city of Port of Spain, when they look at the Brian Lara Promenade, the Hall of Justice, the super highways and then turn south to look at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, they must say a prayer each time thanking God for the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, in this budget speech I have counted more than 12 occasions on which the Minister of Finance referred to the Panday Administration. Sen. Shabazz has made mention of it as well. This is a Minister of Finance who is struggling for his own survival and is just marking time so he has to massage the ego of the Prime Minister.

At page 8 of the Budget Statement, the Minister of Finance says:

“Over the years, Trinidad and Tobago has repeatedly squandered its chance to become “Economic Tiger of Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Mr. President, for the record, I need to remind the hon. Minister of Finance and those on the other side that it was under the Manning administration that the institutional framework was made to position Trinidad and Tobago as the business and financial capital of the Caribbean and, indeed, of Latin America. It was under the former PNM administration that the goal was to make Trinidad and Tobago the gateway to Latin America, South America and the Caribbean and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, again, cannot deny that. It was under Mr. Patrick Manning's administration, as the hon. Minister of Finance would remember because he was the Minister of Industry and Trade as well, that the thrust of the Government was to pursue a vigorous strategy to expand trade and investment with the Caribbean and Latin America.

Mr. President, Trinidad and Tobago for years, had always played a leading role in Caricom. We recognized the need to deepen the integration movement. It was under the former PNM administration that Trinidad and Tobago was elected as the site for the Association of Caribbean States Headquarters. Trinidad and Tobago was gearing up to become the business and diplomatic centre in the hemisphere. The Orinoco/Apure project would have opened up a new kind of relationship between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela.

Sen. Gangar: What is that?

Sen. N. Mohammed: You should be telling us. Mr. President, we even became a member of the Andean Development Bank, we were becoming the “economic tigers” of Latin America and the Caribbean. It was this Government in its two short years in office, that has been squandering our chances of becoming the “economic tiger” in the Caribbean and Latin America and I will show you how.

When the Government was just formed, I remember two months after we had a new Attorney General and very hurriedly, the Shiprider Agreement was signed without any consultation in the country. This was a big issue in the recent summit that was held in Bridgetown, Barbados when the American President was there. We were the laughing stock of the entire Caribbean region because of the haste with which they rushed to sign the Shiprider Agreement without any sort of negotiations taking place.

Mr. President, 1997 has been one of the worst years for fishermen in our country. For the last few months there have been so many incidents of tension in the Gulf. And what is the response of the Government? The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs rushes and takes the Prime Minister for a day in Venezuela, “they come and announce fishing agreement” and next thing you know there is more shooting in the Gulf. What was the Government's response? An Organization of American States summit being held in Peru and the Minister of Foreign Affairs chose to go to the summit and gallery and grandstand, even though advised not to do so but was so proud to have the hemispheric spotlight on him. As soon as the summit was over, the next thing we heard in Trinidad and Tobago was that the Venezuelan ambassador was recalled. Mr. President, never before in the history of Trinidad and Tobago was an ambassador recalled. It is the biggest diplomatic *faux pas* ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago and it is they who are responsible for it.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would know what the effect of that breakdown in relations would have been because he knows about the developments that were taking place between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, making Trinidad the logistic base, development in the ports—airport and sea port. This was the world class vision of the People's National Movement which has been shattered.

Mr. President, I would like to turn to page 14 of the Budget Statement which deals with the Public Sector Investment Programme. The fact that there failed to

be a response to the questions that were raised about the Public Sector Investment Programme in the other place is an indication that it is recognized that this budget is really a sham. It cannot even be defended. Mr. President, do you know for the first time ever in a budget debate in this country that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago has not taken part in the budget debate? It is scandalous.

Mr. President: One must be careful about criticizing positions of head. Please do not do so.

Sen. N. Mohammed: Certainly, Mr. President and I will take note of your comment. Yesterday the Minister of Planning and Development, in the Senate, sought to give an explanation for what we consider to be a failure of the Public Sector Investment Programme in 1997 and its performance. It was really a pathetic report given by the Minister of Planning and Development. In fact, after the Minister's contribution, I must say that I admired his honesty and openness in dealing with the issue, but the Minister himself admitted that they failed to achieve a satisfactory rate of implementation with respect to the Public Sector Investment Programme. The hon. Minister sought to give a comparison of the rate of implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme between the period 1992—1995. The Minister says that in 1992 there was a 54.6 per cent implementation rate; in 1993, 61.8 per cent, in 1994, 71.5 per cent; and in 1995, 75.6 per cent. The Minister went on to point out that in 1996 the implementation rate was 81 per cent but in 1997 it was, in fact, 75 per cent.

Mr. President, I just wish to refer to page 2 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme, 1994*. Under the former PNM administration with respect to the performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme, the former government had recognized that there were some problems affecting the implementation of many of the programmes and projects. It was in 1993 that some very concerted efforts were made to overcome some of these problems. On page 2, paragraph 7 of the 1994 *Public Sector Investment Programme*, I quote:

“Steps are being taken to overcome those problems of a recurrent nature which tend to retard the rate of implementation. Among the initiatives recently approved by Cabinet are:

- (a) the establishment of dedicated management teams for all projects involving an investment cost of \$5 million or more;
- (b) the engagement of personnel on contract, where warranted, to augment in-house resources in executing agencies;

- (c) the preparation of standard-form contracts; and
- (d) the setting up of a Central Coordinating and Monitoring Committee to oversee the progress of PSIP implementation continuously.”

3.00 p.m.

Mr. President, in 1995 the report showed that there was considerable improvement in terms of the performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme. The present drop in the rate of implementation progress for 1997 with respect to the Public Sector Investment Programme is a clear indication of their incompetence, ineptitude and inability to manage the affairs of this nation properly. Do you know yesterday the Minister even referred and admitted that they failed to perform with respect to the Health Sector Reform Programme and the Health Sector Loan? He also pointed out that they failed with the Road Development Programme, they failed with the airport, but he forgot to point out that they are also failing with the Agricultural Sector Loan. I am sure my colleague, Sen. Tota-Maharaj would know what I am talking about.

The hon. Minister spoke yesterday of holding two seminars during the course of 1997 in order to accelerate the rate of implementation progress of the Public Sector Investment Programme. Two seminars for the year to speed up things and he talked about setting up committees. The same Minister who, in years gone by, used to condemn those who had to appoint and set up committees and, here it is, in this Chamber the Senator is trying to justify their failure to perform by saying they set up committees to expedite things. They are failing to make the agencies under their respective portfolios function properly.

I would just like to look at the performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme in some detail during the course of 1997. At pages 7 and 8 of the last Budget Statement of the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister boasted:

“We will improve the quality of the country’s infrastructure by accelerating projects under the 1997 Central Government Public Sector Investment Programme...”

The resources which Government will spend under the PSIP on capital works will more than double to some \$1.7 billion.”

This announcement was made in December last year. The hon. Minister went on to itemize plans to rehabilitate roads and highways. He talked about the construction of an overpass at the Churchill Roosevelt and the Uriah Butler

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Highways and the Rural Access Roads and Bridges Programme. He boasted about the National Airport Complex, about a comprehensive drainage programme, the construction of schools and a redirected National Library. To make matters worse, during the course of 1997, it would have been the hon. Minister of Works and Transport who would have had the responsibility to have these various plans and projects implemented. I remember just about a year ago that the hon. Minister of Works and Transport was being viewed by many people in the society as the most hardworking Minister in this coalition Government.

I would like to go into some figures and other bits of information to really examine and see how hardworking this Minister of Works and Transport is.

In the last Budget debate, our very unassuming, simple, humble supposedly man of the people, who is the Minister of Works and Transport, spoke at length about the role of the Ministry of Works and Transport in making Trinidad and Tobago a “total quality nation.” That was the theme for last year. The Minister talked about the function of his ministry in renewing and expanding the basic infrastructure in the country and he went on to highlight many projects for 1997, and made a clear-cut statement that 1997 will be the year for project implementation. It is in the *Hansard* record for all to see. Notwithstanding the Minister’s 100 page speech—with which over the last few days, I have seen him walking around—in the next few hours, he is going to come to give us a discourse on every single square inch of road that he has paved, every drain or drop of water he has cleared out, or every person he had given a job in the URP. I want to look at the realities of 1997 and what took place under the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, Sen. Sadiq Baksh.

When it was announced that the Government had this \$1.7 billion programme with respect to the Public Sector Investment Programme, our response then was that they were being too ambitious. Indeed, 1997 has proven that their Public Sector Investment Programme has been a colossal failure. Proof of this will be found in the *International Monetary Fund Staff Visit* report which is dated September, 1997 when a task team visited Trinidad and Tobago. The report states on the very first page:

“Although the central government fiscal surplus greatly exceeded the target, this outcome was the result of the earlier than expected timing of the sale of TTMC.”

My colleague, Sen. Montano, has already dealt with that issue.

“In the absence of these revenues, the fiscal target would still have been met, owing to the substantial underexecution of the public sector investment programme.”

Mr. President, this is not the PNM saying this. This is the IMF reporting on the Government's performance for 1997, so there has been substantial under-performance.

Further evidence of this will be found in the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1998*. I would like to refer Members to page 6 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1998*. Yesterday my colleague Sen. Alfred referred to paragraph 20 in looking at roads and bridges.

“A large allocation, \$308.0 million was made in 1997...”

It goes on:

“...only moderate progress was made in the implementation of these works and it is estimated that only \$188.0 million or 60% of these resources will actually be utilised during the year.”

Paragraph 21 deals with the National Highways Programme. In this report it says that the National Highways Programme was considerably delayed.

3.10 p.m.

Three weeks ago when we were debating a variation to a finance bill, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport was not in the Chamber. He was somewhere in Cuba. I thought he was in Guyana campaigning at the time. If one looks at the variation document, one would see an explanation with respect to the National Highways Programme which showed that \$20 million had been taken away from it and reallocated elsewhere. I think it is on page 8. In 1997, an allocation of \$88 million was provided under the Public Sector Investment Programme for executing this project. Programme implementation was significantly delayed. It went on to explain why \$20 million had been taken away from the programme.

Last year, the budget document stated that the UNC had formulated this two-year National Highways Programme as if it were the UNC that was responsible for it. Under the NAR regime in 1986—1991, a comprehensive study was undertaken with respect to all the highways in the country and what was needed to be done. In 1991, when the PNM formed the government, it took up their plans and pursued the programme by carrying out the designs. By 1995, everything was in place for this programme to start. Two years later, we are seeing that this programme is being considerably delayed. It is on a go slow.

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According to paragraph 22 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1998*, the Southern Roads Development Project was also seriously delayed. A decision was taken to defer preparation of preliminary designs of the proposed San Fernando/Princes Town Highway project for 1998. I remember a few months ago there was a big ceremony with the cutting of ribbon for the start of this project. My colleague on the other side, Sen. Baksh, lives in Barrackpore. Some of us go to Mayaro very often. We had great hopes that this new highway would have come on stream to take us to Mayaro. That is what they said they would do. Now we are hearing that programme is being deferred.

During the last budget debate the hon. Minister of Works and Transport told us that an overpass at the Churchill Roosevelt Highway and the Uriah Butler Highway would be built in 1997. I wonder where is the overpass. I know it is because a statement had been made in the other place about three lanes having to merge into two lanes near a bridge close to that intersection that now they have painted three lines. I wish them well and pray there would be no major accidents.

I turn now to the Rural Access Roads and Bridges Programme. Here again, the Government makes it appear as though it is responsible for this programme. A programme which was left behind for them to run with, they have floundered with it as well. I would refer to the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1995*. Page 25, paragraph 71 states:

“A further \$53.0 million will be spent on the Rural Access Roads and Bridges Rehabilitation Programme which started in 1993. The total cost of the programme is \$200.0 million and it is projected that \$48.9 million will be spent by the end of 1994. The implementation schedule calls for the completion of work on Phase I during 1995. Phase II, which entails the rehabilitation of 52 km of access roads and the replacement of 9 bridges, is scheduled to commence in April.”

This should have been in April, 1995. This report shows that the programme started in 1993. Phase I was completed in 1995. With respect to Phase II, I remember during the first budget debate with this new Government, we made the point that the Government had under provided funds with respect to this programme. I think only a sum of \$19 million was provided and there were outstanding bills exceeding \$70 million. I cannot recall the exact figure. We pointed it out to them and they scoffed at us. A few months later they came back to Parliament for a variation of the Finance Bill when they sought to reallocate funds to meet the outstanding bills.

In 1996, in the last budget they over provided funds for the programme. We told them they were over providing funds and that if there were a shortfall in revenue, the capital programme would be one of the first areas that they would cut out. Three weeks ago, so said, so done. The hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism came with a variation for 1997, and here we saw as well, that \$15 million had been taken away from the Rural Access Roads and Bridges Programme. An allocation of \$65 million was made for the project in 1997. They talk about a low level of expenditure on the programme for 1997 being due mainly to the late start of Phase III of the project.

If they were as efficient as they want people to believe, probably, Phase III would have been completed. They are now starting Phase III. I am sure the Minister would ramagé about this. It is important for me to point out how they are hoodwinking the population. It is a public relations campaign and a deliberate strategy on the part of the Government to give the impression that it is doing something. The grass on the highway is brush cut so that when people pass they would say this Government is working. I want to know if these figures are showing that the Minister of Works and Transport is really performing as he ought to be.

Yesterday, Sen. Tota-Maharaj, the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, boasted about this Rural Access Roads and Bridges Programme. She talked about the plight of a family in Valencia, and I am glad that she was of assistance to them. I know her heart is in the right place. I have to wonder. On December 13, 1997, there was a centre page story on the *TNT Mirror* highlighting the plight of the farmers in Aranguéz. To this day, they are still complaining about bad access roads. Aranguéz is the food basket of the nation. Under the UNC administration, these farmers are moaning and groaning about the bad conditions of the roads and they are still affected by flooding.

There is the national airport complex. I am sure Sen. Daly would have much to say. This is nothing short of a national scandal. It reflects what the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism talks about. This has to be the new and aggressive business acumen which the Panday Administration has brought to the Government. This project has been found to be tainted with corruption and the Deyalsingh Report is there for all to see.

3.20 p.m.

When we look at the figures on page 95 of the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the year 1998*, under Head 43, it says that in 1997,

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\$100 million was spent on the airport project. I would like to ask the Minister of Works and Transport: Where has the \$100 million gone?

I ask this because when we look at page 8 of the 1998 *Public Sector Investment Programme*, it says:

“A very large allocation, \$312.0 million, was also made in 1997 to finance improvements in air and sea port infrastructure.”

It talks about the airport complex at Piarco.

“As a result, only modest progress was made on the project. Work has been limited to site preparation, involving mainly earthworks and drainage infrastructure.”

Do they mean to tell me that \$100 million was spent in dirt—to clear the land?

To make matters worse, when one looks at the allocation of the hon. Minister of Finance for the airport project, which it claims will be built in 1998, we see a mere \$50 million. Something is fundamentally wrong.

Mr. President: The hon. Senator’s speaking time has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. P. Beckles*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. N. Mohammed: Mr. President, all I can do is to remind hon. Senators of what Benjamin Franklin said in 1754:

“In rivers and bad government the lightest things swim to the top.”

There is the comprehensive drainage programme that the Minister boasted about in 1997. The hon. Minister Sadiq Baksh talked so much about dealing with flooding in the country. He talked about the Caparo River, downtown Port of Spain, Caroni, Oropouche. Look at today’s *Guardian* and you will see an article by Councillor Paras Ramoutar saying that the Caparo River is now going to be dredged. I dealt with this two weeks ago. They have talked about it for two years, and there is still a flooding problem with the Caparo River.

This is not just in Caparo. I wish to invite the hon. Minister of Works and Transport to go back to the area known as El Socorro South which he toured and “galleried” with the people about a month ago, giving the impression that he was so concerned and stating what he would do. When one goes over the highway,

near the Caroni River, the people in that area are still suffering from the flooding problem. There is a dengue threat in the area. The hon. Minister promised that he would do so much. There are three pumps at the Caroni River and only one is working, so that flooding is still a problem.

If he goes East, across to Aranguez South, near an area commonly referred to as Braznee, near the Mullens Canal, he will see that the sluice gate there is still not working. When he talks about flooding and what he will do, it is just talk and more talk. I wonder if, perhaps, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport and my parliamentary representative for San Juan/Barataria have some problems with each other. Nothing seems to be happening there. They seem to be at loggerheads.

I refer as well to the under-performance of this Government with the Health Sector Reform Programme. I think that the *Public Sector Investment Programme* says that out of a \$75.6 million allocation, only \$22 million was spent. The Minister of Planning and Development admitted to this.

Do not talk about education! Sen. Prof. Ramchand spoke just now about what is happening in education. If one looks at the performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme with respect to education, one will see that it has been a complete failure. One just has to look at page 60 of the development programme and one will see where, in 1997 moneys have been allocated for the construction of several schools—Fifth Company Baptist School, Buccoo Government, Castara Government, Bamboo Settlement Government, Malabar South Government, Beetham Estate Government, and Maloney East Government. At the end of 1997, when one looks at the revised estimates, one will see that not one cent was spent. They have failed as well with the allocation for education and this year, they are boasting about a 12 per cent allocation for education. This year the Minister of Works and Transport may have some time to do his job. [*Words expunged from the record.*]

Do not talk about the National Library Complex. Two years in a row they have spoken about it. Ten million dollars in foundation works have been left behind by the PNM, and today if you go there you will see the only new initiative that they have in their two years in agriculture—a big pumpkin patch. There is no library and, in 1998, we are not hearing anything about an allocation for a library.

Last week I laughed at a report in the *Newsday* dated Wednesday, December 24, page 5, “Baksh to modernize transportation”. He came here during the last budget debate and spoke so much about the transformation that will take place in the

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Licensing Division. There will be no more long lines. There will be the licensing of garages to inspect vehicles. We are supposed to have personalized number plates with colour codes and so forth for the district in which we live. That has to be in some other place, certainly not in Trinidad and Tobago. Over the last year, we have seen no signs.

I just wish to point out that recently I had cause to go to the Licensing Division myself. It took me three separate half days simply to get a duplicate driver's permit. There are long lines if one goes to request it; if one goes to pay for it, a long line; if one goes to take a picture, it is a long line still. Mr. President, the other part about it is that a computerization exercise was done under the PNM. The computers are down and are very much outdated. We hope that the hon. Minister of Miracles would do something to walk the talk.

I have to ask: Where is the Panorama to take us from Trinidad to Tobago? Here is a public notice from the Port Authority some time ago:

“An extension to the vessel's stay at the Curacao Dockyard has become necessary, due to certain serious mechanical deteriorations which have become evident only very recently, when several major mechanical components were dismantled for scheduled examination...”

If I have to send something to be repaired, I would have to get an idea of how much it would cost and what works are to be done. Do they mean that it was only after it reached Curacao, they could see more and more things to be done and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are suffering? Something is fundamentally wrong.

Like Houdini, the Minister really comes across as a miracle person. One minute he is in Moruga, cutting some ribbon; next he is in Toco/Manzanilla; do not talk about Laventille. To paint two water tanks in the hills of Laventille, it took 2,000 gallons of paint costing \$300 each, and the paint is running down. That is trickle down economics.

Now I know why the hon. Minister of Finance effected a Cabinet reshuffle with his budget statement of 1998. The Unemployment Relief Programme has been taken away from the Minister of Works and Transport and as well they have cut off part of the Road Improvement Fund. It shows the shrewdness of the Prime Minister of this country. To have a reallocation of portfolio, one would expect that the Prime Minister would do it, but he always comes out smelling like a rose, while someone else does the dirty work. I wonder why. Maybe there are those in the wings waiting, who just wanted to see the Minister's popularity cut down. It is all about building a base.

I want to make a special plea to the Minister of Works and Transport. Over the last few days, we have been in this Chamber hearing some women pleading for help. They have worked under the much-publicized Women's Programme under the Unemployment Relief Programme and they have not been paid. Would the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, and indeed the Minister of Finance, please see what he can do to alleviate the plight and hardships of these women?

Now, the Unemployment Relief Programme has gone to the hon. Minister of Local Government. God help this country! We are all for decentralization and empowering the communities. We are concerned however, that they have made this shift in terms of reallocating the Unemployment Relief Programme into another ministry and they have not told us how the system will operate. What mechanism is in place? They are not telling us anything. Quite frankly, I believe that they have no plan and no policy. It is just to relieve themselves and to pass the buck on to the People's National Movement.

3.30 p.m.

With respect to the road improvement fund, all this time they have been violating the 1994 Finance Act by not reporting on the use of these funds.

Mr. President, I now move on to an area which is dear to my heart; agriculture. Yesterday, Sen. Tota-Maharaj spoke—and I am sure she was speaking from her heart, but there is this obsession to always shift the blame to the PNM. This Government has been in office for two years and we are still waiting to see the new initiative in agriculture.

Sen. Tota-Maharaj boasted about growth in the agricultural sector. When we look at the *Review of the Economy 1997* we would see that there has been a decline in the agricultural sector's performance in this last year. From 7.6 per cent of GDP in 1995/1996, it fell to 3.7 per cent in 1996/1997 and it is down from a high of 8.4 per cent in 1993. When one looks at this document one would see that in cocoa production there was a fall in growth; sugar production, fell; copra production, fell; grapefruit production, fell; orange production, fell; growth in domestic agriculture fell from 4 per cent in 1995/1996 to 2.2 per cent. *[Interruption]* When the effects of the froghopper disease is factored in, God alone knows what the figures would be like.

The hon. Senator spoke yesterday about co-operatives, that is a good idea and I wish her well in getting that idea going. I am sure if she goes to Aranguez with that idea the farmers would welcome her. She spoke about markets. Mr. President,

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last year they spoke about building 12 rural markets. Yesterday she said they had identified four sites for four rural markets. It took them a year to identify four sites to build markets.

The problem with agriculture in this country is the marketing facilities, not just for retailers but also for wholesalers. The Debe/Penal Market continues to be a white elephant, although the Parliamentary Secretary spoke about 300 persons using it on a Thursday night. That project was built under the NAR administration. I think it was Dr. Suruj Rambachan and Mr. Trevor Sudama who were involved in that. They have moved down the National Agricultural Marketing Development Company Limited (NAMDEVCO). What is NAMDEVCO doing to assist farmers in Trinidad and Tobago? Most farmers still come to the wholesale market in Port of Spain and thanks to Mayor John Rahael that some kind of improvement in terms of the facilities had been made for the benefit of our farmers.

Sen. Tota-Maharaj spoke about legislative reform. Big joke! The Pounds Act, Animals Disease Act, Livestock Board Act—animals are still straying and rabies are attacking our animals left, right and centre. She spoke about the agricultural incentive programme as though it was some new initiative. That programme has been there for years. Mr. President, if you look at the back of this draft document, this programme was implemented by a former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, and one could see the wide items that were covered under that.

Caroni (1975) Limited has to be the topic of another discussion. They are blaming the PNM again, and this is what the hon. Prime Minister had to say in his book on *Enigma* “Beware of those who dress in white to cut cane...” This was in 1987 when former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources went down there to cut cane. Sen. Tota-Maharaj spoke as though the NAR and the UNC were the only two administrations that dealt with Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. President, it was under the PNM that a debt of \$2.1 million with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited had been written off. It was under the PNM that Caroni (1975) Limited was turning around in terms of its economic viability. The tripartite report is there. For two years they have been bungling by their incompetence and their mismanagement. They are failing to implement the tripartite report and we really do not know where they stand with it. That is why they are yet to draw down on the disbursement of the agricultural sector loan. It is because they are not implementing the terms of it.

The PNM was managing Caroni (1975) Limited. One just has to look at the Price Waterhouse report and one would get a good idea of what is really happening at Caroni (1975) Limited. The Parliamentary Secretary spoke about a 7,000 labour force, this report speaks about a 12,000 labour force. So, who is right? The hon. Minister of Finance has a quiet tongue on this Caroni (1975) Limited issue. *[Laughter] [Desk thumping]* We want the Government to tell us what is their position. We need a minister of agriculture with a vision, someone who will walk the talk, someone who will drive the process, make the agencies in the ministry work, someone who knows about cutting the food import bill, making us more secure with food, someone who will generate real employment.

With respect to the provision of computers in every home, we welcome it, but at the same time one would have expected that there would be some kind of information technology plan to go with it. It is just another *ad hoc* public relations gimmick.

With respect to culture, I urge the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs that in the formulation of the cultural policy, because of our rich diverse society, to be mindful of the fact that we are a multi-cultural society, and all efforts should be made, not to impose something, but to let it evolve, as has been said before.

In winding up, I would like to make reference to a statement which has been made so many times by the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, especially when he was in another capacity, when he remarked that: "There are some who will sell their souls for a mess of pottage, a jacket and a tie".

I wish you, Mr. President, your family and, indeed, all Senators a very happy and prosperous 1998. Once again, to the Muslim community, a very holy and rewarding month of Ramadan.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Could hon. Senators, in future, refrain from referring disparagingly to other Senators in this Parliament?

I also ask the verbatim reporter to expunge the disparaging reference from the record.

Sen. Martin Daly: Mr. President, may I thank you and all my colleagues for the warmth in the welcome I received today, having, despite the best efforts of the Leader of Government Business, been able to execute my family plans for Christmas.

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Much of what I want to say has been touched on by Sen. Ramchand. There is something very cynical about this budget. I think it has to do—as I shall demonstrate—with a lack of cohesion among the various principal members of the Government. It has been widely recognized by nearly all commentators that after the initial flurry of economic liberalization there are certain basic things that governments, which have liberalized, have to do. This budget uses language which recognizes that task but, as I shall demonstrate, it is not serious about getting down to that task.

May I begin by referring to the Ibero-American summit of Leaders from Spain, Portugal and Latin America, which took place in Venezuela in the first week in December, 1997. In a report in the *Financial Times* by Raymond Colitt, one of its financial reporters, this problem was discussed in relation to the Caribbean and Latin America. The basic theme of the article is that the trickle down effect has not worked. While many countries have liberalized and have achieved a sound balance sheet, a sound balance sheet does not provide a proper standard of living for the citizens of the country. That is a point Sen. Prof. Ramchand made very forcefully. They refer, first of all, in this article to Chile, and I quote:

“In Chile, where market-oriented reform began earlier and was more far-reaching than anywhere else in the region, the wealthiest 10 per cent of the population take home nearly half of the national income.”

That is simply giving a country examples for the point which has been made so forcefully by my colleague, Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand, about the irrelevance about the GDP to the welfare of the majority of the nation, unless one can turn the economic success reflected in that GDP to the benefit of the citizens at large. Mr. President, we are singularly failing to do in this country, as they are singularly failing to do in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. That is my grouse in this budget, Mr. President.

3.40 p.m.

The article refers to the fact that:

“...the poorest quintile of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean receive a lower percentage of national income (4.5 per cent) than any other region in the world, according to the World Bank’s 1997 World Development Indicators.”

It is most repeated in the Caribbean.

There is great concern among the international lending agencies whether these problems would lead to social unrest and thus would cause the leaders of developing countries to back-track on economic liberalization. They discussed how to overcome the daunting challenges of poverty and I quote:

“Unless more people participate in the gains of economic reform, these may come to a grinding halt amid lack of popular credibility.”

Another commentator in the same newspaper is William Rhodes, who expressed a personal view on the Summit in the same edition of the *Financial Times*. He is Vice-Chairman of Citibank, so we are not quoting from someone who may be dismissed as having no business experience. This is at page 12 of the *Financial Times* of December 08, 1997. It states:

“In some countries, global competition and privatisation have taken their toll on employment, producing disillusionment and social unrest, which threaten to undermine some governments’ political will to continue disciplined reform.”

He then describes the fact that liberalization has to have two distinct stages: The first stage is where you administer the bitter medicine and the second stage is when you then begin to make all the people in the country participate in the economic reforms. He gave eight points that countries need to follow in the second stage of liberalization. I am going to link to local events why I am taking up this aspect of the budget.

Mr. President, it is a wonderful thing that all the major economic indicators are said to be sound. It is a wonderful thing that the country has a good balance sheet. All the things which the Minister has listed in the early part of the statement, in relation to the country’s reserves and so forth, were all very good things. On these Benches we do not waste time trying to decipher who, by good luck, mismanagement or good management, is responsible for these things. There are good things for the country. The question I ask is whether this budget is going to live up to the promise of the task of now making sure that this good balance sheet translates itself into real gains to the people of the country. When I say “people of the country” I am not adopting some kind of reverse psychology of humility. It affects me. As a matter of fact, it affects everyone if these economic gains cannot be turned into real results for the citizens of the country.

Mr. President, I like—as you know—to be treated with a certain tolerance and to have very graphic local examples of what I am talking about. All these

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commentators say that you have to turn these good economic results into the results for the majority of the citizens of this country and, in particular, you have an obligation to improve their standard of living. That is the whole purpose of making these economic gains. This is not a corporation in which only the shareholders participate in the gains of the company; all the people of the country are shareholders and have to participate in the gains.

I noticed that one Minister—I suppose they cannot help it—talked about bias in the media in relation to the National Carnival Commission. I think they are lucky because the media writes anything about the NCC, the way it is refusing to face the considerable problems that have been brought about by a disorganized carnival. Mr. President, that is another story. We are talking now about bias in the media.

Mr. President, in the first week of December 1997—I assume that because they constantly attack the media the Ministers of this Government do not watch the news. I am certain that the majority of these hon. Senators here saw Mr. Dale Narinesingh, a resident of Orange Valley, being interviewed on the television in a state of traumatic grief about the death of his 22-year-old son from Dengue Fever. As I speak about it, as I remind myself about it, it is most vivid in my imagination. This man was almost torn in two as he talked about his indescribable loss of his 22-year-old son to a mosquito bite. A mosquito bite! That is what we are talking about. He made many complaints about the treatment in the hospital—I am not prepared to focus on those because when people are in a state of grief, perhaps their perspective on things is not completely balanced. What I want to focus on is this business of a total quality nation and persons are dying from mosquito bites. Let us get real! What is a “total quality nation” and a man has to lose his 22-year-old son to a mosquito bite? Is it that persons are being carried away by their own rhetoric?

In the course of that interview they showed pictures of the drains and the overgrown bushes around this man’s home. I adopt the language of Sen. Prof. Ramchand. It was putrid to think that anyone in a country that claims to be a “total quality nation” is going to lose his 22-year-old son to a mosquito bite because the drains and bushes are overgrown and people are living in squalid conditions. It is a complete fantasy to take this balance sheet and beat yourself on the shoulder and say that we are moving towards a “total quality nation.” My question is: Who is responsible for keeping public drains and roads clean and sanitary? That is my question. It is a very basic and simple question and I want to know where in this budget statement are we going to deal with the fact that people are losing their children to mosquito bites? Where in this budget statement?

I go on further now to refer to something else. I kept this particular *Sunday Express* because I was thinking about this budget debate. Let us see if this is biasness. This is what we wake up to on a Sunday morning in a total quality nation. It states:

“6 Trinis nabbed in NY drug ring...

Heroin shipped through Trinidad and Tobago...

Panday visits home of dengue victim.”

I must say that he looked very nice in his hot shirt and he was visiting Mr. Narinesingh who was in his grief-stained T-shirt, he had not shaved for days, such was the state of the man’s grief. The headline continues and there is a two-page spread which says:

“When you give up your freedom to stay safe...Living single, living scared...A 24-hour watch on women.”

There are eight or nine interviews, all of which justify something I spoke about in a previous budget debate under a different administration, about the fact that many women in this country live under a self-imposed curfew. *[Interruption]* As my colleague said, all women. What this budget does, very cynically, is to take up the language of that Summit of which I spoke and lay the foundation with the fundamental transformation of the social and economic balance, or to be more precise, the social and economic imbalance which exists in this society. That is what they were talking about in the Summit in Venezuela. This is the claim they have made and this budget is going to lay the foundation for it. It described itself as a comprehensive blue print for human development.

3.50 p.m.

I do not know how we are going to develop or if we are going to conduct a programme of human development where women are under a self-imposed curfew, and people lose their children to mosquito bites. I do not know how we are going to have human development against that background. So Mr. President, that is my major complaint about this budget. I think it is very cynical to call this opportunity for all, it is totally cynical. It is either that, or the person who put this label on this document lives on Mars or possibly the outer rings of Saturn.

How do we have opportunity for all in this country? Consider this. Consider two children; one living in a wealthy residential area who gets up at 6 o'clock in

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the morning, goes to school in an air-conditioned car, is dropped at the school gate and, who is competing for a school place against a child who has to get up at four o'clock in the morning, walk to the stand pipe, tote water on her head, carry it back home, then get dressed and go to school and spend hours on the road in order to get to a rural school. That is opportunity for all? That is the father of all imbalances, that you have two children competing for a school place, living under such completely disparate conditions.

Mr. President, where in this budget are we going to deal with the mosquito bites, the curfew on women and the complete imbalance in the conditions in which children live? I am not against success, all I am saying is that we must try to provide some kind of equal opportunity for all. This budget does not do that. It is very cynical to pretend that it does.

Then, I am not able to find in this budget how these imbalances, of which I tried to give practical examples, are going to be redressed. I understand that they have acknowledged their duty to do it. May I say this—because Governments are always very sensitive—we hear much talk about public relations and all this sort of thing, but the key thing, and it is recognized in this budget, I believe there is a variation on the theme of “the greater good for the greatest number”, I believe I saw somewhere—I did not highlight it—that being stated as an objective. That is the responsibility of Government.

Now, these conditions which I described did not arrive in Trinidad two years ago. These imbalances have existed for a very long time, but with the greatest respect to Sen. Mohammed, I am afraid that, at least, in relation to some of these problems, the Minister is right to say that the country has been atrociously managed because these imbalances did not arrive yesterday.

What I see, not only is it the duty of this Government, but it has an historic mission, if I can presume to tell it so, that despite what the Governor of the Central Bank and others are saying to calm people down, there is a boom going on in this country and we have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to see it. It manifests itself in a variety of different ways; how people shop at Christmas, what motor cars are on the road, the speed with which you get through the various registration plates on cars and so forth.

This Government has a wonderful opportunity and the opportunity has three manifestations. It will govern at the time of a boom. The difference will be that the first boom was oil driven, this is natural gas driven, so it is in office at the time of a

boom. It has an historic opportunity not to repeat the mistakes of the past. That is to say, no one must be able to look at this country when the cycle turns and say that under this Government, as in the previous one when it was in office in a boom, money passed through the country like a dose of salts. No one must be able to say that. In other words, the belly was clean, nothing nutritious in it. Because we got nothing out of the boom. So this Government has an historic mission to make absolutely certain that it manages this natural gas boom in a way that the benefits from it are given, not trickled out, are bestowed upon the citizens of the country and they have a historic mission to do that.

I am very concerned that they are going to be carried away by all their rhetoric into believing that we are moving at a steadfast pace to becoming a "total quality nation". To use Sen. Ramchand's phrase, there is a rotting *status quo*. I thought it was a wonderful phrase. I am not surprised he is the best known Professor in his discipline. There is a rotting *status quo* which this budget does not address. It has to be able to come to terms with it and we cannot, as my colleague, Sen. Teelucksingh was reported to say, approach it in a narrow way.

We must all feel absolute disgust and shame when we see a Mr. Narinesingh on the television in that condition; as we must feel disgust and shame when we see rural villages that have been without a vital bridge as a link to a main road for two and three years and longer. Again, children having to go to school to compete with the children of those of us who are more fortunate, by balancing on a piece of log, in one case I think one fell in the pond and drowned. It disgusts me!

If I were a minister of Government I would hang my head in shame when I see those incidents being portrayed on the electronic media. I would not talk about bias. I would thank the media for letting me know that there is a rotting *status quo* out there. It is a wonderful phrase, Prof. Ramchand, I hope you do not mind if I borrow it again and again. You should be grateful to the media for exposing these things, for showing children balancing on logs to go to school, to compete for a school place with someone else who is getting up three hours later. This budget does not address those things. It simply does not.

Of course, there is much for the Minister to be pleased about, but do not, as the Government, get carried away by their own rhetoric. Because they have an historic opportunity to translate these economic benefits that are reflected in here to the good of all the citizens. Get rid of the self-imposed curfews, the squalid conditions under which many of our children live, the stinking drains that breed the mosquitoes that kill people's children; they have an historic opportunity to do that.

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Of course, they have to have their Atlantic LNGs and all their big projects and so forth. I am pleading with them, not to squander it. Let no one write on their political tombstone, “they let money pass through the country like a dose of salts”. Give us something for it.

I would like to congratulate the Minister on several things which are in this budget. Before I do so, if one looks at the social programmes that are set out on page 11, each one of these programmes is reactive: it assumes that certain conditions in the country are going to remain. What is there to boast about? Of course we have to have it. But what is there to boast about that the Unemployment Relief Programme generated 183,000 job opportunities—apparently, from what I was hearing earlier, it does not pay—at the cost of \$158 million? That is not something to put under an achievement. That is “make work”. That is a stop gap. That is not anything to be proud about. He had to have “make work” programmes and spend \$158 million to do that. What he should be considering are the statistics which Prof. Ramchand gave him; how to get more of these people into A’level programmes and through seven-year secondary schools, not to deal with the results at the end by spending \$158 million on “make work”. All these things are reactive.

Mr. President, then the statement is made on page 12 that:

“Our police are better equipped and better trained, and more officers are in communities and on the streets.”

So? I congratulate the Government. I told this to the Prime Minister face to face. The one promise that this Government has carried out is to provide the police with equipment, but I am not seeing any results. This is a superficial statement. So they are better equipped and better trained? Well, what about better dressed? They might get best dressed police of the year. How is that going to help us with the self-imposed curfew.

I would have liked to see, under social programmes, things that are going to attack the rotting *status quo*. I have been racking my brains all day to think how to describe it and I heard the phrase used from Sen. Ramchand. I would have liked to see in the budget, social programmes of upliftment and advancement that deal with the problem at the root, and not at the end product. I do not see any of that in here. I think the Government has to go back to the drawing board and think fundamentally about what social programmes it is going to implement to produce better citizens and better results, and not treat the illness when it is almost terminal.

I congratulate the Minister for starting—I can only consider it the start of the debate—about the reform of pension law in this country. Unfortunately, he took the very retrograde step last year, assisted by a completely supine insurance industry, sold all his policy-holders out by allowing the Government, without protest, to remove the savings that were given to people who had pension savers and deferred annuity. That is a most retrograde step. The one incentive that we had to save in TT dollars was the tax relief you got up to one-sixth of your assessable income. It is completely contrary to say that you want to encourage savings and the only measure that you had in place to encourage people to save their money in TT dollars rather than put it in mutual funds and other insurance abroad, was removed. It just simply does not make sense.

Likewise, it continues to baffle me why they tax people on their incomes and then tax them when they save. It just does not make any sense. Therefore, the Government, if it is serious about saving, must find some new way, and Prof. Ramchand suggested one: it may have some things that need to be ironed out. From my information, in the United Kingdom now—I think it is £50,000, pretty much what Sen. Ramchand was talking about—up to £50,000 of your savings, you pay no tax. So everybody is encouraged to save, which is TT \$500,000 plus, you do not pay any tax on that figure. Now, that is creative, it encourages people to save, but all these budget measures are anti-saving. To dress them up as pro-saving is simply, well I do not want to use extreme language, it is trying to put “a beats” on us, really. It is trying to give us “a beats”, because they are not pro-saving measures. Let us look a little more closely at what the Government is saying about savings.

I really do not want to—I think if I just say the word ‘airport’. I see I have it marked out on page 14, but what else is there to say? I suffered until 11 o'clock two nights ago as a sharp reminder for my sins. You know what was so ironic? “While I sweating by this 19th Century conveyor belt, listening to the human hand lugging the luggage and pelting it down ‘bradang’, and it coming through a hole with some old carpet flap going flap, flap, flap”—total quality nation! The foreign investors were waiting there and you are only hearing “bradang” and the bags are coming down on the conveyor belt. Then these four nasty strips of carpet going flip-flop, flip-flop, “and man have *Gucci* luggage and thing and it going flip-flop on the luggage”.

Then, when you part the strips now, because you know things here are very informal, so you do so and open the carpet and you look outside. Well, the six

fellas who throwing the luggage on a break! "They standing up and taking a break." Because the thing heavy, not all of them have belt around their waist, not all are strong men, so they are taking a break. And "total quality nation", everybody waiting for their luggage. You can only bring three containers at a time because the space where they have to park the containers, despite the fact they spent nearly \$1 million to fix it, it only holds three containers at a time.

4.05 p.m.

They have to be dragged near to a tow truck, 'bradang', through the carpet, drag it away, 'bradang', you bring another one. If it raining, you know what is happening, because the same people who work in the snow in Toronto cannot work in the rain here! Well, c'est la vie, total quality nation, you sure have a total quality airport!

I will not let myself run away with this again. All of this is only talk. That airport is never going to be built unless the successive governments who have botched it, stop talking all this tripe. Why do we need a complex? Just give us a place that has space, a roof over our heads and is properly air-conditioned. Why do we have to think in these grandiose terms? I do not want to hear anything about NIPDEC, if you have not already spoken hon. Minister. NIPDEC cannot do anything until the lawyers decide what you are doing with the pre-existing contract. It seems as though half the Cabinet wants to leave the contracts in place and the other half wants to terminate it. I see the Minister is giving me a tremendous poker-face there, so I know I am right.

Mr. President, let us look at these so-called savings measures. First of all, this Government has taken anti-savings measures. Employees Share Ownership Plans (ESOPs) are fine, what they say about the Unit Trust Corporation is also fine, but those are really investments. They are savings but primarily when you put your money into ESOPs and the Unit Trust Corporation, you are making an investment and of course an investment has a savings element in it. But the first thing you want to do is encourage people to put aside the cash or assets as a savings and then decide what to do with it. Depending on their personality and requirements they will then exercise different options. With regard to the old-fashion virtue of saving for a rainy day; there is not one single measure in here. This is very "hifalutin" to the ordinary PAYE earner. Many people still want to put money in the bank and have a little book. That is the first type of savings you have to encourage and then you build towards these more "hifalutin" measures. There is nothing in here to encourage people to put aside money.

First of all, the taxation rates are still too high, then when they put aside money you tax them on savings. There is nothing in here to encourage plain, ordinary, grassroot, ignorant, layman savings. It is just a puff wind to say that there is something in here to deal with that.

When we look at FUNDAid we see something that the Government is doing that is proactive. There you have an organization that is doing total quality work—keeping very quiet about it—to deal with the social problems at the root. I congratulate the Government for recognizing FUNDAid and dealing with it. You notice that they have also finally stopped beating up on Servol. I guess because of the anti-domestic violence thrust, they have stopped.

Mr. President, to summarize what I have to say about this budget, I believe very profoundly that it is very cynical to say that it contains measures that are going to redress the imbalances. I do not think enough thought has gone into it. In particular, I do not think that enough thought has gone into having programmes that are going to deal with the root causes rather than the problems that are produced. I think it is very cynical by way of the examples I have given, to say that there is opportunity for all in this country. We have not got to that stage as yet. I wish we were there. I wish I did not see children toting buckets of water on their heads when I drive in the country. It offends me.

We have distinguished visitors in the Parliament, one of whom, when I was a school boy, asked my assistance in promoting his book—I cannot remember if it was his first book—while I was still at St. Mary's College. I know that he passionately believes in these things. I am very pleased that although we cannot officially recognize him, he is hearing these things. He will realize that the book made a greater impression on me, at the time, than he thought. But he was such a brilliant mas maker and I was such an ardent masquerader, even at that age, that I really paid more attention to his costumes than his books. I can assure him that his book has left a greater impression on me than perhaps he thinks.

The whole purpose of that kind of philosophy as I say repeatedly, is to translate sound economic gains into benefits for everyone. I regard trickle down as a "cuss" word. What it tells me is "like somebody waiting for something to drop off the rich neighbours' tree into their hands." I think we absolutely have to reject that phrase. It is a foreign phrase. It could as well be French or some other language.

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I would now deal with one or two other matters. I thought I would take the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs to task about the NCC, but that is almost as bad as the airport. Perhaps I could content myself with one of my little descriptions.

As a mas player of 31 years, what the NCC inflicts on us every year is poor sanitation, ill health and a complete degradation of the environment. You go through the savannah in dust, everybody gets the flu, the place smells of you know what and cars that drive through the savannah to all of the various functions—well there is no grass again—lick up the ti marie. The Minister said there is no confusion and the media is bias. There is no new thinking about any of this. I understand that carnival is not something you can direct from the head. Whatever you do about it, as a festival it has to have popular acceptance but there is no new thinking.

They have put down a temporary road instead of a full-time road. We know that the temporary road is only the thin edge of the wedge. This is the innovative thinking. A temporary road is put down instead of a permanent one, they are not going to have any competition on Dimanche Gras night and of course, we are going to package it for international sale.

Mr. President, let me tell you respectfully, if you read any reviews of arts and entertainment, they all tell you the same think about films from developing countries with the exception of India which everyone knows has a highly developed film industry. The lighting is too poor. The first year I knew that because I was chairman of a state enterprise in the entertainment business.

The first year we tried to export carnival everybody used tapes. By carnival Tuesday people are going to be looking at tapes of Dimanche Gras and then there is pay-per-view and you are going to be looking at it simultaneously. It is a basic thing like a mosquito bite. The lighting is too poor. The NCC should be studying how to fix the lighting better to display the costumes, change the shape of the stage. That is creative thinking, not putting a temporary road as opposed to a permanent one, and coming out of Victoria Avenue instead of at All Saints' Church. That is just tinkering and we will never turn carnival into as big a money spinner as it should be, if when people buy a ticket for a show they cannot get their seat, the place smells of you know what and they have to wade ankle deep, in you know what. When they go to Madison Square Garden or whatever they have in Germany or Japan, they do not walk ankle deep in you know what in other words to see the cultural products of that country.

We have to address these basic issues. What is all this "hifalutin" business about "total quality nation" and you are walking ankle deep in you know what to see what is said to be the country's premiere cultural event?. Let us get real and come back down to earth. The country is being successful, the Government has kept its promise about equipping the police, the economic indicators are good, but let us step back down to earth.

Let us wake up every morning and think about Mr. Narinesingh crying on television over the loss of his son. Let us go to bed at night hearing 'flap, flap' on the suitcase and go to bed smelling the dust in the savannah that gives us all the flu. Let us deal with these things and not all these platitudes that are contained in here. We need some creative thinking. Maybe you need to go red like Peter Minshall.

To pretend that all is well with carnival is just another sham and just another cynical joke, as far as I am concerned. I am sorry to say there are almost as many shoppers as there are shams—both being neutral words I hope, Mr. President.

4.15 p.m.

I suppose, unhappily, because it probably causes him no end of trouble with his Cabinet colleagues, it is the second year that I must congratulate the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries for some original thinking. Well, it is not so original. Did I hear a flap? I read—I assume the report was unbiased, it certainly was in a good newspaper—an account of his plan to have an energy holding company in which citizens will be able to buy shares. That is a wonderful idea. That provides a very direct link between the success that you get from the gas coming out of the ground into people's pockets. I think it is a wonderful idea and I commend him for it. While he is thinking so creatively—of course 10 per cent is much too small—I think the Minister must talk to "Mr. ENRON" and "Mr. LNG" for more than 10 per cent, but I know he is a hard negotiator.

While he is at it, perhaps he and the Minister of Finance can look in the archives of the Ministry of Finance and see if they can revise the scheme which was known as NIC which was very similar. It was designed to give people shares in the business that is conducted by the government. This is a wonderful idea; it is the only piece of creative thinking that I have seen either in the budget or in the way in which I have been able to follow the debate, because I was not here for a lot of it. It is very important, Mr. President, at the risk of repetition, to recognize that there is a large number—I am coming back to the Minister of Energy and Energy

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Industries—of people in this country who are simply out of the loop. The Minister of Energy was reported in the *Express* of November 28, 1997 and similarly in the *Newsday* of November 20, 1997 as having got the energy investors to give him \$70 million to develop skills. That is wonderful. But in the course of his speech on that occasion he pointed out that 85 per cent of the job seekers in the energy industry were unemployable. Where is the plan in here, the blueprint for human development, to make these 85 per cent of the job seekers employable? I do not see this plan in here but yet still he somewhat arrogantly calls it a blueprint. As far as I know a blueprint is something you look at and see exactly how it is going to work, how the structure is going to take shape, how the machinery is going to run. Where in here is there a plan to retrain 85 per cent of these job seekers?

Retraining is the second stage of economic liberalization. What this is a prelude to, and I know the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Minister of National Security will resist it, is the investors here come with their own bacon, their own lawyers, accountants, potato crisps and now they want to come with their own welders. They are saying our welders are not good enough. Are we going to be recolonized? We are going to have welders whose skills are not sufficiently adequate so that 500 welders are going to be brought from overseas by a foreign investor. Do you think people are going to stomach that?

I am glad that the Minister has recognized the problem, but I would have expected to see a blueprint here for how we are going to bring our welders up to scratch, so you will not have 500 more people coming in here, driving up the price of housing, all of which are the downsides of intensive foreign investments and which have to be carefully managed. Every 500 expatriates that come in here the price of a two bedroom apartment goes up by US \$5 or \$8 because of a shortage. Therefore, I would have expected to see in this blueprint a serious plan for retraining people who are out of the loop. All in all, while I congratulate the Government in managing the natural gas boom quite well—it is difficult to see how you could botch it—and for making all the right noises about the problem, I am extremely disappointed not to see a blue blueprint as opposed to a rather inaccurate and cynical use of the word.

Finally, Mr. President, Caroni (1975) Limited seems to be the popular thing this year. We now learn that it resulted in the death of a Prime Minister. I certainly think it is going to—well he did have a sugar problem—

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. Prof. J. Spence*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. M. Daly: Thank you, Mr. President and colleagues. I want to add my fuel to the Caroni (1975) Limited fire. I want to approach it with a similar perspective of Sen. Ramchand and the same perspective of my other colleagues. Here too, this Government has an historic opportunity quite apart from a duty. In the same way that the urban problems were neglected by previous administrations and they buried their head in the sand, won the elections, it got worse, it got worse, it got worse. More and more people got displaced and we bred more and more heartless criminals. Do not bury your head in the sand with the Caroni (1975) Limited problem. The longest rope has an end and there is going to come a time when the country, however much natural gas we have, will not be able to support Caroni (1975) Limited in its present form. You are in the middle of your term, you are sitting on a very good balance sheet and you have the political clout to do it. Do not lose the opportunity: deal with the problem. That is to say, find a way of making those who are close to that land, part of a structure where they work the land but at their expense, not ours. That is your second historic mission and I hope you succeed.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: We will break for tea now and resume at five o'clock.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.01 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Sadiq Baksh): Mr. President, I am happy to support the Bill before this honourable Senate and I must extend my sincerest congratulations to the Minister of Finance whose budget has touched the lives of the people of this country positively in so many ways. It is a people's budget, addressing as it does, so many of the problems which have plagued our society and perpetuated imbalances which have, to a great extent, militated against the full flowering of a just and equal society.

Mr. President, the budget lays the groundwork for dramatic innovations and fiscal strategies that would bring our nation closer to economic independence and promote real growth, which are two essential elements in the Government's vision for a nation striving for excellence. We have just completed two years in office and

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any assessment on what has been achieved over the period would show Government fully in control, a young nation on the move with the people becoming increasingly motivated and the resources of the country appropriately harnessed for the welfare of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry of Works and Transport continues to play a significant role in the achievement of many objectives for national development. In 1997, we considered it the year of delivery and the momentum in the Ministry of Works and Transport has picked up considerably and it will certainly accelerate in the year ahead.

I noted the comments of many of the speakers on the opposite side and in complimenting Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed on her elevation to office as deputy political leader of the PNM, it brought back to me fond memories of my first encounter with her. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. President, I had the privilege of meeting the dear Senator four years ago. I was then conducting screening exercises for the United National Congress at the Reinzi Complex. On that occasion—

Sen. Mohammed: Mr. President, on a point of clarification, please.

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: Mr. President, on that occasion as the chairman of the screening committee for the United National Congress, I did not consider her nor the person she accompanied a world class candidate. However—

Sen. Mohammed: Mr. President, on a point of order. Standing Order 32(4)—the hon. Minister is misleading this Senate—

Hon. Senator: Really. *[Laughter]*

Sen. Mohammed:—and I ask that he withdraw his statements from the record. I have never been to any screening for the United National Congress; I have never been a member of the United National Congress; it is a totally misleading statement; and I have never tried to be a member of the United National Congress. However, for the record, my late father was a member of the United National Congress and so, too, was my brother Jamal Shamshudin Mohammed. I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: Mr. President—

Mr. President: I am searching Standing Order 32(4). I think you quoted the wrong Standing Order.

Sen. Mohammed: Mr. President, Standing Order 34(b) under Interruptions.

Mr. President: It is not a point of order. Standing Order 34(a) deals with points of order; (b) deals with elucidation and clarification.

Hon. Senator: It was not clear enough.

Sen. Mohammed: Mr. President, on a point of clarification, then, or even elucidation. Just for the record, I merely wish that the record be set right. He is misleading the Senate in any event.

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: Mr. President, I will repeat what I said because it is the truth. My earliest recollections of my encounter with the hon. Senator was on a day at the Reinzi Complex while I was the chairman of the screening committee of United National Congress, and I tell you on that occasion, neither the person she accompanied nor herself was considered a world class candidate.

Sen. Mohammed: Mr. President, the hon. Minister continues to mislead the Senate. My first encounter with the Minister of Works and Transport was in the office of the United National Congress at the Caroni East constituency when my late father represented the constituency. He is totally erroneous in his comment. Misleading.

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: Mr. President—

Mr. President: Each side is claiming to be correct in his and her interpretation of what the Minister has said. Both of you will know the truth and I cannot get into it because I do not have any facts. All I would say, Minister, is that you concentrate on the budget.

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: I would do so, Mr. President.

The point I was linking is that on no occasion a world class performance as the Senator would like to claim, could assist her party in terms of improving the quality of life of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I must inform this Senate that all the plans for the St. Ann's Roundabout were, in fact, the plans of the People's National Movement. They were plans for 25 years.

Hon. Senator: Oh, my God!

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: Mr. President, I will also hand the claims for the designs for the St. Ann's Roundabout to the People's National Movement. They just did not do it.

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The Macoya Extension, another important design done by the People's National Movement. Yes, I admit the People's National Movement planned and planned and planned and, in fact, they went further on this occasion. Twenty-eight years ago, they indicated their need to acquire that property; 26 years ago they completed the designs. This party, the United National Congress, this Government of national unity, completed the extension of the Macoya Extension Road during 1997. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, the Caroni Silver Bridge has long been recognized by the PNM as an important piece of infrastructure for the development of Trinidad and Tobago. The People's National Movement understood the amount of time spent by all our commuters and the loss of productivity by the people on a daily basis. In fact, in 1981 they awarded a contract for the building of a bridge over the Caroni River. To date, the Ministry of Works and Transport still owes the contractor over \$10 million for that bridge. It was never completed. In 1997, we got that bridge over the Caroni River.

Going further, PNM had completed plans for the overpass at the Uriah Butler/Churchill Roosevelt Highway completed in 1970 at a cost then of \$10 million. They had all those plans and that is PNM's world class performance. Today, Mr. President, nothing to show.

In 1968, the first phase of the development of Piarco International Airport—\$10 million allocated; today, zero. The PNM would have us believe that we are implementing all their plans. The only reading material with which I prepared myself in preparation for this particular task was to read the budget presentations of the PNM from 1956—1994. Some of the best plans one could ever find, but implementation, nil. Nothing to show. No consideration for the commuters in Trinidad and Tobago.

The deterioration of our infrastructure continues to be one of the most scandalous situations in Trinidad and Tobago. When we look at this particular building that houses the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, judge the performance of the PNM on that. I find it extremely difficult and I must agree with Sen. Martin Daly when he made his statement about a little cubby-hole. Yes, Mr. President, PNM in action. [*Laughter*]

You know, Sir Walter Raleigh had a big problem when he came to Trinidad to caulk his ship. He took a group of men and decided to venture into San Fernando; when they reached to the Godineau Bridge, high tide; no roads then; so he could

not come. Do you know what happened? In 1995, PNM comes after 40 years, 30 years, 33 years and 10 months, any amount of time you want to put there. Do you know what happened? Floods, Sir. If Sir Walter Raleigh comes back in 1995, he cannot pass.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. President, our dear Sen. Mahadeo Jagmohan lives in that area and can bear testimony to the degradation, to the loss of time that he encounters on a daily basis—PNM inaction. The accomplishment of this Government in the last two years will bear testimony to the fine efforts it continues to make to improve the quality of the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The Senator rightfully pointed out that in the budget presentations in 1996, and now in 1997, this Government has completed Phase II of the Rural Access Roads and Bridges Programme, improving the service delivery to the population, particularly in the transport sector, preparation of road projects that were supposed to commence in 1997, some of which I just listed, preparation of drainage projects to commence implementation in January 1997. After hearing some Senators speak, one would find it almost difficult to understand what they did for 30 years for the Unemployment Relief Programme.

Mr. President, before I go into further details, I will like to make a few points on certain sections of the budget speech. I will deal first with the shifting of the Unemployment Relief Programme from the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Ministry of Local Government. This programme, which had its genesis in the socio economic problems which existed in the urban and suburban areas in the 1960s, has expanded considerably over the years and now covers the entire country. I must confess that it has not been easy to deal with the intractable and endemic problems which had beset this programme from its inception.

It is a well known fact that the early forms of the programme through Special Works, DEWD, LID and URP, have always been seen in a large measure as a sort of handout programme for the unemployed and, very often, unemployable. Over the last two years, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works and Transport, a serious attempt was made to transform this programme into an empowering programme enabling recipients or participants to move towards self-employment or self-sufficiency. Serious emphasis was placed on the development of skill and training which, naturally, was intended to lead to some measure of self-worth, self-esteem, and marketable skills on the basis for self-employment for entrepreneurial development.

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One of the main objectives of the new approach of the Unemployment Relief Programme was to make those employed less dependent on the kind of dependence that characterized the programme before. Our efforts achieved reasonable success although, I must admit, the unavailability of personnel to macro manage work and expenditure might have allowed some instances of mismanagement.

As Minister of Works and Transport, I am pleased to place on record the fact that much has been accomplished for thousands of our citizens in our work programmes and in our related training programmes. We have in the process developed a large section of our human resources that remained underdeveloped and untapped for years. Over 30 years, that is the PNM's record. In no other relief programme has such a quantum of success been achieved as the Unemployment Relief Programme in 1997, despite its deficiency.

In 1997, the Unemployment Relief Programme continued its mandate and undertook activities which provided employment opportunities and self-sufficiency skills to a wide cross-section of the society. In this respect the division's programme focussed in the following three areas: firstly, a programme of works; secondly, unemployment relief training programme; thirdly, unemployment relief women's training programme. Some 918 projects were undertaken on a regional basis, incurring an expenditure of \$119,196,979. Overall, at the end of the programme 183,000 employment opportunities were offered while 9,358 persons received employment. In other words, on average, each individual received at least two fortnights of employment.

Mr. President, we really cannot expect people to work for two fortnights and live for two months, far more one year. This is the record and proof of what took place. The Unemployment Relief Programme assisted other ministries by providing the physical infrastructure required for successfully achieving such objectives. In this respect the following flagship projects were implemented under the Unemployment Relief Programme for 1997: construction of seven new police stations, refurbishment of six police stations, four courts houses, refurbishment of four health centres, construction of the Matelot Health Centre, construction of Radio Toco building and the refurbishment of seven community centres. In addition, the Unemployment Relief Programme undertook on behalf of the Drainage Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport such works as: desilting of rivers, the building of retaining walls and pavements. The works were undertaken in addition to the division's traditional work programme of drainage works, extension and upgrading of pavement.

It is noteworthy to mention that the division also assisted the National Emergency Management Agency with disaster relief works such as the Piparo Mud Volcano eruption in March 1997 and the freak storms which occurred at La Paille Village Caroni, and in Port of Spain in August 1997.

During 1997 the Unemployment Relief Training Programme, a six-month programme geared towards upgrading the skills of the unemployed youths of our nation in the age group 17—35 was undertaken. This programme involved training in either public or private sector organizations in a range of skills which included: upholstering, cabinet-making, typewriter repairs, dairy farming, radiator and gas tank repairs, silk screen printing, book-keeping, security services, construction related skills which included: carpentry, masonry, steel bending and electrical installation. Each trainee received a stipend of \$42.00 per day. The cost of the public sector training was estimated at \$2,009,680 and was paid by the Unemployment Relief Programme. The cost of training in the Unemployment Relief Programme within the private sector was \$1,872,227 since payment of the stipend was shared equally between the Unemployment Relief Programme and the relevant private sector organizations.

Mr. President, it is the first time in the history of the Unemployment Relief Programme or any of its predecessor programmes, 1,036 trainees were trained, and all graduated from the programme—420 from the public sector institutions and 616 from the private sector organizations. That is URP!

In 1997 an innovative step was made by our Government to focus on equipping the women in our society with employable skills with the aim of facilitating their assimilation into the labour force with pride and dignity.

Under the PNM they normally would have been in groups of 20 or 30 at the side of the road chipping away grass. This was a thrust of the Unemployment Relief Programme. This programme targeted women throughout Trinidad over the age of 17. There was no upper limit to the age of the participants. Mr. President, 643 training courses each with a six-week duration were conducted in: hairdressing, book-keeping, handicraft, cookery, geriatric care, child care, horticulture, welding, small appliance repair and computer literacy. A total of 18,064 women accessed and graduated from this programme which incurred a total expenditure of \$21,971,106. They all received a stipend of \$42. Tracer studies indicate that in excess of 400 of these persons have either taken up some employment, or gone on to receive start-up capital in terms of loans from FUNDAid to start their own businesses.

5.25 p.m.

I wish to endorse the decision to remove the Unemployment Relief Programme from the Ministry of Works and Transport and to place it in the hands of the Ministry of Local Government. This ministry would have the advantage of mobilizing the developed human resources, infrastructure strategies and training which the Ministry of Works and Transport has put in place for the more efficient, rewarding and productive expenditure of public funds. The assignment for the responsibility of the Unemployment Relief Programme to the Ministry of Local Government, and by extension, the municipal and regional corporations in the country provide the basis for more equitable distribution of projects and would result in greater focus on their implementation.

The various elected representatives and public service staff of the municipal and regional corporations would be able to macro manage the expenditure of the Unemployment Relief Programme more effectively and efficiently, and with far greater surveillance for the potentialities for mismanagement which became endemic over the past 30 years.

Centralization would now give way to decentralization. Because of their proximity to the projects being undertaken, regional and municipal authorities would be in a better position to meet all the needs of the citizens in all the communities in the country.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Thanks for giving way, hon. Minister. I understand the benefit of the decentralization. How would the training aspect be managed if the units are split among so many different corporations?

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: Mr. President, I am sure that the Ministry of Local Government would put all the mechanisms in place to ensure that there would be improvement on what we have started in 1997. I have absolutely no doubt that all aspects for the development of the unemployed in the country would be continued in a manner to ensure that empowerment continues to be an integral part of the redirection of the unemployed and unemployable. We look forward to greater productivity and a general enhancement of the Unemployment Relief Programme under the Ministry of Local Government.

Another matter which I would touch on is the allocation of 50 per cent of the Road Improvement Fund Programme to the municipal and regional corporations. These corporations have a great responsibility in terms of the extent of roadways which they are expected to maintain. This decision would result in an immediate

improvement in the road infrastructure within the areas covered by the corporations. It would also free the Ministry of Works and Transport to attend with more urgent priority to the major highways and roads which are so essential to national development, and which would come under focus for construction, maintenance and repair in 1998.

With this kind of parallel programme within the municipal and regional corporations looking after their domestic responsibilities, and the Ministry of Works and Transport looking at the major networks of communication in the country, I have no doubt that we are about to usher in a period in which the development of road and communication infrastructure would be extensive, and of a magnitude which has not been seen in the past. It is something to look forward to in 1998, and beyond. All the plans of the PNM over the years will finally come on.

Under the IDB FUNDAid Programme, the final designs are 80 per cent completed for the construction of an interchange and approach ramp at the Uriah Butler/Churchill Roosevelt Highway intersection and are expected to be completed in March 1998. The completed designs from 1970 could no longer work. The sad state of it is that two companies now occupy the sites of the exit and the ramp which were designed in 1970. Although the PNM had the design and had acquired all the land, they leased it. That particular project could not continue. Thirty years later we are about to implement one of the most important developmental projects to take place in the country. The construction of that overpass will signal the modernization of our infrastructure as we approach the new millennium.

During 1998, paving works would begin in January on the North Coast Road, the Eastern Main Road and Siparia/Erin Road. The entire roads programme is scheduled for completion in June 1998. Next year would see the commencement of the Uriah Butler/Churchill Roosevelt Highway interchange; continuation of the widening of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to El Socorro Junction; the rehabilitation of the Solomon Hochoy Highway and improvement on access into Port of Spain. Furthermore, eight bridges would be completed in June 1998.

On January 31, 1997, we delivered the Mosquito Creek bridge; one month later we delivered the Marabella bridge and a few days ago, we launched the construction of the Valencia bridge known as the "Killer bridge". This was also designed many years ago and there was no implementation.

In 1998, for the first time, the Highways Division would be executing a major Orphan Roads Development Programme in districts throughout the country. From 1956 to this day, under the PNM there were roads which people called orphan roads because no governmental authority took the responsibility for their maintenance or development. I note that some of these roads are in the hands of private developers and there would be certain legalities in terms of the transfer of those roads to Government. We are prepared not to shun the responsibility of improving the quality of lives of the citizens in this country. As such, this major Orphan Roads Programme was designed to rehabilitate secondary roads, particularly in housing developments which have not been adopted by either the Local Government Authority or the Ministry of Works and Transport. This is one of the most important steps in the development of the road infrastructure and something which eluded the PNM for all these years.

During 1998, we intend to build on our earlier successes which we achieved in the Rural Access Roads and Bridges Programme. Some were indicated yesterday. Some will open up the country and make otherwise inaccessible agricultural lands accessible. We know that 85 per cent of the benefits produced by the increase in farm production would go to the low income population, given the distribution of land tenure and the nature of the cut parcels which lie within the projects. In a real sense that is an opportunity for all.

During 1998, \$75 million would be allocated to press on with Phase III of the programme, whereby 43 kilometres of road and nine bridges would be constructed as follows. In the central a total length of seven kilometres would be built. They are Alfred Edwards Trace, Guinness Trace, Soriah Branch Trace, Christian Hill Trace and Brazil Lome Trace. In the west, the total length would be 9.4 kilometres. In Aranguez North, it would be Martin Trace and Fernando Trace. The total length of roads in south/central is 4.65 kilometres. In the north, it would be Boundary Trace, Manmohan Trace, and Corial Road. For roads in the south, the total length would be 6.1 kilometres and they are Ramnath Branch Trace, Ramcharan Branch Trace, Sirju Trace, Congo Trace and Rahamuth Trace. The total length for roads south/west is 6.8 kilometres. They are Government School Road, Dookeran Trace, National Mining Road, Goopiesingh Trace and Bobby Trace.

In Tobago, the total length is 7.8 kilometres. The roads are Belmont Branch Road, Mount Hay Trace and Mount Hay Branch Trace. A number of bridges on the Eastern Main Road, Manzanilla/Mayaro Road and Naparima/Mayaro Road

would be undertaken. These are some of the projects which are planned for 1998. The Maintenance Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport has the responsibility to maintain and upkeep government buildings and associated equipment. It is the same division and the same ministry, but just different governments—the PNM and our Government.

5.35 p.m.

In 1998, the division's main thrust will be providing quality services to its clients. To facilitate these objectives, there are plans for establishing a detailed databank on physical plant; a system of retrieving data and statistical information with respect to cost of items, programming of specific categories of work, manpower needs, market information and feedback on performance of products; and project management courses to enable supervisors to maintain high standards in the execution of their duties.

Some of the programmes to be undertaken for client ministries in 1998 are as follows:

Major refurbishment of eight community centres at a cost of \$1.5 million;

Repairs to existing police stations, hospitals, health centres, office buildings, fire stations, schools and court houses.

In 1997, the Maintenance Division surpassed its previous 1996 achievement by increasing the extent of day-to-day maintenance and minor repair work, and upgrading of the stock of Government properties to acceptable standard.

Mr. President, also in 1997, construction, maintenance, electrical and air-conditioning works were undertaken throughout Trinidad and Tobago on 250 schools at a cost of \$10 million, 28 post offices, 92 Government quarters, 40 health centres, 150 public buildings, five hospitals, three fire stations, 39 police stations and five court houses. In addition, the division was involved in a number of special projects for young unemployed individuals, two of which are:

- (a) School furniture repair/school refurbishing project for the Rio Claro region.

The Ministry of Works and Transport partnered in a United Nations Development Programme project, which involved the training of 60 unemployed youth ages 17—25 in the Rio Claro environment. These youths successfully completed rehabilitation works on the Cushe Government and St. Theresa's Roman Catholic Primary Schools. The Ministry of Works and Transport provided the funds for the training, stipend, guidance and technical training.

(b) Programme of survey and data entry for government properties:

One cannot reasonably expect to maintain the properties under the jurisdiction of the ministry or the Government without knowing where they are and in what condition. The division provided training at a cost of \$80,000 for six unemployed young people for work on a programme of survey and data entry for Government properties. This project which initiated the databank for all Government properties, would assist the Property Management Division to carry out the exercise on the sale of Government quarters and provide data for the ministry on the Government's real estate.

The division conducted in-house training programmes designed to assist supervisors in the successful implementation of the division's maintenance programme in the areas of tendering procedure, maintenance management, electrical system, financial management, and performance management.

Mr. President, for the first time within the ministry, we are looking at developing an entrepreneurial approach to the development of our human resources and an attempt, on every occasion, to get value for money.

In 1998, the Drainage Division will utilize its allocation of \$21 million to continue a comprehensive national drainage programme designed to ensure that the policy objectives of this Government to provide adequate drainage and irrigation infrastructure to facilitate growth and development and to achieve a measure of food security are realized.

There are two components to this comprehensive national drainage programme: the World Bank-funded drainage programme and flood control programme, which was funded jointly by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the World Bank, and the drainage, construction and maintenance programme, funded totally by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

In 1997, the two components programme were funded in the sum of \$20 million and \$5.2 million respectively. Projected expenditure to December 31, 1997 was estimated at \$11.5 million and \$4.8 million respectively for both programmes.

Five projects were selected for implementation for 1997. The status of these are as follows:

(1) Caparo River short-term works:

A contract for the execution of the first phase, which includes the widening, dredging, embanking and realigning of the Caparo River between Perseverance Road in the west and Brasso Caparo in the east, as well as the reconstruction of the bridge on the La Clave Road was awarded to R. Mahabir & Sons on September 8, 1997 in the sum of \$6.9 million. The project is expected to commence on January 1, 1997 and will be completed within 12 months of the starting date.

(2) Caroni River short-term works:

Work commenced on April 2, 1997 on the section downstream of Kelly Village, a length of approximately 400 metres, at an estimated cost of \$2.4 million. As at November 30, the project was 60 per cent completed with an expenditure of \$1.3 million. The project is scheduled for completion in May 1998.

(3) Rehabilitation of the St. John's tidal exclusion gates:

Tenders were invited in April 1997 and recommendations will be made to the Central Tenders Board today for the award of contract to undertake works which include the replacement of 14 malfunctioning automatic gates, rehabilitation of complementary 14 manual gates, and the construction of underwater concrete sills and sealing of all vertical joints and horizontal seatings. This is one of the projects to be undertaken to eliminate seawater intrusion in the Oropouche Lagoon as a first step towards the rehabilitation of a large expanse of barren agricultural land.

(4) Dredging of St. Ann's River Outfall:

Tenders were invited in April 1997 and a contract was awarded to Sea Works Trinidad Limited on August 25, 1997. The agreement was executed in November 1997, and dredging is expected to begin in January 1998. The project will be completed within four months, at an estimated cost of \$1.2 million. These works are expected to improve the drainage in East Port of Spain, particularly South Quay and Sea Lots.

(5) Rehabilitation of sluice gates in the Caroni irrigation area:

The Caroni irrigation area occupies more than 5,480 hectares, and which are cultivated by numerous small farmers in the Aranguez and

Caroni areas. The area is serviced by an intricate system of drainage and irrigation channels which are controlled by 83 sluice gates and other hydraulic structures. In order to increase agricultural output, improvement in water management continues to be one of the most important aspects in ensuring that our agricultural lands continue to be under production. Tenders were received in April 1997, and a contract was subsequently awarded in September 1997 in the sum of \$2.4 million for the rehabilitation of the gates. This project is expected to be completed within seven months.

For 1997, three of the four studies which were required to complete the preparation of the first drainage and flood control project, the execution of which will begin in 1998, with a loan of approximately TT \$100 million from the World Bank were completed.

5.45 p.m.

They are:

- (a) The environmental impact assessment for projects under the first drainage flood control programme.
- (b) The upper river basin watershed management study.

This takes into consideration some of the points raised by Sen. Prof. Julian Kenny in terms of looking at preventative mechanisms with respect to desiltation of our rivers.

- (c) Financial management and controls in the Drainage Division.

The fourth study which is the consolidation of economic analyses of the first drainage and flood control project will be completed by January, 1998. Additionally, the Caparo River Water Resources and Flood Abatement Study is expected to begin early in January, 1998.

While we do all these things within the Drainage Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport, the sum of US \$500,000 was provided under the Water Sector Institutional Strengthening Project for training and development of staff in the Drainage Division, Central Planning Unit and other agencies engaged in water management. The bulk of training estimated to cost \$3.5 million will be implemented over the next five years in keeping with a comprehensive training plan, completed by the Ministry of Works and Transport in November, 1997.

Mr. President, the development of our human resources continues to be one of the important aspects in ensuring that we deliver to Trinidad and Tobago the type of infrastructure that would be important for the development of our country.

In 1997, the Drainage Division implemented a programme of works throughout the country which included manual desilting, clearing, lining of channels, gabion basket works and repairs to sluice gates at a cost of \$28,000,000. A number of projects continued to be done under the Drainage Division. They include the Oropouche River, Macoya Drain, Guayamare River, Beetham Drain, Cunupia River, Arima River, and St. Joseph River.

In addition, the development programme targeted flooding, irrigation and coastal erosion for the first time. Coastal erosion continues to be one of the threats to Trinidad and Tobago, and no attention was paid to this particular matter for years. In 1997, for the first time, we have been looking at all the studies to ensure that we take all the preventative measures necessary to halt the tremendous erosion of our soil around Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President: The hon. Senator's speaking time has expired.

Motion made, That the hon Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh: Thank you, Mr. President. Within the Ministry of Works and Transport we do have a number of other areas under our control, among them is the Department of Civil Aviation. During the year 1997, after tremendous work from the Department of Civil Aviation we were able to be upgraded at the Piarco International Airport in terms of our air flight capability in moving to category 1. This means that our airline would be able to go to destinations in the United States and expand our fleet.

As we continue to look at all the deficiencies which existed in Trinidad and Tobago over a lengthy period, one would always need to look at our air services between Trinidad and Tobago. As such, this is the first time we are pursuing a policy of open skies in terms of inviting other airlines and allowing market forces to dictate the price and level of service we would expect between Trinidad and Tobago.

Another vexing problem, Mr. President, is the seabridge and the sea link between Trinidad and Tobago which continue to occupy the attention of the

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Ministry of Works and Transport, the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. Cabinet appointed a team to look at all the implications for the proper servicing of the route between Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. President, I cannot tell you that the sea link between Trinidad and Tobago is something of which we could be proud. We need to improve all the facilities as it concerns the link between Trinidad and Tobago and we are doing everything possible to address this vexing problem which has, in fact, engaged the attention of the people of Trinidad and Tobago for an extended period. We, however, understand that we now need to take the responsibility for the improvement of that service and we will do exactly that in 1998.

With respect to the Transport Division of the Ministry of Works, I noted that Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed, on going to the Transport Division, spent a long time, in fact, she said three half days. I have no reason to disbelieve that but I would tell you that at the Transport Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport all the people who had to visit that particular department to renew their licences on a yearly basis, no longer need to visit that particular office. Mr. President, over 300,000 vehicle owners did not need to visit the Transport Division during 1997. That is the record of this Government.

The information system at the Transport Division still needs to be updated. We will not be able to do everything with the speed we would like to, but we will continue to aspire to ensure that we bring the management systems within the department of transport to ensure that we deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the type of mechanisms which will allow one to stay at home and conduct much of one's transactions at the Transport Division. We plan to build on the successes which we have had during the past two years. Within the Ministry of Works and Transport we do have the responsibility for many areas in terms of maintenance of all government motor vehicles and the maintenance and construction of buildings.

I noted the Senator making an inquiry about the new library complex. I did not think that was necessary but, Mr. President, the contract for the construction of the new library project continues to be under active consideration by Fincor, which has finalized the designs with all the stakeholders. We look forward to the commencement of construction during 1998. When the library is completed it will not be a white elephant, not being able to be opened because of the lack of furniture, fixtures and equipment. On the last occasion all the plans for the building

were in place but without equipment, books and outfittings. Mr. President, that will not occur with this Government.

As I have given some insight into the present scope of achievements of the Ministry of Works and Transport over the past year, I realize that the year 1998 will be extremely challenging in terms of delivering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago the type of infrastructure they have lacked over the past years.

Mr. President, we, in the Ministry of Works and Transport, continue to work to develop our human resources and as such we have established a team of senior managers within the ministry, who have been looking at all the plans for the development of the infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago.

5.55 p.m.

As we continue to work for the development of Trinidad and Tobago we would make the decisions necessary to ensure that we deliver the type of infrastructure to the people that would make all of us proud. We are actively looking at alternative mechanisms in terms of our land transport systems. We are thinking in terms of doing a study for our national land transportation plan and we have not excluded the possibility of a mass transit system.

I have noted the suggestions by a number of Independent Senators, who continue to make worthwhile suggestions for the improvement of the quality of the lives of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. They do not just disagree on what we are doing but they come up with constructive suggestions and we plan to look at them. One of those constructive suggestions came in terms of emission control. We were very pleased in the Ministry of Works and Transport to handle, expeditiously, the need to look at our environment and institute all the infrastructure to ensure that emission monitoring and control become a reality in 1997. [*Desk thumping*]

Our environment continues to be the focus of attention within the Ministry and as such, we have established an Environmental Management Unit to ensure that every single piece of infrastructural development that takes place in Trinidad and Tobago would be in harmony with our environment to ensure sustainable development as we move into a new century. Mr. President, we have disregarded the environment for too long and we, in the Ministry of Works and Transport, would do everything possible to ensure that we develop Trinidad and Tobago in a sustainable manner, preserving our environment for our future generations, realizing that we are, in fact, the ancestors of the future.

I thank you very much, Mr. President.

Sen. Penelope Beckles: Mr. President, I rise to make my contribution on this 1998 Budget Statement. First of all, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the majority of my colleagues for constructive criticisms and deliveries in relation to the budget with the exception of the Hon. Minister of Works and Transport.

What is very interesting is that, today, the Muslim community is looking out for the moon. It is so amazing that the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, as a Muslim, would have stood up and made such false accusations against my colleague. However, I am not surprised at his delivery. I am not surprised at his accusations because it is consistent with this Government's treatment of women in Trinidad and Tobago. Several psychologists and sociologists are saying that many of the men feel marginalized and this has resulted in the amount of domestic violence that is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago.

My colleague, Sen. Mohammed, took her time and showed the incompetence of the Minister of Works and Transport. She showed that he did not perform over the last two years and one of the difficulties with many of the men in Trinidad and Tobago is that when women tell them that they cannot perform, they respond in a rather strange manner. He gave us this story about where he met her, the first time that he remembered and because she told him of his lack of performance for the last two years, he tried to humiliate her. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, Sen. Mohammed, with facts, using the documents provided by the Government, was able to show the incompetence and ineptitude of the Minister of Works and Transport. [*Desk thumping*] He could not handle it! Therefore, he chose to start his contribution by accusing her falsely.

Again, it continues to show a tendency of this Government to abuse parliamentary privilege, in order to make false allegations against people. Mr. President, both Sen. Mohammed and myself are lawyers and I ask him to go outside of the rubric of parliamentary privilege and make that statement. Mr. President, he may have a writ in the morning. Again, they cannot deal with us showing them their incompetence. I filed a question to the Minister of Works and Transport some time in July, 1997 and it was answered on August 12, 1997. Mr. President, with your leave, I am quoting from the *Hansard* of August 12, 1997 at precisely 1.40 p.m. The question was filed by myself to the Minister of Works and Transport and I asked:

“Could the Minister kindly state:

- (a) When construction work is expected to begin on the National Library Complex?
- (b) The expected date of completion?
- (c) The estimated cost of the project?”

He indicated that the project would have started in six months which should be in December. The expected date of completion would be 21 months. The cost of the project would be \$90 million. The consultants’ fee would be approximately \$7.85 million, but he is telling us about Fincor and plans at this stage, after having already come to the honourable Senate and said that the project would start this month. *[Desk thumping]* I ask him to indicate where, in the budget allocation, is the money to start this National Library Complex? He cannot show us. Because my colleague has showed up his incompetence and, in fact, that he has been misleading the Parliament, he chose to take a position of talking about some screening in the United National Congress. Which hon. Senator on this side would want to join the United National Congress? There are persons who have left them. With regard to the treatment towards women the same thing happened to Sen. Deborah Moore-Miggins. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. President, I would start with the Government’s treatment in relation to women’s affairs.

I was tempted to start my contribution by giving the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism some congratulations for some of the things that he did, until I heard from the Minister of Works and Transport. He is giving the impression that he is the champion of women and he is saving the women of Trinidad and Tobago, but he has not been able to go outside to answer the several women who are waiting out there for their salaries. *[Desk thumping]* Let the hon. Minister deal with that. The several women in Trinidad and Tobago who have worked and have not been paid. Let him deal with that.

Mr. President, their figures in relation to how many women have worked in Trinidad and Tobago suggest otherwise, from the impression that he is creating that he has employed so many women in Trinidad and Tobago during the period 1996—1997. What is interesting is that they are giving their comparative analysis, so when the hon. Minister gives this figure of 18,000 persons who have been employed and how many million dollars are being spent in 1997, he must tell us how much was spent in 1996 and 1995 so we could see that they have progressed. He has not done that. The hon. Minister continues to have this public relations

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campaign for himself and that is why he has a distinction of being the first Minister to be fired in a budget speech. [*Desk thumping*] He is campaigning for himself.

6.05 p.m.

Mr. President, I want to read from page 23 of the *Review of the Economy 1997*. It states:

“Of the number of persons employed during the period January to June 1997, approximately 291,900 or 64.2 percent were male while 162,500 or 35.8 percent were female. These represented increases of 4.3 percent and 1.2 percent respectively over the 1996 period.”

The Minister is giving the impression that he employs so many women. Again, that is consistent with their treatment, because, one would recall that the Minister of Works and Transport was the one, a few months ago, who was saying that women must not sweep the road and cut the grass and so forth. So, as we enter into the second millennium, he is trying at this stage to still dictate to the women of Trinidad and Tobago what we should and should not do.

What the Minister of Works and Transport needs to do is to check the records and see the performance of women over the last couple years and where we are going and maybe he will understand that those accusations that he tried to level against my colleague were totally unfounded. That is not the way you deal with women when they show your lack of performance in your various activities as Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

I will start now by giving a bit of congratulations to the Minister of Finance, which I had intended to start my presentation with until the Minister of Works and Transport almost sidetracked me because of those accusations that he made.

In this blueprint for human development and opportunity for all, the Minister of Finance refers to \$25 million for single mothers. Now, I would say that any allocation in relation to moneys for women ought to be something that should be applauded. My only concern is that the Minister has not defined who is a single mother. He has not indicated to us what are the statistics in relation to single mothers. Whilst we might say, yes there are many single mothers around the place, I think we need to do a little better than that.

One of the concerns I have, and I would like the Minister of Finance to explain to me first of all is: Why is it that the allocation has gone to the Minister of Social Development and not to the Minister of Community Development, Culture and

Women's Affairs? You see, the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs in her one-hour presentation, spent very little time on the issues of women's affairs. She spent a lot of time dealing with gender and I want to suggest that she needs, first of all, to train her male colleagues about gender relations because it is quite clear that the Minister of Works and Transport ought to be the first student. *[Desk thumping]*

What is the reason that they are giving the Minister of Social Development \$25 million to deal with single mothers? Has an allocation gone to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs? What Ministry has it gone to? Nobody knows. *[Interruption]* That is what the Minister should have said. The Minister should have said to us that it had gone to her Ministry. My information is that it is under the Ministry of Social Development. I would have assumed that if it had gone under the Community Development Ministry, the Minister would have given us much more grand plans about what they intended to do about it. *[Interruption]* The Minister did not have the time? Well, I would have thought that would have been the first aspect of her presentation having regard to what is happening with women in Trinidad and Tobago! She should have spent a lot more time and given that priority in the hour that she spoke.

Mr. President, the average person in Trinidad and Tobago is getting tired of reading about the rape of our women and our children. Tired of it! The Minister is saying she had no time to talk about women's affairs and the allocation of the \$25 million? Is that what she is saying, Mr. President? Absolutely disappointing! I would have thought that would have been first. That would have been absolutely first. Further to that, she is saying to me that it is not going under the Ministry of Social Development. Where is it going?

I want to suggest that this \$25 million allocated by the Minister of Finance has not really been thought out. It is a good idea in principle, but it has to be linked to so many other things. It cannot be dealt with in isolation. It has to be linked with the whole issue of morality, development of the family, juvenile delinquency and training and development of women. It has to be linked, it cannot be separate and apart. I would have thought that the possibility existed that that whole idea had actually come from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, but it appears as though it has not. I do not have to check the *Hansard*, because I will tell you where it came from.

Mr. President, I am reading, and I ask you to refer to *the Independent* newspaper of Saturday, December 13, 1997, because the Minister of Community

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Development, Culture and Women's Affairs would want to suggest that this idea came from her. I would like her to tell me who is speaking the truth. I will still check the *Hansard*. Mr. President, with your leave I read:

“Job takes credit for \$M Women’s programme

Tobago Affairs Minister, Morgan Job, yesterday welcomed the 1998 Budget, saying it indicated that government was finally taking his advice. Dr. Job was referring to the measures announced in the fiscal package to help educate and train women. Job added that the move was an indication that the Basdeo Panday administration was not mamaguying the poor people in the East-West corridor but in fact helping them.

It’s this Panday ‘Indian government’ that start to teach remedial literacy to Black people. It’s this same ‘Indian government’ that is preparing now to go with a programme to help these poor little girls who have been breeding like stray dogs among garbage.

Job said that he will be on the committee that will be addressing this programme. He said it was only through programmes like those that people can be helped.”

The Minister is suggesting that this is her programme.

Mr. President, you understand why I have to be concerned that the Minister was treating my colleague like that a while ago, because they have a member of their Cabinet referring to the women of Trinidad and Tobago as stray dogs. And you are talking about gender relations! He is student number two. You need him in a class by himself! To be talking about women like that and you do not have difficulty with that! I ask the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs to try to teach some of the men in her Cabinet gender relations. *[Desk thumping]* I cannot see how you could be comfortable sitting around persons referring to women as stray dogs.

Mr. President, I am certain that my mother, yours and all of our mothers are not stray dogs. Not one! How could we be allowing this? What is worse, I want the Minister of Finance to clear it up, whether the \$25 million is for stray dogs? I want him to clear it up. The time has to come when men must recognize the power of women in Trinidad and Tobago and it is going to come very soon, because they cannot continue to insult us in this fashion. He may say it is a threat and I am saying yes, it is.

Sen. Prof. Spence: May I suggest to the hon. Senator that she need not be worried. Dr. Job once called Independent Senators ‘swine’, and named them, including one John Spence. So he sometimes makes the comments as for men as well. *[Laughter]*

Sen. P. Beckles: I am obliged. Seriously, I do not think that the Minister of Finance has that view of women, I really do not think so, but I would like him to clear it up. I certainly do not believe the Leader of Government Business has that view either, but I think one has to remember that people read these comments. We have the Internet, we have technology. They are reading about what is happening in our Senate, in our Parliament and in our news. You see, some people are alleging that the newspaper is putting crime on the front page and they would like other things on the front page. Well, I do not know if this is what they will want on the front page. I am concerned about that.

As I said, it may very well end up to be a good programme, it may very well be positive and any measure whatsoever that this Government brings before this Parliament or anywhere else to assist the plight of women in Trinidad and Tobago, I will support it. But I have a problem with my sisters, mother, grandmothers and children, any woman, being referred to as a “stray dog”. I would like the Minister of Finance, when he is setting up this task force, to be very careful about this person who says that he would be on the task force. I do not assume that the Minister has yet appointed the task force, but a certain person is already on it.

There is a document here called *Statistics and Indicators of the Status of Women 1990-1995*. That document gives the statistics in relation to the number of female persons’ potential in the labour force and the number of persons who have been employed. That document also gives the different age groups; 0—14 and 15—64 in terms of the population census. If I might just state:

“Number of females employed

1990	120,700
1991	135,600
1992	142,300
1993	142,800
1994	148,000
1995	154,000”

What it says here is that the unemployment rate in relation to women in 1995—because I do not have the 1996 figures as yet, I imagine they would bring that out shortly—is 20.6 per cent and the male unemployment rate 15.1 per cent.

Mr. Minister, I would humbly suggest, because you all love to say that we do not give suggestions, that you look at this document. I think it will be extremely helpful in terms of assisting you in setting up the task force and the direction you may want to take in relation to this \$25 million that you have indicated would be distributed in relation to single mothers.

The other thing I would like to suggest in relation to that fund is that there are several support systems existing for women. Much of the difficulty has to do with the bureaucracy and I know many persons congratulated FUNDAid. I will add my congratulations except to say, that it is extremely difficult, not only for a single mother, be it a married person, to access FUNDAid. If you know the procedure, you need to have four guarantors with letters indicating that you are employed. They have an excellent rate of repayment of interest. The reason for that is that with four guarantors the likelihood is that the delinquency would be very low.

So that, yes, \$25 million has been allocated to FUNDAid. I am saying that if we are talking about an opportunity for all and a blueprint for human development, we have to ensure that it is much easier for persons to access these several grants. In addition to which, I think that what could be considered is setting up a department of FUNDAid in Tobago. At present there is no FUNDAid department in Tobago, persons normally go across at particular times and I think it will be much easier, beneficial and equitable if a FUNDAid department were set up in Tobago. Clearly, if this allocation has been given, I think we should ensure that Tobago also benefits equally.

Mr. President, I end that area by saying that like my colleague, Sen. Mohammed, there was an article in the *Daily Express* of December 23, 1997, “Frustrated URP women demand pay.” At that time it was indicated that their cheques would have been paid by Christmas Eve and it is now December 30, and we continue to see women demonstrating in relation to the fact that they have not been paid.

6.20 p.m.

The Minister of Works and Transport gave us a long discourse about how much he has done for women. As my colleague Sen. Shabazz said, when persons work and they do not get paid it is a different kettle of—

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that this Senate continue in session until the conclusion of the matter before us.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

Sen. P. Beckles: Mr. President, I was speaking about the difficulty in accessing payment. I would mention what Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt said in relation to creating this culture of violence.

I do not think that any of us could feel comfortable in passing in the area of the Treasury on days when persons are to change their cheques. I do not have the answer and I am not professing to have the answer. All I am saying is that it really looks totally disgraceful. I think we ought to find a method where persons do not have to be like hooligans, lining up in the morning, to collect their hard earned money with police with batons and guns keeping order. I really think we can do better than that as a society. I am not blaming the Government, because I cannot say that I have the answer. I do not think it is impossible for the Minister of Finance to sit with his technocrats and try to deal with that.

It breeds violence and does not speak well for our society. It certainly does not mean that we have a quality nation and there is opportunity for all. When we have to collect our salary cheques none of us would like to stand behind barriers with police walking up and down with guns or batons ensuring that we stay in a line. I am pleading with the Minister of Finance to remedy the situation.

When we talk about opportunity for all—as we said these problems may have existed for a long time—the point is, it takes place in the heart of the city and this is where we are demonstrating to all our nation's visitors that we have opportunities for all.

When I talk about the whole issue of accessing grants, my information is that the Disability Assistance Grant implemented in the last budget was not accessed by any recipient. No recipient has received any money, as yet, from that fund. The Minister of Finance could say that I am wrong when he is dealing with it. That is my concern about some of these funds established. The bureaucracy often causes problems for the persons being able to access the money.

When the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs spoke in her first budget debate, she spoke about the SHARE and CARE programmes and the moneys going back to the Treasury. Those of us who have had the experience of talking to women who have gone to access these funds—I am sure Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt would bear me out on that—it is extremely difficult for women to access these funds in a reasonable time.

The last area I will deal with in relation to that, is the whole issue of the public assistance and women accessing it. The \$25 million grant has to be seen in the context of all that we do in relation to women. On an average it takes a woman six months to access public assistance. If I am wrong the Minister could correct me. Normally you may get it quickly in three months, depending on your situation. When we talk about this situation, very often what we create in families is violence by some of the systems through which we are actually trying to help some of our citizens.

I will give you a simple scenario. I am married, my husband has not been able to get a job for two months, we take a decision that he disappears somewhere, go to the country or wherever so I can apply for public assistance. You have a breakdown in family life. The evidence would bear me out that this happens in many instances, where families take decisions to break up for the purpose of accessing public assistance.

Then we have another situation where the woman has to prove desertion in order to access public assistance. What about cases where parties have been separated for years, the woman has gone to apply for public assistance and she has been told, "You have to go to court and we have to establish that your husband cannot work, or he has deserted you." Do you know what happens? He is in some other part of the world. He forgets that he has a wife and children. One morning they bring a summons for him, the first thing they say is that the women are wicked and vicious. The men go to court with anger and violence and very often it results in violence being perpetrated against women.

This is a real situation. They have to go to court and then they have to tell the magistrate, "I do not really want maintenance from him and I do not know where he is, but I have to do this because it is the only way to get public assistance."

In the context of the \$25 million being allocated, there are many situations where women have to go through these humiliations to access moneys that already exist for them. Some of them just decide that they cannot take it. When dealing

with this we really have to look very closely at what is happening and what is already in the pipe line. I hope that these are some of the areas the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs would probably impress upon her colleagues in order to improve the lot of women.

Mr. President, in dealing with this, I am sharing with the Minister of Finance my experience because the Minister of Works and Transport accused us of not having suggestions. In my practice, one of the most humiliating experiences I encounter on a daily basis are women lining up to collect maintenance. What is distressing about it is the extent to which they may wait three or four hours or come back two or three days to find out that there is no money. Do you understand my concern in relation to this whole issue and women?

It needs us to take a different approach, to get together with persons who are aware of what is happening in the system and it needs us to be strong and committed enough to take the decision to get women out of it. There are sufficient women around who can deal with it and that is why I have a concern with this task force and Dr. Morgan Job sitting on it.

I will mention some of the other areas in which I wish to congratulate the Minister, before I go into some of the things I am not too happy about. One of the things I would like to congratulate the Minister on, again, is the issue of the increase in the old age pension. What is clear is that any increase given to the old people of Trinidad and Tobago, they would welcome. That spells volumes when a person gets \$100 and he is happy. But the point is, are we happy? Is that the best we can do? If it is that \$600 is the benchmark for a person living under the poverty line, then we know that our grandmothers, aunts, most of the old women in Trinidad and Tobago are living under the poverty line. Therefore, we need to look at it again and see, as Dr. Mc Kenzie said, whether the possibility does not exist—in the context of some of the other allocations given—for us to give a slight increase to the old age pensioners.

I know some persons have been critical of the placing of the Unit Trust Corporation on an equal and comparable footing with its competitors. I read Henry Sealey's comment on this yesterday and whilst I may have had a difficulty in the beginning, since he would have been one of persons responsible for taking the Unit Trust Corporation where it is today, he said that he was extremely happy with the move. He said that providing the transfer and the transition is properly managed, it may very well redound to the benefit of the shareholders. I will ask my colleague Sen. Ramchand to have a look at that article. He explains why, and it

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may be quite possible that he would agree or not agree with it. But he is comfortable that they would continue to be secure in the interest paid to their several shareholders.

That brings me to the issue of allocations to NATUC. While I do not have a difficulty with that, my concern is in terms of the other organizations—

Sen. John: You do not want to recommend that NUGFW get something?

6.30 p.m.

Sen. P. Beckles: In terms of some of the other organizations, and I refer specifically to that of the credit union movement, we must remember that this blueprint for human development refers to opportunities for all. Therefore when we make that comment, we have to look at it in the context of other organizations.

Last year the Minister indicated in his budget speech that in the first quarter of 1997 he would be bringing to the Parliament legislation to deal with the credit union movement. Mr. President, he has not yet done that. And I will just refer him to that. This is his budget contribution of December 20, 1996 where he referred to institutional restructuring and strengthening of the credit union sector:

“We are quite aware that the credit union movement controlled in excess of \$2.2 billion in shares as it relates to its members. While we are also aware that there have been some problems in the credit union sector, that is not unique to the credit union sector, it may exist in the trade union movement where you have some stronger credit unions and you have some weaker credit unions, those that have difficulty in terms of their management and those who may not have that difficulty.”

The Minister of Finance in the last budget speech was referring to the whole issue of levelling the playing field. We are coming to the next budget speech and he has not dealt with this issue of levelling the playing field having removed the \$625 tax credit in relation to the credit union movement. Therefore, I think there is inequity and I think that is a situation that needs to be dealt with. My argument is that if you have given NATUC that money for institutional strengthening, training and improvement, I think the credit union movement, the co-operative sector, friendly societies, which he spoke of last year; all those organizations deserve an equal share of the pie. I am again asking him to look at that.

I now come to the issue of the energy sector. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries indicated that no one has spoken about the energy sector. When

he said that only two of our speakers had spoken and there were five of us to come, so I do not know why he assumed that the Opposition would not deal with that very important part of our economy. Last year I told the Minister that his budget was a gamblers' budget. It was, because the Minister of Energy yesterday in his speech indicated that the Minister of Finance got lucky two years straight. I do not know if it was lucky seven or under seven. He also indicated that this year, using US \$19 as the benchmark for the oil price may very well be a risk. You may be lucky once or twice, but very few of us are lucky a third time.

I would like to share with the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Minister of Finance why that figure of US \$19 may not have been such a good decision, and why it is that his luck may run out this time. Mr. President, I ask your leave to read page 4 of the *Guardian* "Oil Prices Plunge", today's date December 30, 1997:

"World oil prices fell to their lowest for almost two years yesterday as Iraq moved quickly to resume UN-monitored oil exports and Asia's financial crisis started nibbling at global demand.

Mild winter weather in the northern hemisphere also contributed to the slide on crude markets pushing the price of international benchmark Brent blend crude below \$17 for the first time since May 1996.

London February futures for Brent settled at \$16.16, down 73 cents on the day...."

Mr. President, they went on to explain why. But before I read the *Guardian* I had actually, in preparing my debate—I am sure the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries will be familiar with this newspaper called *Upstream*, the international oil and gas newspaper. It is the December 5, 1997 issue. I have the feeling that neither the Minister of Finance nor the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries read this newspaper before they decided to go with US \$19 a barrel.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. P. Beckles: If they read it, I shudder to think that they still went with US \$19 a barrel and I understand why they said it was a risk they were taking. The article is dated December 5, 1997:

"Saudi spanner in the oil works

OPEC's decision to increase production by 10% to 27.5 million barrels per day could have a damaging impact on world oil prices and corporate results. Is Riyadh, which talked Opec into the move, following a private agenda or does it seriously believe its own rhetoric about big future increases in oil demand?

Crude prices have tailed downwards this week in reaction to the cartel's decision. Spot Brent blend was trading at below \$17.80 per barrel but there could be a lot worse to come. Energy analysts at stockbrokers Robert Fleming insist they will keep their oil prices forecasts at around the \$20 dollars per barrel but most are much more bearish. Some Centre for Global Energy Studies estimates have oil prices hitting the \$15 per barrel mark by the second quarter of 1998 and continuing to fall."

Sen. Gangar: That is one man's opinion.

Sen. P. Beckles: Mr. President, this newspaper, as we say in law is *locus classicus* on the oil and gas industry. The hon. Senator is saying it is one man's opinion, sometimes history has told us that one man's opinion is good enough, sometimes one woman's.

What the Minister has not said is that insofar as this \$19 is concerned that is in relation to the Amoco crude, but then there are other crudes that fetch much less than that. Some other crudes, particularly those off the Gulf of Paria, fetch \$2.50 and sometimes \$3.50 less. We have a further concern with the reduction of production in our oil and when we combine that, together with what I have just read, bearing in mind the contribution of oil to the economy, I hope as I said that this Government and the Minister of Finance get lucky. Mr. President, that is what I would say in relation to that issue. Yes, in terms of the setting up of the energy holdings we wait and we hope that may bear fruit.

I want to support Sen. Teelucksingh in that request for increasing the number of CNG stations. This is my third debate and I am asking for the third time, for that increase. Where I live in Arima there is a particular station where persons line up, sometimes from as early as four o'clock in the morning. Certainly, at this stage I will not put CNG in my car because I do not have two and three hours to waste. I would love to put CNG because certainly, it will reduce the cost in relation to my gas bill, but I just do not have the time. I am hoping that the Minister, who has given his commitment, will try to deal with it in terms of productivity, for the taxi drivers and other persons using it. But he also gave that commitment last year.

I am hoping when we are dealing with the 1999 budget, that the Minister will be able to say that he is satisfied that there have been improvements and taxi drivers and persons who use the CNG will be equally happy and will be complimenting him for that. It may be that the Minister of Finance needs to take a positive initiative by giving some sort of preferential treatment to persons to use the CNG. It may very well be that it is necessary, bearing in mind the whole issue of the environment, that that is the way we have to go and if it is, we need to look very closely at the whole issue of whether this Government's policy in relation to the CNG and the whole issue of the environment are not separate and apart.

The Minister of Works and Transport spoke about the setting up of the EMA in the Ministry of Works and Transport. Again, there has to be some sort of policy from the Government in relation to how all these several ministries are handled. I return to the issue of the used cars that I mentioned in my last budget presentation. If it is that the Government is allowing persons to bring in several used cars from Japan, we know that from articles in the newspaper, they are saying that they are happy to send some of the cars to Trinidad for free. We are allowing those cars to come into Trinidad knowing that those engines are used. What do we expect?

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. N. Mohammed*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. P. Beckles: Thank you, Mr. President and colleagues, for that extension.

I was saying that at some stage the Government has to make some sort of policy decision to ensure that this new direction it is taking in relation to removing vehicles from the road bears some sort of relation to its policy of allowing used cars and engines to come into Trinidad and Tobago, or else we may find ourselves with persons saying that they are being inequitably treated in relation to this measure. One should not wait until this gets out of hand before we make some concerted effort in relation to that. We have seen in Japan and other countries that they deal with their whole issue of the environment by having a policy as it relates to how long a person can keep a vehicle. It is not just a question of setting up an EMA, but you have to have all these things in place or else they really cannot work. Whilst going home last night, after 10 o'clock, passing again in the area commonly known as the labasse, and I mentioned it in my last budget debate, the average person cannot pass there with his glass down. You cannot. By the time

you reach through that area you must be inhaling really unhealthy stuff. And we have to deal with those issues.

6.45 p.m.

That takes me to the Ministry of Health with which I know most speakers have dealt. I just want to state my concerns because I live in the eastern district and the majority of farmers in the Wallerfield area make their livelihood by rearing cattle. We have a situation where rabies is attacking the cattle, sheep and goats and it is now stated that it is attacking the chicken. That is a serious cause for concern and we must not wait until many critical issues in our country reach to crisis proportion before we deal with them.

It is not just in relation to rabies. Like some of my other colleagues, I have a special concern with this issue of AIDS and my colleague Sen. Shabazz spoke of it. In today's *Guardian* Dr. Adoo sounded an AIDS warning. Rather than the Government get into a conflict of whether or not it is every 25th person in Trinidad and Tobago who has AIDS, or as the Minister said, it is every 100th, does it matter? Any one person with AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago is a source of concern, so we ought not to be getting into arguments about whether it is every 25th or every 100th. We have to specifically allocate money to deal with the issues of AIDS and dengue. I congratulated the Minister on the \$25 million allocation for single mothers, but I am saying that he should have had a special allocation to deal with AIDS and to deal with dengue.

We must realize that AIDS is no respecter of persons. In today's newspapers, Dr. Adoo said that in many of our prestige schools a number of our 13 and 14 year-olds feel they cannot get AIDS. It has reached a stage of crisis proportions. The *Tobago News* of December 27—Scarborough has the highest rate of HIV. It has become necessary for us to recognize that these are serious problems whether it be 25 or 100. If it is that there is a special concern in Tobago as it relates to the whole issue of AIDS, it means that separate and apart from the allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly, money has to be given to Tobago to deal with the issue of AIDS.

The way to deal with it, is not as Dr. Job, the Minister of Tobago Affairs dealt with it, to say that it is the Tobago men who are going around, and that promiscuity is causing the AIDS. We have to educate the children; we have to educate the people; we know that a lot of money has been spent in relation to tourism. In today's papers, people are saying to give condoms to doubles vendors,

and condoms are all over the place. People are getting desperate and the Government is the one with the responsibility—this is not a joke—to say to the nation, “This is how we are going to deal with the AIDS and dengue epidemics in Trinidad and Tobago.” [*Desk Thumping*]

I am hoping that when the Minister of Finance is wrapping up—he may not be able to say what sort of moneys he has allocated—he is going to say that he is going to give serious consideration to these issues. As I said, we are talking about equal opportunity for all but at the rate we are going, whether we accept 25:1 or 100:1, by the year 2010, we may not be around to be debating, because many of us feel it does not apply to us. Yes, many of us feel that it is a joke. That is not a joke. I am just waiting and hoping that somebody is going to take this issue seriously.

You see, Mr. President, the Minister of Tobago Affairs, in the other place, never spoke about Tobago. There are two representatives for Tobago—one did not talk and one spoke and neither of them spoke about Tobago. Mr. President, many persons have spoken about Tobago and I always have my little piece to say in relation to Tobago.

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie put it very nicely. I am not going to go into those areas. She referred specifically to the Act and I hope the Minister of Finance would have listened to her and would have done the things that the Government needed to do to ensure that the Tobago House of Assembly Act is properly implemented.

When we come to the Parliament a few days before an election to debate an act, to use that act as a means of getting votes in Tobago, it has come to haunt the Government, because we wondered what was the intention when the Tobago House of Assembly Act was debated, claiming it would give Tobagonians autonomy and half of the Act had just been left, had not been implemented and we are wondering now: At what stage would they seriously address the Act?

The Chief Secretary, from what I understand, in the month of March, complied with the Act to the letter of the law. He sent what the Government told him was needed and said, “This is what I needed.” Whether we agree or disagree that \$500 million was exorbitant is not the point, but in the month of March he requested that, and in the month of December the Government decided to deal with it knowing full well that the Act they were sending to Tobago gave him the authority to do many of the things that he did and they waited until December to deal with that. As my grandmother said, the chickens are coming home to roost.

There are just two areas that I need to deal with very quickly. The Minister of Works and Transport said that he endorsed the Government's movement of the Unemployment Relief Programme to the Ministry of Local Government. Does he really have a choice? He has no choice. They have moved it and he has to follow suit.

I just want to say that if it is they are now giving the local government councillors more responsibility to deal with local government, I hope as they have addressed the issue of the housing increase, that they will deal with the issue of salary increase for the local government councillors. You cannot expect to give them so much responsibility and not deal with the issue of the improvement of their salaries. I just remind them of one of their own local government councillors referring to herself as a professional vagrant because of the money that she is getting as a local government councillor.

The other issue that I want to deal with is the Government's policy as it relates to maintenance of buildings. There was this whole issue that I think I just must bring up in relation to the Chief Justice's house. My argument is very simple, if it is that the Minister of Public Administration and Information was saying that it cost the Government in excess of \$20,000 to pay for security and so forth to keep armed guards to protect the unoccupied quarters, and if they are saying that they consulted the Chief Justice and he said, "Look, it will probably be cheaper to give the judges \$5,000 and to give the Chief Justice \$7,500." If the argument was one of economics, I expect that very soon, having regard to the moneys that have been spent on the Prime Minister's quarters, the President's quarters, Whitehall and other places, that they may very well be coming to say that they are going to sell those places as well. The question was one of economics. There are some persons in our society, depending on their status, who cannot deal with the question of economics.

Mr. President: You have three more minutes.

Sen. P. Beckles: Very well. Mr. President, I would go so far as to say that if it is that anybody asks me for advice on a particular area and I give them that advice, it does not mean that they have to take that advice, which is what they are suggesting, that because the Chief Justice said so, so, so, they went ahead and did it, and because they calculated the money. It may have been for other judges, but when you look at the fact that you have the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice, it is quite likely that when that Chief Justice leaves, there may be another person who may not have as good quarters as the existing Chief Justice has. So where do we go from there?

I am hoping that the Minister of Public Administration and Information will deal with that, because I really do not think that it was very good for this issue to have been dealt with on the front page of our newspapers; bringing one of the most important persons in Trinidad and Tobago to discuss such an issue at that level. I think it could have been handled much better.

We must remember that this Government has been claiming that it is a government of consultation, a government of transparency, a government that listens to the people and a government that is always willing to hear. In dealing with that matter, it was totally different and it could have been avoided.

I just want to end by referring to the magistrates who have not been dealt with. We saw that recently the Magistrates' Courts were shut down for two or three days. We have not heard mention of that in the context of the bills coming before Parliament and in the context of this Government trying to deal with the escalating crime, and has failed miserably. Those are issues that must be addressed.

Mr. President, I want to end by saying that tomorrow is old year's day and we are two days away from the start of 1998. I take the opportunity, like all my colleagues, to wish you and your family all you wish yourselves and to all other hon. Senators, the best of everything for 1998. I hope we will return here safe and sound to continue to do the work of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. President, I rise to make my contribution on the Appropriation Bill 1998, which was so eloquently presented by my honourable senatorial colleague and Minister of Finance and Tourism, Hon. Brian Kuei Tung.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Mr. Vice-President, I intend to approach my contribution by firstly addressing some concerns expressed by the other side and, secondly, by providing this Senate with some perspective on my Ministry's accomplishments and achievements in 1997 and also to deal with some projections over the next 12 months, that is 1998.

Mr. Vice-President, first of all, I would like to make reference to a statement made by my senatorial colleague, Sen. Danny Montano, very early in his contribution, when he made reference to the fact that his constitutional rights and democratic freedoms were, in fact, being subverted and violated, because of the time that we had started the budget debate. This, to my mind, is nothing strange coming from the lips of Sen. Danny Montano; he has always uttered strange

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statements in this Parliament over the time that he has been here and this is just a pattern that emerged when he made that particular point.

Mr. Vice-President, you would know that we provided to each Senator some 1,600 pages of documentation as it relates to the 1998 budget statement. I could not understand this concern of Sen. Montano when he spoke about subversion of the Constitution and his democratic rights when, in truth and in fact, the Government played its part in providing to Senators the relevant information for their consumption, digestion and deliberation.

7.00 p.m.

When the Senator spoke about the violation of his rights and subversion of his freedom, he reminded me of his Leader who, when he referred to that same kind of situation, ended up in court and we all know the history of that. Today, although the Member boasted that he would stand alone, he would walk alone, he would lose alone, I see that he is not prepared to pay alone; he is seeking a bail out.

I want to suggest to my good friend that maybe, when we bring to this Parliament the new Financial Year Bill, that we will get the full support of the PNM, so that this question of the budget debate in December, and people speaking about not being able to really contribute as they would like to, would be addressed in a very profound way.

I also want to refer to what I call a kind of pappy-showing of the police by the Front Bench where, for instance, in a daily newspaper a Member of Parliament is reported to have ridiculed gang rape of women in our country when he said, it appeared like total quality rape when seven men raped two women and one of the women was raped twice. They made fun of that in the other place, and it was published in the daily newspapers.

Mr. Vice-President, I am making reference to this because the police service is working extremely hard in Trinidad and Tobago to provide the necessary protection and safeguard for our citizens. When PNM was in Government it could not even provide the police with a bicycle or a donkey cart to assist people who were in need and in desperate situations. This Government, led by the hon. Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, was able to fulfill its commitment to this country by providing the police with a number of vehicles and appropriate equipment, at least to fulfill its commitment to arm and to provide the police with the necessary resources.

The politics of desperation is in the PNM camp in a big way, hence the reason they are virtually “pooh-poohing” on very serious issues affecting this nation because of the fact that they are in Opposition and, of course, trying to score cheap political points. When it comes to crime, it is a very serious matter. When it comes to rape, it is also a very serious matter and we should try our best not to engage in what I will call ludicrous remarks which could be misinterpreted by the population.

When our new Senator, our good friend, Sen. Shabazz was speaking, one got the impression that he was making fun of the whole effort on the part of the Government to address the issue of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. He said that when the PNM was in office they did not engage in open nepotism, they sought to be fair. Just a couple days ago was Innocence Day and I know, for instance, having regard to the fact that he is new, he probably does not understand what his predecessors were engaged in. The fact of the matter is that some of the worse forms of corruption, in nepotism that took place in Trinidad and Tobago in the last 35 years of its history, took place under the stewardship of the PNM which was in power for three decades, 3 years, 11 months and 16 days.

One has to understand that this young administration has been here for two years and the people of this country are of the view that we have been here for five years already because of the pace with which we have proceeded in addressing the nation’s business. Of course, all administrations have limitations, weaknesses and deficiencies, but one thing that the people are saying in Trinidad and Tobago is that this Government is working. That is clear. I want to remind my good friend, Sen. Shabazz when he talks about nepotism he must never forget the corruption of the PNM and the loss to this country in terms of opportunity as a result of mismanagement, waste and outright theft.

When one talks for instance, about Project Pride as an example, the La Brea fiasco where a geologist was seeking to establish an LNG plant on a Pitch Lake and sunk in the process close to \$150 million, that is waste and mismanagement of the financial resources in this country. When one talks about cost overruns in the 1970s and early 1980s; the Hall of Justice, the twin towers, the Mount Hope Medical Complex are examples where there were cost overruns of tens of millions of dollars. That was waste and mismanagement of our country’s resources and many problems that we are experiencing today did not arise two years ago as a result of the UNC’s coming into office. The PNM has a lot to do with what has happened. One must not forget the Lockheed scandal, the O’Halloran, and the

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Prevatts. Those are people who were nurtured in the PNM and cost this country. If one goes to Toronto now one would see twin towers built by O'Halloran and now inherited by his son as a result of outright theft of this country's Treasury by this PNM. One must never forget these developments. One must never forget that under Manning, 166 acres of state lands were left to be controlled by a drug baron who is now in another place. You all did not take those lands away. It took this administration to return 150 acres of land to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and it is now being used as a rehabilitation centre for vagrants and sick people. One must never forget that.

It is important that those who live in glass houses should never throw stones because they are the ones who have been responsible for a number of the difficulties and problems that we have inherited and that we are seeking to address in a very positive way in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, I also take this opportunity to indicate that in Trinidad and Tobago we have, in fact, made some strides and headway in trying to stabilize and consolidate our economy and our country. For instance, for the first time in almost maybe, a decade, there has been unprecedented industrial peace and stability in our county. The record is there for all to see that this Government has been able to settle outstanding industrial collective agreements that the PNM could not have solved in its four years in office.

7.10 p.m.

I would give the Senate a brief understanding of some of the achievements as they relate to industrial relations in Trinidad and Tobago in the public service. We signed a memorandum with the National Union of Government and Federated Workers on the introduction of a pension plan for daily rated workers. Discussions are taking place. As Sen. John said, it took 36 years to accomplish this pension plan. We began the process and we hope that in 1998, we would put it into effect. We arrived at collective settlements involving the Contractors and General Trade Workers Union representing daily rated workers in respect of the period 1993—1995.

We have also settled the matter involving the teachers, even though there were some initial difficulties. We have settled the issues with the doctors and nurses in the country. In one year we have settled issues with the First and Second Division of the Police Service, the First and Second Division of the Fire Service and the First and Second Division of the Prison Service. With guidelines coming from the interministerial committee we have monitored public sector negotiations. In one

year we have settled two collective agreements with the Water and Sewerage Authority. We have settled issues with the Port Authority. Workers could not get their cost of living allowances and they were suffering for years. We have settled matters at the Institute of Marine Affairs and the Public Transport Service Corporation. We have reached a settlement with Petrotrin and the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union, Trinmar and National Petroleum.

The Government is working in spite of what Patrick the hat-trick would have us believe otherwise. The distinguished Leader of the Opposition has the record of being the first former Prime Minister to lose three consecutive elections in less than two years. He lost the general elections, the local government elections and the Tobago House of Assembly elections.

I put on record the achievements of the Panday Administration, insofar as industrial relations are concerned, in the public service and by extension, the public sector. We intend to go further and create history in industrial relations in the public service in 1998. We want to ensure that we are working with the unions. We have taken a decision to visit every trade union office by the first quarter of 1998, to consolidate our relations with the trade union movement to ensure that at the end of this collective period, on December 31, 1998, we would not have to wait until 1999 or 2000 to settle issues. We would go into the new year with industrial peace. We have a vision of how we want to address the worker involvement and participation in the process.

The PNM almost murdered collective bargaining in the country. Were it not for the United National Congress and the National Alliance for Reconstruction that came into office on November 6, the trade union movement in the country might have been destroyed. We revived collective bargaining. For that reason, the former president of the Public Services Association could have boasted that for the first time in 14 years, there was a bilateral agreement between the Chief Personnel Officer representing the employer and the Public Services Association. That was for the period 1990—1992, 1993—1995 and 1996—1998. There were three collective agreements in one. There was no intervention by a third force or the Industrial Court. It was a bilateral agreement.

These things may appear to be simple, but they are historic in terms of achievements in the country's industrial relations. We have taken steps to ensure that in 1998, the women of whom Sen. Beckles spoke earlier would be able to enjoy maternity leave with pay. Early in January, a bill would be debated where we would ensure that women in our country who work in the private sector and where

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there is no union representation would be able to enjoy compulsory maternity leave with pay. That is a tremendous advance. One of the first International Labour Organization Conventions in 1919 was about maternity leave with pay for working women. It took this Government to move in that direction to protect the women.

We are bringing the Occupational Safety and Health Bill to protect employers, workers and the environment at the same time. On the statute books of this country, there is the Factories Ordinance of 1948. The PNM has been in power for 33 years and they never took the opportunity to revise, amend or bring into being a new bill. Workers have been maimed and killed on the job because of criminal negligence on the part of that previous administration.

That is why I make the point very clear that the PNM would be in permanent and perpetual opposition for some time to come. People are not fools. The workers of Trinidad and Tobago have come to the realization that this Government led by the honourable Prime Minister is doing everything in its power to ensure that there is equity and justice for them, and by extension, the whole country.

The National Union of Government and Federated Workers contributed to the removal of the PNM, when Mr. Valley reneged on his pledge and commitment to the union. They took 10,000 workers in the valley of the valley. After that it was death! [*Laughter*] Never forget that! When one moves against the trade union movement, one moves against the country. The trade union movement represents over 100,000 workers and if that is multiplied by 5, that is 0.5 million people. If the trade union movement is treated sensitively and sensibly, there would be no problem. The PNM is now there, so they are in trouble. We learnt from the errors of the PNM.

We also want to amend the Workmen's Compensation Act and the Industrial Relations Act. We hope that in 1998 all those matters would be seriously addressed. Over the last two years, we have been focussing on development administration and development communication in the ministry. We operate on the simple premise that in the final analysis for the Government to have a second term, it is important for us to work on the quality of public service delivery in the country. The Ministry of Public Administration and Information has a very critical role in transforming the public service into a unified, cultural, progressive, economic, social and dynamic institution, in an effort to ensure that we move towards this whole concept and realization of this dream of a total quality nation.

I indicate to Sen. Martin Daly that we all have to dream and we always have to move towards an ideal. Our ideal as a government is to move towards a total

quality nation. We are not saying that it is happening now. It is a commitment, a dream and an ideal. We are working towards it. There must be hitches, glitches and hiccups as we proceed, but we are going to get there without a doubt.

Service delivery is critical. It is related to our capability and capacity as a people. It is also related to the environment within which we operate and the access to information which we afford the public. It also deals with the respect we, as a government, demonstrate to the wider public with reference to the conditions of offices in which they conduct their transactions. By no means least, what and how the Government communicates with respect to accomplishments and plans, and the psychological contract it nurtures with its constituents, which my friend calls propaganda, is to us information and communication. We need to communicate with the public. They must know what we are doing. We are at all times seeking to communicate and educate.

7.20 p.m.

To tell you the excellence we have been able to achieve in the Ministry of Administration and Information, there was a recent media excellence awards function at the Trinidad Hilton. In the category called television, out of eight awards, the workers of the Information Division, which does not have transmission facilities, were able to achieve wonders. They won six of the eight awards distributed that evening. That was not propaganda, it was excellence.

We are transforming the whole communication process in terms of focussing on people and their activity. We have just done a whole hour's documentary on FUNDAid. No one knew about FUNDAid and what they did. The board of directors of FUNDAid cannot stop praising us. We are going to communities and letting people speak. Ministers are hardly on television anymore. [*Laughter*] We let the community speak.

We are making serious advances and are hoping, Mr. Vice-President, that, come the first quarter of 1998, we would have a revamped and restructured Information Division, consistent with the recently approved Government communications policy for the entire public service. They must be able to market and to communicate properly with their audiences and personnel in the different areas of operation.

So, Mr. Vice-President, we are building a public service that is flexible and dynamic, one that is technologically efficient and people oriented. We have

inherited a public service, as it relates to information technology, that is almost three or four times behind in terms of generations. At one time, the public service was at the leading edge of technology in Trinidad and Tobago, but the private sector has overtaken the public service. We now have to introduce serious information technology in the public service to automate the entire public service to protect our international reputation as a nation. We are committed to international competitiveness, and if we are to survive, we must have a well-oiled and organized public service. Information technology plays a critical role. That is why we welcome the decision taken by the hon. Minister of Finance to ensure that every public officer, whether teacher, doctor, nurse, policeman, soldier or public servant, can get a computer. He can access up to \$15,000 to purchase a computer, and the Personnel Department of the Central Training Unit is embarking on a massive programme of training.

We even want to change the entry qualifications for the public service. Apart from five "O" levels including Mathematics and English, a person must have some CXC course in computer science. That is where we are headed. We are in the information age and we are saying if we are to become and remain relevant in the 21st Century, we must go through a process of constant self-renewal. We do not want to start and then change. That is why the dinosaur disappeared. It was not able to evolve as the environment changed. We have to ensure that in the public service, we constantly evolve as the environment changes, so our policies, plans and programmes will continue to be relevant as we shoot into the 21st Century.

We have a great deal of important work to do. Just to bring the Senate up to date, we have been conducting a strategic review of the entire public service. Each ministry has to subject its organization to a revisioning of what it is doing now. Is it relevant? What must be delinked from the ministry? What do they need to contract out? We want to make the public service more efficient, effective and dynamic and responsive to the needs of the public. People are demanding value for money. Taxpayers are no longer taking for granted sloppy and shoddy treatment. We have to ensure that in the public service people are dealt with with courtesy, dignity and efficiency. That is what we are committed to—revamping and reorganizing the entire public service.

We have had 35 years of independence and for the first time in the history of the public service we have been able, as a government to declare an entire week for the public service of Trinidad and Tobago. This was done under this UNC administration. In early November, we declared a national public service week in

this country. For the first time 500 public officers, with 35 or more years of service, were honoured. Some of them cried because in the public service they were never honoured or recognized.

For the first time also, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is on the web site. We are on the Internet. During that public service week, we launched our own website of about 170 pages, and we are renewing it all the time, upgrading and updating the information. What was the PNM doing? Were they too busy? Were they too intoxicated at Smokey and Bunty's? They let processes and designs become so outdated and backward that it took us almost two years to catch up with that madness. If they had left a nice foundation, I would have shot forward in the first year because I am a man in a hurry. I want to do things; to get things organized.

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Mr. President, we have also, in two years, a code of conduct for public officers—

Sen. Jagmohan: So, there was never one?

Sen. The Hon. W. Mark: No, never. They were never guided properly by a code of conduct, that is why there was the Endell Thomas case.

We were able to get the Public Services Association to agree, on January 1, this year, to a code of conduct. That is the first time in the history of the public service that we have had a code of conduct. We want to publish it for the entire country so that they, too, would be guided by the code which regulates the behaviour of public officers in Trinidad and Tobago.

This is why, Mr. President, I am happy to be at the helm of the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. I came from the trenches. I know the trade union movement and, therefore, I am able to communicate with all my colleagues in the trade union movement and we understand exactly where we are going.

I would also like to indicate that we were able to pass the Pensions Reform Bill which deals with workers who have been in the public service for all these years and who were not entitled to any pension at the end of their service. We have been able to regularize that. For the first time, we have been able to deal with portability of pension within the public services. A person can leave the police service and go to the teaching service; leave the primary school and go to the secondary school; leave the fire service and go to the police service; and have his pension preserved. That was something persons could not have done before the Bill was passed.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, in planning today's activities, we had anticipated a fairly late sitting. It appears that we are now winding down the debate and unless Senators feel that we ought to break now for dinner, I would suggest that we complete the debate and move on to dinner. Is that all right?

Agreed to.

7.30 p.m.

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

Sen. The Hon. W. Mark: Mr. President, as I said, we are, in fact, in an implementation mode. In the public service we are developing a zero tolerance for shoddy and shabby treatment of the citizens of this country. We have made it clear to officers in the public service that they are employed by taxpayers. They are to perform a service to taxpayers and they must do it with efficiency, courtesy and dignity. Therefore, it is a new culture, a new attitude we are seeking to introduce in the public service, so that persons would understand that their job depends on the public and if they shortchange the public then efficient action could be taken to deal with those weaknesses or limitations.

We have been doing much work in the public service to bring it up to a certain standard. There is an entrenched culture, however, but it is coming gradually. We are hoping that by the first quarter of 1998 we would be able to introduce a new performance management system in the public service and move away from the old staff reports with which we have been traditionally saddled. We are getting the co-operation of the relevant organizations; the teachers, the fire service, the police are on board [*Interruption*] I would give the details on that but it would take too much time at this moment.

Mr. President, when one looks at the strategies outlined by this Government, through the Minister of Finance, he spoke about human development with opportunities for life-long learning, he emphasized incentives for significantly broadening the culture of savings in Trinidad and Tobago, to expand the base of asset holders which would include all sectors of this society, he outlined a range of activities which we are going to pursue in 1998, in order to support these strategies.

It is important to note that while these are the Government's broad objectives, the Government has decided that we must focus on specific areas in order that these objectives are achieved in an efficient and timely manner. Therefore, as I said, public administration and public information are very critical areas on which we need to focus. The role of an efficient and effective public management system in Trinidad and Tobago is critical. Therefore, what we have been doing over the last few years and what we intend to pursue very seriously in 1998—because having taken a hard, long, critical strategic assessment of the structure, operations, efficiency and effectiveness of the public service—we are now in a position to reorganize, reshape and refocus the public service. As I said, the PNM was there for so long and they have not really left any serious foundation for us to inherit.

For example, Singapore has been wired, they have computerized and automated the entire public service since 1982. We are in 1997 going into 1998 and our public service remains backward. We are trying and we are going to deal with some of the vital issues which would give the public service that edge. Mr. President, I need to emphasize that the public service is critical to national development in Trinidad and Tobago. If we do not have an efficient, well-organized, well-oiled public service we would not be able to deal with the international competitiveness which we all have to face. It is, therefore, important that we understand this. We have understood it and this is where we intend to focus. When we talk about human development and the need for us to focus on that in the budget; opportunity for all, a blueprint for human development, national savings and asset building, we must look at these things in a broad context. It is not simply about the human spirit and developing the human potential.

My ministry has a central responsibility for human development and a continuous learning in the public service. By the first quarter of 1998, we are going to have a complete strategic review of the public service. Every ministry would have to submit to this particular review. It deals with the rationalization of staff, systemic and structural issues which impede and negatively impact on the ability of the public service to use modern management practices and tools. Therefore, the focus would be for us to put new structures, a host of mechanisms and work arrangements for service delivery, for excellence and for effectiveness, as we seek to redesign the way Government conducts business.

In order to deliver and keep the focus, Government will embark upon an expansion of training and development activities through the Personnel Department and the Central Training Unit, in collaboration with line ministries and

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their human resource management divisions. By the first quarter of 1998, we intend to establish human resource units in every ministry. We are going to decentralize the Personnel Department and bring it so that decisions could be rapid at the level of the ministry. If something happens in the ministry, fix it, do not try to get to a central source. We are decentralizing that whole human resource management function in the public service. It, therefore, means that we would have to revamp the training process to re-design, re-skill, re-tool, re-orient and change the behaviour of public officers so they are best prepared to deal with delivery of excellent service to improve individual and organizational performance on the basis of a system of performance management that would be facilitated by my ministry. As I said, Mr. President, we are on the move.

On many occasions I heard Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed make remarks to the effect that we are against public officers, that we are against the civil service and so forth. I suggest that the public service's morale today is at its highest in the last decade. We have been able to settle key issues, particularly the industrial relations issue, and to ensure that there is a computer in every home by the year 2,001. We have started off with 100,000 public officers. If that is multiplied by five or six, one is talking about almost 600,000 persons. *[Interruption]* Well that is coming, I am not dealing with education, I am dealing with the public service. The Minister of Education would adequately handle that.

The whole issue here is to deal with a programme of continuous learning, jointly and mutually undertaken by the Government and the public service, emphasizing the need for both individual and government to take responsibility for satisfying training and development needs in the public service, and for ensuring that the public service succeeds in retaining appropriately highly trained personnel to implement the work of government at all levels.

When one compares the salary that a geologist gets at Amoco or at some other oil company, and what one gets in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, we have to do something about our wage levels in the public service. There is no doubt that the Government has to revamp that whole system and to ensure that if we retain and sustain talents in the public service, persons must be properly rewarded and remunerated. That is where we are heading, we want to professionalize the public service.

7.40 p.m.

We want to ensure that my Ministry begin to restructure for the inclusion of knowledge and information, waste management, career and succession planning.

Today, there is a situation where we have to work very closely with the Public Services Commission, the Director of Personnel Administration, the Chief Personnel Officer and the unions in order to establish proper career and succession planning systems. It must be done without negatively affecting the criteria of tenure in the public service.

We want to move to a system where people are going to be promoted on the basis of meritocracy. We want to get brilliant persons from the university and so forth into the public service. We want to have competitiveness in terms of promotion. If one wants to move from an Administrative Officer II to an Administrative Officer IV, an Administrative Officer IV to an Administrative Officer V, an Administrative Officer V to Permanent Secretary, you must go into an assessment centre and deal with—we are talking about management, we are talking about the public service and we are talking about ensuring that we have the best qualified persons in the public service to manage the affairs of this economy and this society. Therefore, we have to revamp the entire public service to ensure that takes place.

We have inherited a bureaucratic model of 100 years old, and it has now become counter-productive and it is a threat to our very survival in Trinidad and Tobago. So we have to revamp that bureaucratic model and move towards a more flexible and dynamic system in order to allow people to move forward as they would like. Mr. President, we are on the move in that area.

As it relates to the question of information technology, I want to just dwell on that for a few moments again. In the past, information technology has been viewed with fear and suspicion and, it is simply, a centralized automation of data entry and information retrieval. For instance, we currently call what is supposed to be the premier public service organization, information technology, that is, the National Information Systems Centre. In 1998, we are seeking to deliver an information technology service, whose main goal is the utilization of computerized IT including, E-Mail, Data Link, Web Site, to enhance the management and operation processes within the Government in ways that increase and maximize performance and output.

Mr. President, for example, Canada on the Internet. We did it in November where one can now go on the Internet and get the names of every Ministry in Trinidad and Tobago; every Permanent Secretary; every contact person, their telephone numbers, the functions of Ministries. If somebody is in Canada, America or Europe and they want to know what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago in

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terms of Ministries and their functions, they can contact our Permanent Secretary, because the numbers are there. They know what are their functions. That is a simple process.

As I said, since 1982 Singapore has been wired, automated and computerized, that is why today they have about \$37 billion in reserves. They “took in front” and we have inherited a system which we now have to reorganize. It is a pity that the PNM did not have the foresight and vision that we have now been demonstrating and implementing. We are seeking to, at least, promote and utilize information technology that would result in speedier transactions and processes which allow for easier access to Government and its stakeholders and customers.

Mr. President: Hon. Senator, your speaking time has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. B. Kuei Tung*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. W. Mark: Mr. President, 1998 is going to be a year of implementation. We have set the foundations, we have gotten all our policies approved: whether it is communications policy; information technology policy, or the new policy for the public service. We have a new training policy for the public service where training would be relevant to needs and to requirements, not because somebody reads in a paper that they are having a training course, they would apply and leave; it must be related to our developmental thrust and needs.

Mr. President, 1998 is a year of implementation so we are restructuring the whole National Information System Centre to deal with the introduction and application of Information Technology into the entire public service of Trinidad and Tobago. This is why the whole question of initiating modernization in the internal communication systems is critical. We are talking about internal electronic data transmission systems, for example, E-Mail, and that sort of thing.

In the final analysis, Information Technology must facilitate the public service in its efforts to be service and customer-oriented. That is what we are about; where it would facilitate cost effectiveness, efficiency and also be technology supported.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to transparency in the conduct of its affairs with regard to relevant information, putting out policies, programmes, plans and priorities which are designed, undertaken, and provided for the public and the public’s interest. The population has a right to

know what the Government is doing; when and where it is taking place and they must be made aware of general improvements and new services which are available to them.

Previous administrations have sought, as I said, to use the Government's information division as instruments of protocol one-man object. We want to ensure that the information division does not become a simple public relations instrument. We want to ensure a new Government communications function that would replace the Information Division, having been totally reordered, revamped and redirected as well as restructured. We are hoping to have this accomplished at the end of the first quarter of 1998. The information delivery capability should align ministries and centrally would be strengthened and made coherent and consistent through the implementation of the Cabinet-approved information and communication policy.

It is important that we focus on service delivery, seeking to get feed-back mechanisms in place so that the average citizen would be better served according to their particular needs and particular environments, wherever they may be in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, I think it is very important when we look at the whole question of human development and at savings; we must look at these things in a very broad perspective. We must look at agricultural savings in the context of the creation of an environment for excellent performance, for "total quality nation" that would ensure, in the process, major advances. We are hoping that in 1998, the Government's real estate, including its vast stock of buildings, whether offices or residences, would be utilized in a manner that minimizes risk and maximizes development potential. This unit would be given a new mandate for redirection and reconstruction and re-peopling for greater relevance and effectiveness.

In closing, I want to look at the very third strategy I mentioned, that is, the expanding of the active base of citizens in this country including all sectors of our society. We would all miss the boat if we do not put the broadest description and meaning to the word "assets." To do that, we must focus on our people as our most valuable assets in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, the base of assets or holders is not about every person being part of an employees stock ownership plan. That would be wishful idealistic thinking at this time.

7.50 p.m.

Rather, this Government will ensure that this third strategy, like the other two, will provide opportunity for all in Trinidad and Tobago. The strategy will,

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therefore, have many follow-up strategies to target people, focus activities and so improve the conditions for many; including women, children, youth, the physically challenged, the victims of crime, pensioners and our nation's men as well.

Mr. President, clearly, the strategy of human development and continuous learning is national in its scope. I have outlined the initiatives of my Ministry, the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, and what we will be engaging in in 1998, to ensure that this Government of national unity, led by the hon. Basdeo Panday, Prime Minister, and the public service of Trinidad and Tobago, in partnership, will lead this nation into a new millennium with clear values and results in terms of its human capability and the skills required to compete in this global dynamism that is fast becoming part of our everyday reality.

It is my view that in 1998 the Government is prepared to provide services in such a way that our people recognize in them the opportunities for self-determination, self-improvement, self-reliance, self-help, which eventually will result in the progress and success of this one nation of twin islands and multifaceted people.

My Ministry is prepared and ready to continue strengthening the policy environment so that public administration for national development and success will be an attainable goal. A more efficient public service that focusses its energies and resources on service delivery and seeking partnerships with its employees and the private sector can only result in tremendous savings in the country as a whole. This is why I said we have to look at savings in a very broad context. Therefore, the improvements and plans that we have outlined, with reference to the implementation of modern information technology and data systems throughout the public service will, in the long run, extend these savings and make available to both Government and the private sector additional resources to be used in development of our country. Therefore, I hope that I have been able to outline to this Parliament what we have been able to do in 1997 in our Ministry and what we have been able to achieve.

One of the greatest satisfactions I have had in 1997 is to have been able to bring about an environment of industrial relations peace, because if we do not have industrial relations peace, we are not going to have development in Trinidad and Tobago. We want to continue to build on that. The National Public Service Week is going to be celebrated annually. Public servants are going to be recognized yearly. That is going to help to motivate them, inspire them. They want recognition because they have, and continue to make yeoman contributions,

priceless contributions to the development of Trinidad and Tobago and its people. I am happy that this Government undertook the responsibility of recognizing and institutionalizing National Public Service Week in Trinidad and Tobago for the first time in 35 years. I think that is an achievement that we can boast about for years to come, past 2015. I think that I have said enough.

I also think that as we move forward in 1998, reinvigorated, we are facing new challenges, but we are committed, dedicated and we know what we are about. We are committed to seeing excellence in achievement. We want, as I said, to reorient cultures and attitudes in the public service, mores and opinions, so that everyone can focus on one mission, one vision and achieve common objectives, all in the interest of our Republic and our people, regardless of race, colour, creed or religion. At the end of the day, Trinidad and Tobago belongs to every citizen in this country and we have to work together to make Trinidad and Tobago a brighter, prosperous, healthy society for all of our people. [*Desk thumping*]

I thank you very much, Mr. President.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. President, it is my good fortune or maybe misfortune, that I had to present a budget in the other place, listen to several speeches over several days and nights and then come here and listen to the budget speech all over again.

I want to congratulate this honourable Senate, Mr. President through you—I am not going to make a comparison—for a quality of debate which, in my mind, has really reached very high standards. I think every Senator who spoke ought to feel proud, whatever their creed, race, religion or gender. I think that the quality has really been exceptionally high. I am sure my memory serves me right. We started last week Tuesday and every Member who spoke, did so for more than the normal allotted time, I am sure of that. I did not see or hear anyone who stopped before the normal allotted time. As a matter of fact, we all spoke in excess of the normal time and did take the necessary extra time. I think that speaks well for us. It means that we are certainly very much interested in what goes on in the affairs of the nation. I want to address immediately, therefore, the first criticism that was levelled at the budget.

Mr. President, I am wondering if you would allow me just a second before I do that. I know my good friend is going to understand when I say that I am sorry that Sen. Mohammed was distressed by my hon. colleague's comments. I do not think

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he meant anything. As a matter of fact, he has asked me, in my winding up, to offer another word of congratulations to her on her new post as Deputy Political Leader of the PNM. But I will also tell her, I want to share a little word of caution with her. Having offered her the sincere congratulations, I know that she has replaced Dr. Rowley as the Deputy Political Leader, and obviously, from her contribution, she wants to replace him as a more successful Minister of Agriculture.

The word of caution I want to give is that I have a list of names of people who got very close to the political leader and they are no longer close to him. May I put my name on that list. I am not at the head, unfortunately, but I can give you a few: Morris Marshall, Jean Pierre, Russell Huggins, Keith Sobion, Augustus Ramrekeringh, Wendell Mottley, Ken Collis, Ralph Maraj, Occah Seapaul, Knowlson Gift—remember the guy who got ten days, the Chinese Baptist. I do not know where they are now. I remember that they were important to him and they were close to him, but they got chopped too. I will not mention Alexander Lau, I did not have him on my list. Dr. Lasse, Dr. Griffith and then I could talk about some of the old staff; Errol Mahabir, Kamaluddin Mohammed, *et cetera*. Then I could think of the current people who were close to him but are no longer close;—Rowley, Draper, Imbert. It is just a word of caution, Senator, but congratulations, all the same. I hope you have more luck than all of us have had in the past. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] I am sorry, I want to state that is why I want her to remain close.

I also want to say that the quality of the debate has also stuck in my mind. I remember very many Members making very significant contributions. I also want to congratulate my very good college friend, Sen. Shabazz, he has made a very strong maiden statement and I really want to congratulate him very sincerely. He has retained a quality that I saw in him when we were at school together, Mr. President, through you, a sincerity and a genuineness. I know he speaks about what is being said on the ground. I know that because, I too, remain on the ground many times. I am among people and I hear the comments, so I know he is genuine. I know that his criticisms are well meaning and I appreciate that very much.

The first criticism that was levelled at me: I want to address that very quickly, I want to put it in perspective because I thought that I had done this last time. I want to achieve a style that is different. I said that I want to be consumer friendly, I really wanted to be stakeholder friendly because I think every single Trinidadian and Tobagonian has a stake in what goes on in the economic affairs of this country. I do not want to imitate anybody's style, I do not want to follow anyone, I

want to have my own. If it has fallen short, I am sorry, if it has reached more people, I am also happy. That is my intent, not to present a technical document.

One could say that our budget is really four documents. I will tell you why I say four, even though you have been given 1600 pages, it is not meant to bamboozle anyone, it is merely meant to give as much information as possible. You can choose to use or ignore what you wish. The first document that says anything about a budget is really the *Medium Term Policy Framework*, and that speaks of three years. Even though it is a small document, it says that over the next three years, several ministries are going to attempt several things. It really points to the strategies and policies that the Government is adopting. Out of that we develop two basic things.

First, we say, here is a review of the economy. This is where the economy is in 1997, this is what we have done, this is where we are at, and this is how we are, against a backdrop of national economy. There is that as well; it is there in fairly non-technical language. Then we say, in 1998, we want to do two things; we want to develop our capital stock and we want to do our revenue items. And that basically, is our budget. Four documents which, if I choose, I can sit, précis and read for two and a half to three hours and believe you me, not only would the nation be bored with me, I would get bored with myself. Instead I chose a style where I can communicate with people much easier; I find it is easier for me and it is easier for people who listen to me. So, I choose instead, to condense in a budget statement, some of the more critical areas in the hope that anyone, technical or otherwise, can refer to these other documents and understand how the whole matter is put together.

This basically is the document which—I am sorry that my senatorial colleague is not here—was not meant to be cynical, it was meant to be earnest and genuine when it says that if one takes all four documents together, one would see that we are trying to develop an opportunity for everyone, not give everyone an opportunity in every sense, that would be wishful thinking. Instead, it presents opportunities for people who, in the past, have not had opportunities or were not afforded them. That is why we say we want to develop a document that is going to be for human development, where people who never had assets can now have an opportunity to accumulate assets.

8.05 p.m.

Mr. President, I hope that Senators will understand what we are trying to do and how we want to do it. This document, as a matter of fact, took me an hour and 15 minutes and even that I felt was too long. I know that Sen. Spence longs for a slow speech but I do not think, quite frankly, that I am capable of delivering a slow-speech style budget. Instead, I prefer to use this style. I think I do not lose my audience and people retain an interest in it.

I have taken the pains after the budget to do something that is quite different, I met with journalists. I did not choose them, I asked the television stations to choose the people they wanted me to meet. I also asked that they not only be from TTT, so they brought people from CCN and the *Express*. They asked any question they wanted of me, whether it was from this, or from any of the other documents. I know, unfortunately, that they did not have much time to study it, but I assumed that from delivering the budget which I finished about 3:30p.m., roughly, between 3:30 and 7:00 p.m. they would have had an opportunity to at least scan it and come up with some questions which I expect journalists would ask on the ground. In other words, they are not interested in the technical.

Two days later, on Sunday, I met with the technical people. They had two and a half days to study the document in detail and ask technical questions if they could. Then I met with people who, again, were selected by the station. There were people such as the new Public Services Association president. I did not choose who I would talk to because I wanted to show people that the document I read is not to be cynical but to be as sincere and genuine as possible.

I hoped in those few minutes that I would be able to at least demonstrate what I am trying to do and hoped that people would accept it for what it is meant to be. It was not meant to be a document that would mislead people, but one that would bring everyone on board, hopefully, with the aims and objectives of the budget.

Before I answer some of the specific questions that were asked of me, let me briefly say that the intent of the budget was not to tinker with the tax system. I want to remind Members that when I became Minister of Finance, the first thing I did was to consolidate in 1996. We looked at things and tried to clean up the tax system. We also tried to remove many of the nuisance taxes—if you remember that expression—and in 1997 I went one step further, as far as PAYE is concerned, I tried to simplify the system. I did not zig-zag. I felt that the way to make the system simple you had to remove, literally, everything.

If I had done that, some people would have been unduly hurt, when I looked at the models that were done. I had to retain mortgage interest. Then a plea was made to at least try to keep pensions. I said that was fine but let us have one allowance which was either mortgage interest or pensions. I thought it was very successful and from the reports that we got from the Board of Inland Revenue the PAYE system was really made simpler. We had no particular loss of revenue which was my main concern. Many people congratulated the budget because they felt they would have to pay a little less taxes.

In this third year, I had to go one step further. I did say and I always indicate in every budget presentation, where I am going to go in the next step. I will make a little pronouncement; next year I am hoping we can review corporation taxes. If we have done the PAYE and the individual systems and they worked, I think we should move on. It is from strength to strength that I want to go without necessarily cluttering the PAYE or corporation tax systems.

That is why I have said I will not tinker with the things that are working. Let us go for another year in 1998 in terms of the PAYE, except making some minor modifications which are not going to clutter the whole PAYE system. I had to find ways and means to encourage savings because I know that what I did was not particularly popular in certain quarters.

I knew that the Unit Trust Corporation and the credit unions were upset. In terms of the credit unions let me assure you, I did promise I would bring legislation, but I assumed that I made that promise on the basis that the group that was put together for institutional strengthening was going to complete its work in the first quarter. You know that the institutional strengthening is being funded by the IADB as a grant, the credit union movement and by the ministry itself. I cannot push them any faster. There is a committee made up of these three groups and they are working towards that institutional strengthening. I would be pleased, as soon as they have completed their work and present their report, to bring legislation to this House. I am sorry that I was unable to make it. Maybe I was a bit more ambitious than their own capabilities.

I know there were some groups that were concerned and it was not my intent to attack them. I did not plan to do away with the Unit Trust Corporation or to attack credit unions. I understand the strength of credit unions but I could not keep cluttering PAYE if I wanted to simplify the system.

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There I am, back again, saying that pension is critical from a different angle. The whole budget talks about financing pension and that is quite different from talking about it. The budget talks about the alarming crisis that we are going to face in five years time if we do not start putting mechanisms in place to finance our pension requirements.

Our public service pension in five years from now could very well be \$1 billion. It is unfair for your children and mine, to have to pay for their pension and ours; ours being the public servants who are going to retire now. We have to start putting things in place. That is basically the major shift I am making in the budget, the financing of pensions.

I tried to do that by harmonizing national insurance, old age pension, as well as the public service pension in the long run, so that they are funded properly. I think that hopefully it is going to mushroom to the point where local or domestic investments would be sufficient for us to make our own capital development instead of having to rely on foreign investments. That is the vision that this budget brings about.

Having done that, I am not a believer in trickle down—incidentally, I do not believe anything trickles down, not even molasses. If you do not help and empower people they are—especially people who are the most vulnerable in our society—going to suffer in this sphere. This is why I have something for single mothers; not because single mothers are the most vulnerable necessarily, but think about their children. They grow up with their mothers barely able to eke out a living and they do not have the same opportunities as others. I cannot give that poor child an air conditioned car—as Sen. Daly suggested—so that she does not have to collect water on her head in the morning. I cannot satisfy every single need in one budget, but I can clearly signal that we are concerned about people and their plight. We are concerned that there are people who, unfortunately, would not have the same opportunity as others but we can at least attempt to meet some of the needs as best we can.

Bear in mind that even though we have surpluses being generated on our fiscal operations, it does not mean that we have the opportunity to satisfy every single need. It is just not there. We have a budget, we manage within our means and we intend to meet our expenses based upon our means.

Let me quickly say that I am not a gambler. I do not gamble a cent. Do you know why? I just hate to lose, Sir. As a result, I cannot gamble with the oil price.

If I had done this budget in September, I would have predicated it on an oil figure of US \$25 or \$30 because that is where it was then, that is where it was pointing. On December 5, 1997 by the time you read your newspaper, we had already done our budget numbers because the budget had to be presented by December 12, 1997. It was predicated on US \$19 per barrel.

If the price falls to US \$16 next year we are going to have to cut our cloth to suit. We would have no choice, because as a responsible Minister of Finance, I could give you the assurance that we will only live within our means. If our means is just enough to cut, I am not afraid to come here and say that things have changed.

If I had a crystal ball I would not be in politics. I could be making money a lot better, but I do not have a crystal ball. Instead I am here to see how best I can manage the affairs of the country's finances using the assumptions that are reasonable. At that time we felt that US \$19 was a reasonable price. What happens if it goes the other way? Suppose the price goes to US \$25 or \$30? I assure you it would not be squandered, but saved. I am contemplating that if ever there was an excess, we should create an oil fund to cushion some of the things that happen now.

8.15 p.m.

We have not had an opportunity to create such a fund but I would be happy to create an oil fund from excess dollars if ever that excess should come about. That is basically the strategies that this Minister of Finance plans to operate with. If we have less money we have to live on less; if we have more money we should save it. We are not yet in a position where we have such huge reserves that we could afford to maintain the same lifestyle.

Mr. President, let me quickly answer some of the questions. I had Sen. Montano at the top of the list. I am glad that he is learning very quickly. Of course, he has a little more time than he thinks but he can learn very quickly. I heard something that he said. I thought I had heard it wrong until I read it. I have said it before and I am quoting him:

“All of the incentives in this budget are to encourage the consumer to spend rather than to save. We have gone backwards into the era in the 1970s and early 1980s when the country was having a party.”

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Was that right? Is that what you said? If ever you heard an admission. Here you are, a product of the PNM, your father was a Member of the same government in the 1970s and 1980s when the country was having a party, by your administration, of which your father was a part. I could not believe that was an admission you would make. But I am glad you admitted it, although I could not really believe that you would have admitted that the government of the day was throwing a party. We are serious. As you heard my good colleague here say, we are dead serious. We are going into a new millennium and we feel we have a lot of catching up to do and that is why the question of the computers is key to us. We have to find measures that will bring everybody on board, computer-wise that is, very quickly because we have lost ground. We have lost ground to Barbados and a number of other countries.

With regard to the Employee Stock Ownership Plan, our intent is to make it as far and wide as possible. There is no one who is going to escape or who will not have an opportunity with ESOP. I do not care if it is a branch that operates here. If the branch of a multi-national corporation here wants to offer shares to its employees, we will encourage it because whether they have a branch, a minority company or majority company we will not legislate to force multi-nationals to sell their shares to employees. That is not what we are about.

What we will do is create an environment where the employees, as long as they are Trinidadian or Tobagonian, who work for a company and that company's shares are on a recognized stock exchange—because we have to protect the employees as well. It does not have to be us, it could be NASDAC, the New York Stock Exchange or the London Stock Exchange, as long as we are satisfied that there are enough safeguards there to protect the investments of the employees, under reasonable conditions, we will encourage employees to own shares in companies for which they work. Whether it be foreign, local, or otherwise. Whether it be a branch or subsidiary. That is the kind of legislation at which we are looking. I hope this will satisfy your query. If the budget gave any different opinion, I am sorry. It was meant to be as lucid as I have just explained it.

I may have to skip over some of these. I know Sen. Kenny raised the question of the over 65 allowance for drugs. That is something at which we have always looked. We have always been concerned about how to make medication affordable to people. We have toyed with a number of ideas. I have had discussions myself with the Minister of Health. We have not found any that are satisfactory as yet because we feel some of them will be really awful or difficult to enforce. I do not

know if you want an allowance for drugs for tax purposes. Instead we will try to make drugs more affordable, especially for people who are on fixed incomes. We are looking at ideas. As I said I am not sure if a tax allowance was a right approach.

Just by talking about the old age pension I, myself, am a little embarrassed that as Minister of Finance I preside over an old-age pension scheme that is far in excess of the national insurance. I know that age old criticism keeps coming up, that you contribute towards a national insurance scheme and you get back an old age pension that is far below what the government gives for which you make no real financial contribution. June next year I am hoping to do two things. One is, to respond to Sen. Wyatt's concern, I am going to look at the possibility of harmonizing national insurance and the old age pension. What that may mean—and I am again giving a little insight as to where I am coming from—it will mean an increase in contributions and an increase in benefits. It is the only way it can be done. It is going to be harmonized with the old age pension. The second thing is that we are going to look at the limit for qualification and we will increase that. I had hoped in this budget to be able to increase it to \$7,500 but I was not able to; it was just not possible. I know that by June, when I am able to do all this harmonization, we will be able to make one go of it and clean it up once and for all.

Sen. Dr. St. Cyr had asked about land and building taxes. This is not retroactive. This is going to become effective on January 1, 1998. I forgot to put that in the budget. That is because it is almost impractical to go any way back at all. From 1st January, 1998, as long as you have paid your land and building taxes and not filed your return—in other words, if you have not paid it in 1998 and did not file in April, 1999, you can still claim it back once you have paid it but you have to pay it in order to make the claim. We are going back to the old system. I think it was a little harsh for someone to have to pay those kinds of penalties and I have indicated that. It is just a clean up which I think was misconceived.

Sen. St. Cyr asked why we had singled out single mothers and not fathers. I felt, and it is said that the single father might have been the cause, I cannot really debate as to how to address the cause. I think it is a fact, as I said earlier in my statement, that unfortunately children of single mothers tend to be the one group who seem to be caught in a net of despair or desperation that really, they have very little chance of getting out of. Let me say it is not unique to Trinidad and Tobago. It is a phenomenon of all of the ghettos of the world. Every single ghetto in the world has these pockets of single mothers who have children whose fathers have deserted them.

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Sen. Beckles gave me a number of people who suffer under these circumstances. I also know in Trinidad and Tobago there are many people who try to defraud the system. Unfortunately, the more people try to defraud the system, is the more checks and balances need to be put in place. All that this serves to do is create a bureaucratic nightmare. But it is something I am prepared to look at and address. I get more letters from single mothers than from any other group. Maybe that is why I am so concerned about them because their plight comes straight to me. I do not know why they think the Minister of Finance—maybe they know that I love all the women of Trinidad and Tobago. Maybe they will also know that, if what you say is true that my Cabinet colleague has said, I do not think of any woman as a stray dog in Trinidad and Tobago. I hold all women upon a pedestal, as a matter of fact, and I would really like to apologize if that statement was made. I am sure that is not what he meant but if that is the way it has come across, I am really sorry about it.

Sen. Alfred, let me—oh, she is not here. I was going to tell her that it is not my intent to punish the Tobago House of Assembly or punish anyone. I just had a quick comment from her. She said that it appears as if we are punishing the Tobago House of Assembly for “squandermania”, as she put it. I do not regard the Tobago House of Assembly as having done any squandermania. I know there have been some problems on the question of the budget. I have tried to clean it up as best I can. If it appears as if they are being punished, it is only that you have a pie and you want to share the pie as best you can and unfortunately we have a THA and not a CHA.

Let me quickly say that someone had raised the question of the cost. I had planned to put in the cost of the increase in pension. A hundred dollars may not sound like a lot but it certainly is 25 per cent increase in the old age pension cost for the Trinidad and Tobago Government. There are about 60,000 people who receive old age pension and with \$1,200 a year extra we are talking about \$72 million. Given the fact that I have not raised any additional revenues by raising taxes, except the excise duty on tobacco which Sen. Oudit said was meaningless—and which, incidentally, was not meant to be a revenue item, it was meant to dissuade people from smoking—that will raise us \$18 million but it costs us \$72 million to increase pension by \$100. If I had gone all the way up to the poverty level which was my original objective in 1998, it would have cost me \$150 million. I just could not have afforded that, unless I had raised taxes, and you know I am committed to lowering taxes and not raising them.

I think I have addressed, in the main, most of the queries. I have one here that my good friend, Sen. Shabazz had asked me. What is the difference between URP and Caroni (1975) Limited. I thought that Sen. Daly had answered that for me. He talked about what URP produced or did not produce. I thought that Caroni (1975) Limited, at least, makes a known contribution to the national economy. In the case of Caroni (1975) Limited it earns foreign exchange. It is not the most effective or most efficient and I will leave you with one comment. I am not aware of any government anywhere in the world, and I say this without fear or favour, that does not support and possibly subsidize agriculture. We have to remember that. I am not saying it out of the context that I plan to subsidize Caroni (1975) Limited because, as I said in the other place, what we have done is put a committee together to look at the options of how we can break it down. We have had a number of options in this House and I think we will take all of them on board before we make any final decision.

With that, Mr. President, I do hope I can leave you with two things. One is, that I can invite Members in and out of this House to join with this Government in trying to achieve our objectives, even if you do not share our strategies and policies, even if you feel you want to drop me a line, I would be happy to hear what you say and believe you me, you will influence my behavior for future budgets. I think that if we all come together, this budget is really going to be a blueprint for all of us and that people who never had before will end up having. That is my concern. Whether it be a pension or stock certificate, if I could see a family in Laventille having a stock certificate saying I own stock in a company, that will make me feel good. If you can help me share that view, I will be happy.

Sen. Prof. Spence: I wonder if the hon. Minister, before he finishes, will clear up the point of what he meant by saying that the incentives for agriculture will be similar to those for tourism.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I was hoping that you would not draw me into that debate. I will tell you why. Cabinet agreed to that, but Cabinet has not agreed to the specifics and I would not get into a debate with my colleague to say anything because I am not one of those who is going to preempt Cabinet. Cabinet agreed that we are going to look at agriculture pretty much as we did tourism. How far we will reach, I do not know.

While I am on my feet, I would like to wish every Member of this House and their families a most prosperous, bright and successful 1998 and hope we can continue to live in the peace that we have enjoyed so far.

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Mr. President, with those words, I beg to move that a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ending December 31, 1998, be now read a second time.

Question put and agreed to.

8.30 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order No. 63, I beg to move that the Bill be not committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be now read the 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 the adjournment of this Senate, may I also take this opportunity to extend to you and your family and to all fellow Senators, the staff of the Parliament and the police officers and members of the media, a very happy and productive 1998.

I also take this opportunity to inform fellow Senators that upon resumption, we will deal with Bill No. 3 entitled an Act to provide a minimum level of maternity leave benefits and protection. After that bill, we are also going to deal with an Act to provide for the disqualification of a judge of the Supreme Court, then we go to Bills Nos. 6 and 7 respectively.

In so doing, Sir, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, January 13, 1998 at 130 p.m.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, before putting the question, I would like to thank Members for the generous expressions of goodwill, good health and season's greetings to my family and me. I would wish to offer to Senators and their families, all members of staff, members of the protective services, the media and, indeed, to the whole national community of Trinidad and Tobago, the wish for a very peaceful, productive and progressive 1998.

Sen. The Hon. W. Mark: Mr. President, could I just intervene for a second, Sir.

Adjournment

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Mr. President: I also wish to bring greetings to the Muslim community on the occasion of the commencement of the holy month of Ramadan. Yes, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. W. Mark: Mr. President, instead of the 13th, I think it would be advisable that we adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.35 p.m.