

SENATE*Wednesday, September 13, 2000*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION BILL****(BUDGET)**

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 12, 2000]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Sen. Eudine Job: Mr. President, before I begin I would like to add my share of congratulations to Sen. John on his maiden speech. I would like to say that I knew Sen. John a long time ago in a work situation. I know him to be a very competent and hardworking gentleman where tourism is concerned. However, I never thought, as the other Senators there in the Independent Benches, that I would ever see Mr. John nervous. *[Laughter]* So I have to take heart. Congratulations, Sen. John, and I look forward to hearing more of you in the Senate. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. President, my worthy colleague on the other side yesterday mentioned that I followed him into the Senate and I did. I have known Sen. Winston John for a very long time. I have known him to be a very forthright and outspoken young man, but he did not tell you the reason why I followed him into the Senate and I am going to tell you that now. I am very happy that Sen. John is here as a representative of the people of Tobago. However, I understand, quite clearly, that being a Member of the other side he would have certain constraints. Because of those constraints I have followed the Senator here to ensure that the representation of Tobagonians would not be diluted. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. President, with respect to the Appropriation Bill, I feel so much pain with the provisions of this Appropriation Bill; the pain I feel is the pain of all Tobagonians because we never seem to get our due from this Government; from a Government that was put into power through the generous assistance of the NAR in Tobago. My worthy colleague, Sen. John, on the other side, spoke yesterday

that this coalition Government was the best thing that happened to Tobago, and that we got the most money under this Government. Mr. President, I am here to say otherwise. Permit me, Sir, to quote from a document by the Tobago House of Assembly re the allocation that has been given to Tobago over the years.

In 1994, under the PNM regime, the Tobago House of Assembly requested \$26.5 million under the development fund. They got 100 per cent.

That was under the PNM regime. [*Desk thumping*]

In 1995, the Tobago House of Assembly asked for \$45.6 million and they got \$43 million. That is 95 per cent.

Again, under the PNM regime. [*Desk thumping*]

In 1996—and I would grant this to the other side—the Tobago House of Assembly asked for \$42 million and they got \$51.3 million; 122 per cent.

However, in 1998, when the Tobago House of Assembly asked for \$89 million, they got \$30.4 million, a mere 34 per cent. In 1999/2000 they asked for \$92 million and they got 23.7 per cent. Things are getting worse, Mr. President. Twenty-three per cent! I do not understand what is the reason for the decrease in the allocation to Tobago. Permit me, if I may, to suggest that the allocation to Tobago was based on the relationship between the UNC Government and the Chief Secretary, not even the people of Tobago. I am assuming that because of the decline in that relationship over the past three to four years, the allocation to Tobago has dwindled with that declining relationship, and that is not acceptable. Not by Tobagonians; not by anybody. Mr. President, the NAR regime sold Tobago for 30 pieces of silver that they never received.

The Minister of Finance painted a very glowing picture of the economy, and I do not think it is any accident that sometimes we see things behind rose tinted lenses. However, if we decide to take those lenses off and take a second look at Tobago we would appreciate that that economic upliftment or that economic boom has not touched Tobago.

The Minister spoke of the increase in Old-Age Pension. But does the Minister know, or does the Minister care that Tobago's cost of living is by far probably 100 per cent higher than our Trinidad counterparts, our Trinidad sisters and brothers? If someone is working in Tobago as an agricultural officer or an administrative officer and drawing the same salary as the counterpart in Trinidad, who do you think is worse off? I will tell you. It is the Tobagonian. Because the price of everything skyrockets.

1.40 p.m.

Mr. President, permit me to quote from the budget statement of the Minister of Finance last year. I say this because I want to show that broken promises exist throughout this 1991—1995 period. Last year, the Minister said in his statement at page 30:

“Over the past few months, commuting between Trinidad and Tobago has been challenging for the citizens of both Tobago and Trinidad. Government intends to rectify this with the restoration of an efficient inter-island ferry service. Therefore in this fiscal year, we will ensure that there is adequate sea transport between Trinidad and Tobago.”

We are in August of 2000 and that ferry has not materialized. As a matter of fact, we all know the fiasco that was caused when Tobagonians had to sleep on pavements in Trinidad—and that is no joke—when the *MF Panorama* could not sail and these persons did not have any more money to travel by air, that is where they had to end up, on the pavements in Port of Spain.

In the budget statement this year the Minister indicated that Tobago was going to be serviced efficiently. We would like the Minister to know that “efficiently” for that ferry service means two ferries, maybe three as Sen. John said yesterday, but no less than two ferries, and two ferries that are of a quality that would not be breaking down every so often. We do not want two old boats. We are demanding now our just due as citizens of this unitary state.

Mr. President, in Tobago we have a situation with the fisheries department. The recent ferry fiasco would have shown that we rely to a very large extent on Trinidad for our food supplies. Because of that, I think it is very important, urgent even, that this Government pay some attention to the fisheries department. Other Senators may have mentioned this in this Senate before but I would like to reiterate that a mere \$2 million is what it would take to refurbish the Nipdec cold storage facility, and that facility has not been working for quite some time. To date, nothing has been done. Fishermen in Tobago continue to suffer because of spoilt goods. They have to throw away large amounts of fish, that is lost income and, Mr. President, who cares?

Further to that, Tobago’s fishing products have been blacklisted on the European market. That is because of the introduction of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points Programme (HACCP). Numerous pleas have been made in all quarters, including central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly to regularize the situation. Nothing has been done to assist these people. So right

now, those who would have been getting some funds from exporting fish to these European countries have to take nothing, and there is nothing for them to get because the jobs are not available. Even the 60,000 jobs that I heard mentioned, Tobagonians are not accessing these.

On the matter of the fisherfolk in Tobago, I do not even want to mention that unsavoury incident at one of our prime beaches. Suffice it to say that it is not part of the budget. The landing facilities for which funds should have been allocated, let us hope that this allocation would indeed be realized and that those fisherfolk at Pigeon Point would not have to go through the trauma that they went through earlier this year.

The Minister allocated \$1.5 million for tourism development throughout Tobago. What a pity! What a shame—\$1.5 million for the whole of Tobago! In Tobago—and I cannot help but stress this point—tourism is the livelihood of Tobagonians. After the Tobago House of Assembly, that industry is the second largest employer. However, over the years—and I want to refer to a statement made by the hon. junior Minister of Works and Transport when he said that tourism is in its embryonic stage. Mr. President, 14 years ago when I went into this industry, it was in its embryonic stage. Fourteen years later it could never still be in its embryonic stage. If that is the case, we are going to have a stillborn industry. We would like to see new initiatives being taken for tourism development in Tobago and \$1.5 million in no way scratches the surface of that development. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition to that, numerous critical issues continue to plague Tobago's tourism. I would just like your permission to mention some of them. When we look at destination marketing we understand that Tidco is responsible. However, over the years we have advocated that tourism in Tobago is supposed to be a high-end scale market. However, the hoteliers in Tobago have asked me to express their concerns that within recent times what we have been getting—and I would like your permission to quote from this document by the Hotel Association in Tobago:

“Tobago now gets back packers and bargain hunters. People seeking jet ski and hot parties. This was not the vision any of us had for Tobago.”

Mr. President, linked to the tourism industry is the issue of crime. We have been hearing from the other side that crime has gone down, you know, “We have bought more police vehicles. We have employed so many more police officers”,

but here again from this document I quote, and we all know because we have spoken about it before, that:

“There has been a consistent growth in the incidence of petty and drug-related crimes in Tobago. The Tobago Police Service is understaffed and the present staff is grossly under supported by means of machinery and equipment.”

The hon. Minister of National Security told us yesterday that they had beefed up the police service in so many ways—machines, equipment and vehicles. These are not evident in Tobago. “Tobago needs”, and I continue to quote:

“...Police vehicles, both marked and unmarked, a Mounted Service and Marine Patrols. An additional Police Post is needed on the north coast (Castara to Parlatuvier).”

I hope the hon. Minister for national security will take note. Mr. President—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. President: Are you finished quoting?

Sen. E. Job: Yes, Sir, end of quote.

Mr. President: Could you give the date and title of the document, please?

Sen. E. Job: The *Trinidad and Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association*. It is just a letter.

Mr. President: What is the date?

Sen. E. Job: That should have been two days ago. Just a second, Mr. President. Could I get it for you a little later, Sir, because I do not want to take—this was two days ago.

Sen. Kuei Tung: Who is it from?

Sen. E. Job: From the Tobago Hotel Association.

Sen. Kuei Tung: To whom?

Sen. E. Job: To myself. They asked me to inform you because they are not here, Sir, to inform you, so I am doing it on their behalf. [*Interruption*] Okay, Minister, I will send you a copy of this. Thank you very much. I hope the Minister, Mr. President, does not get angry because what we are trying to do here is to seek Tobago's business [*Desk thumping*] and I would appreciate if he would render some assistance to us so that we could alleviate our concerns. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Kuei Tung: I just asked a question. I do not get vexed.

Sen. E. Job: No, Minister, I know you would not get vexed.

Mr. President, on the question of the environment and tourism, we in Tobago understand that the environment is of great concern, and because tourism in Tobago developed without any planning in the early stages, we did some things wrong, as did most of our Caribbean brothers and sisters. However, now is the time that we have to take steps to rectify these wrongs; to make these wrongs right if we can. Unfortunately the environment in Tobago continues to slip slowly into an abyss of no return.

The Minister has spoken of the Green Fund and that is much appreciated. However, we have to take more serious action if we need to preserve the environment and if we need to contribute to sustainability. We have to ensure that our beaches are no longer made available to investors. [*Desk thumping*] We have to protect the beachfronts, and not just protect the beachfronts but we even have to ensure that access is available to all, since our Act states that there are no private beaches in Trinidad or Tobago. Recently we have been seeing moves to initiate private beaches, Mr. President, and I hope that something would be done to prevent that from happening. We would also want the Minister to note that our fragile system in terms of the marine environment around Buccoo Reef and southwestern Tobago, basically where all the mangrove is, should be off-limits to any investor who wants to do construction, private or otherwise.

Mr. President, we all note that air access is critical, and we are happy that the Government can find \$1.3 billion to construct an airport in Piarco. Given the emphasis on tourism and Tobago, one would want to enquire why upgrade of the terminal at Crown Point was not carried out. One would want to enquire why we have to wait until the billion-dollar airport is finished in Piarco before they can come to Crown Point. Recent initiatives have seen some increase in charter flights to Tobago. We have JMC, we have British Airways and we have Condor. Sometimes when these planes land, there are more or less 500 people at one time in the airport. What happens? They use the domestic departure lounge plus—there are two departure lounges at Crown Point Airport. The one downstairs is used for the foreign visitors, plus the immigration area, in order to accommodate these passengers.

1.55 p.m.

Mr. President, recently, on my way to Port of Spain, through the departure lounge gate No. 1, I observed a structure in that departure lounge and I enquired

obviously, what is all of this. I was made to understand that structure was a private VIP lounge to accommodate whom we do not know. What happened then was whoever it was—I am not quite sure—removed approximately 20 to 30 seats from the departure lounge to put in a private VIP lounge to accommodate whomever.

Mr. President, it is coincidental that this construction occurred as soon as a certain gentleman had to wait for a couple hours at the airport. So we do not know if this VIP lounge is to accommodate 5000 or 5 people. We hope that the Minister of Works and Transport will investigate this issue as a matter of urgency, and remove that structure from the domestic terminal for the comfort of the travelling public. Mr. President, one cannot put a departure lounge to house five people when the rest of the citizens—tax paying people—have to stand and wait for the same flight and who also paid \$300. It cannot be fair. As a matter of fact, people in Government should be happy—not only the Government, but people in high positions in this country—to see our citizens comfortable and they bear a bit of discomfort. They will be loved for that. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, I would like to appeal to the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development to revisit the \$1.5 million that he gave to Tobago for development throughout Tobago. The Minister should have consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly and the people of Tobago, so that he would know what we really want to do in Tobago and give us the support that is necessary from the central Government.

On the question of education, I am not even going into that matter, but at this point in time, as I stand here, there are 600 students in Tobago who have not yet gone to school; who have not a clue of where they will be going to school; and who have not a clue when they will be going to school. Mr. President, is that fair to Tobagonians? Secondary education for all does not include Tobago, and the silence from the other side is indeed deafening. School reopened last Monday and we all saw the news—Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie referred to it in her contribution—112 students turned up at a certain high school in Tobago East, complete with books, uniforms and everything else because they were registered, only to be told when they got there Monday morning, there was no place for them, they were in the wrong school.

Mr. President, does anybody consider the psychological damage which that would have done to those children? *[Desk thumping]* Does anybody care that secondary school for all did not materialize? What about the financial state of these poor people who would have taken their last cent to ensure that these children would have turned out to school? Who is going to reimburse them? I hope the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development or

[SEN. E. JOB]

the Minister of Education will find a way to assist these people because I am certain that they would not be able to find the funds to purchase more books, more uniform, and I say, if and when that time comes.

I spoke about broken promises earlier and I want to continue with broken promises. Tobago was promised four secondary school centres. To date, none of these has materialized. The four Post Primary Centres that were up and running and young people could have benefited from those institutions. As a matter of fact—we were just thinking of beginning a tourism training programme in those schools for those children, so that there will be easy transition from those Post Primary Schools into the work environment of the tourism industry. *[Desk thumping]* Those four Post Primary Schools have been closed without notice to anybody. Children turned up for school to be greeted with closed doors; no questions; no statements; nothing, and the silence, I repeat, is indeed deafening.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, I wonder if the hon. Senator could tell us whether those kids who were doing their second year in the Post Primary Schools have been allocated places in secondary schools or not. I wonder if the Senator knows that.

Sen. E. Job: Mr. President, through you, no. *[Interruption]* I guess that is what would happen in the end. Mr. President, I was speaking about the Signal Hill Technical Vocational wing that was constructed a couple years ago. I happened to visit it recently—in order to use it now the Government will have to refurbish that wing. It has never been used, newly constructed and nothing is being done in that place except, probably, some evening classes in some of the rooms. Is it that we just like to fritter away money? Is it that we have the money and just do not know what to do with it? Or when we do whatever we do with it, we do not know what to do after we spend it? We need to look seriously at these things. At the end of the day, the taxpayer is the one who bears the burden, and we all pay taxes on a Pay As You Earn basis. So, when moneys are misspent, we all share the burden of the frittering away of funds.

Mr. President, the Tobago Skills Development Centre was promised in the last budget and that too has not materialized. We wonder if Tobago is viewed as the lost city of Atlantis, or if it is that the Central Government has abdicated its responsibility for Tobago, and I would hope not. On the question of the apprenticeship programme, I notice that the Minister mentioned this in the budget and I think that is commendable—but I hope that this apprenticeship programme would become a policy and not just a programme for a tax break. We have seen the apprenticeship programmes in some instances where students intern at firms,

they will either give them all the faxes to send, or everything to photocopy—in other words—all the tasks they do not really want to do.

Mr. President, we hope that there could be some monitoring of that apprenticeship programme and it should also become a policy. For example, in Germany after nine years of compulsory schooling, students can either go on to general education or they can do vocational studies. Those vocational studies would either be an apprenticeship and they will sign a contract for the apprenticeship and, probably, get a job in that same institution when they are through. So we hope that the Government would think out this apprenticeship programme thoroughly, and not just implement it. They should look for the repercussions down the road, as was not done in the case of the Aliens Landholding Act, when that Act was repealed by a former regime.

2.05 p.m.

I come to housing. Mr. President, that controversial amendment to the Act was carried out, I believe, in good faith. However, because of the haste with which that was implemented, the repercussions were not evident until much later. What we have in Tobago at this point is the alarming increase in the price of land to the point where the average Tobagonian cannot purchase a piece of land. That is because when they quote prices in this time, the prices are quoted now in US dollars on the market:

Sen. Dr. Phillips: Private land?

Sen. E. Job: Private land in US dollars on the market. Our dollar has no value; none whatsoever, and foreigners figure that it is cheap. They could buy a piece of land for £10,000. It does not cost them much.

Mr. President, the Government is in a position to repeal that controversial document, as they have done with all the Bills I have seen here since I have been coming to this honourable House. They are in a position to do that, but they have refused to do anything about the Aliens Landholding Act.

We have seen foreigners purchasing land to build what are considered private homes. What happens then? Those homes are run as guesthouses. Not one cent of that money is seen in Tobago or Trinidad, or in the coffers of the Treasury. Not a cent. Every cent stays outside. If honourable Ministers would like to be cynical about that development, then I hope to God that they can find it in their hearts to really do something about it. The money does not come to Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Dr. Phillips: Talk the facts.

Sen. E. Job: The Minister of Housing and Settlements earlier this year promised—broken promises again—Tobagonians that he was going to intervene in the Signal Hill housing development so that they would not have to pay the \$7 per square foot requested by the Tobago House of Assembly. Faithfully promised Tobagonians. Do you know the result of that? The people who have paid the \$7 per square foot now have deeds to their lots of land. What has happened to those who relied on the Minister's promise? They have not yet received any deeds and the Tobago House of Assembly apparently has informed them that they cannot get any deed to that land unless they pay the \$7. Broken promises all around.

Mr. President, health in Tobago is a disaster and the Tobago hospital—I know I am coming after about five or six other Senators in this Senate who would have spoken about the Tobago hospital. I would still mention it because by now I am really not sure what is happening with that place. I know they say that the designs are out, but I am not sure. This is the sixth budget that has been read in which funds have been allocated for the construction of that Tobago hospital.

In the year 2000, when we think we will have access to superior health services, what do we have? Nurses going on strike because they cannot even find equipment and the Tobago hospital nowhere on the landscape. The health division in Tobago, I want to repeat, is in crisis. They do not even have telephones in the health centres out of Scarborough; most of them. The Scarborough Health Centre opens for half a day. Why? They have no money to fix the air-condition unit. The workers at the Regional Health Authority and their salaries? Do not even mention that. They cannot get paid.

Mr. President, health and education are two of the more serious aspects of our nation, and putting the construction of the hospital on the budget, we have seen, does not mean that it is going to happen. I would like to implore the Minister of Finance to ensure that the necessary funds are released for the construction and the completion—furnishing, fittings, everything—of that Tobago hospital. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, now I come to the THA debt, and I know that Members on the other side have been taunting and talking about Charles and so forth. In no way do I condone or agree with the Executive Council of the Tobago House of Assembly for its inability to account for funds to be released. However, just as we got this letter yesterday being handed out by Independent Sen. Daly where the Government is guaranteeing Tidco a certain amount of funds; we are wondering,

why can that facility not be extended to the THA? Can it? I certainly hope so.
[Laughter]

We hope that the Minister would find it in his good graces to assist the Tobago House of Assembly with the debt that it has incurred. We know it is wrong. Maybe it was not supposed to happen that way, but the fact is that it has happened. They needed funds, they did what they had to do and it has happened. Could we then not play with words and be very serious about fulfilling these obligations to creditors that the Tobago House of Assembly has incurred, so that public servants would not have to pay the price every year of not being paid their salaries on time for two months?

Mr. President, we know about Ring Bang, we know about ADDA. In no way do we condone those actions. That was not a communal decision. It was a decision that we had no input in, so Tobagonians, by no means, should be held responsible for the actions of the people who they put in the THA to look after their business.

There is a saying in Africa: “when two elephants fight, the grass around them gets trampled”. We do not want to be caught in a fight between elephants. We want to ensure that the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago remains as is, a unitary state. For the debt incurred by the THA which could be anywhere between \$100 and \$200 million, we are putting the blame squarely on both the THA and the central Government. Why? There is no proper system of accounting—we all know that—and the Central Government has refused to put in that system of accounting where the THA must account for the funds disbursed to it. They must.

In no way should one use the Act to say that they must not account for funds. The THA is responsible but, as I said before, if the Central Government has not abdicated its responsibility in Tobago, then it is fully responsible as well.

I want to quote, again, from the Minister's budget statement last year, page 28. He said:

“We have long recognized the local peculiarities of Tobago within this unitary state. It was for this reason that this Government adopted the Tobago House of Assembly Act No. 40 as the basis for developing the legitimate aspirations of Tobagonians.”

Mr. President, we believe that that Act is seriously flawed. Maybe it was done in haste to accommodate a marriage of convenience—a marriage of convenience that probably worked for a year and then one partner has been unceremoniously

kicked from the marital bed—but we of the PNM have seen the flaw and we in Tobago endorse what the Leader of the Opposition said in the other place—

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. N. Mohammed*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. E. Job: Mr. President, I am just about winding up. We on this side of the Bench fully endorse the Leader of the Opposition's statement to repeal the THA Act and to create a document in its place that is going to be mutually beneficial to both Tobago and Trinidad [*Desk thumping*] to sustain and to maintain the relationship that we want to have.

We do not want independence. We do not want to be independent. Not in this day and age when Europe has joined forces for economic reasons. Why would we, little dots in the ocean, fight for independence, Mr. President? Not at all. We want to maintain the unitary state. What we want is really our share of the pie. We know the Minister of Finance has the unenviable position of doing a national budget that would satisfy both Trinidad and Tobago. However, like I said before—and we on this side believe—the allocations that have been given to Tobago have been done on the basis of a deteriorating relationship between the Chief Secretary and the central government.

2.20 p.m.

We hope that Tobago's allocation would be reviewed by the hon. Minister, that the hon. Minister would consult with Tobagonians before he decides to allocate funds for Tobago and we hope, Mr. President, that the relations between our two islands would be enhanced—if not with this regime, we know that it would be done shortly when we on this side are elected as the Government in the next general elections.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh: Mr. President, first of all, I wish to congratulate my dear friend, the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, for his Budget Statement 2001 and thank him for his stewardship during the closing parliamentary term, as he has served in one of the most sensitive and demanding government ministries.

I also join with many others in this honourable place in complimenting Sen. Carlos John for his budget contribution. I must add, too, that I am quite impressed

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with his quiet disposition, especially when scolded for past savannah sins by Sen. Prof. Kenny, the high priest of the environment. [*Laughter*] I do not know if confessions will follow.

Mr. President, all the issues considered in the Appropriation Bill are of national significance but I will share with you certain concerns, directly or indirectly related to the Bill.

I am terribly disturbed and disappointed at the ineffectiveness of our mechanisms for monitoring public spending. Our tendering agencies, whether the Central Tenders Board, or similar systems of checks and balances: Have they been serving us as they ought to? Are we doing a good job in the critical examination of monitoring contracts? Can we detect unrealistic estimates and ridiculously high costing hidden in bids and negotiations for government contracts? It is not today that I have been bothered by this problem.

There is a growing concern in our society that our systems have failed us and there is a sense of surrender and helplessness as if no one can change the direction of those massive cost overruns and inflated costing of work done for government—any government—past and present.

We are all familiar with explanations. Mr. President, I have had explanations—all kinds—given for any item of public expenditure and yet, there is the nagging suspicion spanning decades that all is still not well with the management of public funds. Explanations aplenty can be found at the completion of numerous jobs. Explanations invented to blame God—weather conditions; domestic or international factors. We have found sufficient reasons to get past any Chief Executive Officer, any board of governors, any auditor, even to get past the Parliament, with explanations.

Some of the illustrations I will use now, I have used before. I mean malice to no one but I refer to them again to emphasize the fact that we have failed as custodians of the nation's wealth. We are only keepers and never the owners—any government.

Remember the Hall of Justice, Mr. President, estimated to cost \$97.5 million but cost overruns took that project to a whopping \$291 million. Remember, I mean no malice. I am an ordinary citizen. I am concerned and worried. It is a phenomenon that governments, past and present, just allowed to happen.

A sum of \$72.2 million was first approved for the financial complex. It went up in the sky. It skyrocketed to \$439 million, almost six times more than

originally allocated and we have done nothing. We could do nothing. The Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, estimated to cost about \$515 million, ran off to about \$800 million and more. Somebody said a billion. Three-quarters went to France. [*Laughter*]

Mr. President, remember the claims of contractors on the recently proposed site at the La Brea Industrial Estate? Only to level the site at La Brea, to remove some forest trees in La Brea and to just say in this place and that place, we have a few uncapped wells—\$125 million. Of course, everyone cashed in handsomely in the hundred million dollars Miss Universe show-off, plus the Ring Bang million. My point: astronomical cost overruns and indiscreet public spending have always haunted us as a nation. They constitute the monster that feeds on the Treasury. The matter cannot be ignored any longer. It has got to be the first item on the agenda for any new government, whenever that be. The matter cannot be ignored, if even it means revisiting existing toothless legislation and making them more relevant and appropriate to needs like this one.

In an article in the *Daily Express* of August 27, 2000, someone raised a question relevant to government's project of road paving. We all have suffered too long. I would like all the roads to be fixed. Our roads in many areas have been neglected. They have been sub-standard, but the article observed that last year, road paving contractors would charge the Government approximately \$190 a tonne for asphalt mix, but this year all the roads must be fixed, so it does not matter. I am not a contractor. The price has gone up to as much as \$390 per tonne, approximately \$200 more per tonne in a few months. Is it because road paving must be done at any cost?

In the *Sunday Newsday* of September 3, 2000, at page 13, there is a thick bold headline: "Too many unscrupulous contractors in TT". I did not write that but thousands read it. The article describes some road works taking place along the Naparima/Mayaro Road and said:

"This type of nonsense or rip-off of taxpayers money is not only now being done...

Anyone who knows about road works, will know that this material, which to the naked eye has 80 per cent clay and 20 per cent metal should not be used as a sub-base material."

And the writer asked; I have asked this; many people are asking this:

"How in heavens can the Clerk of Works, the Roads Supervisor, the CE II Highways...and the Minister allow such rubbish to be placed on the nation's roads?"

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...Where is the conscience of contractors, Ministers, supervisors, technocrats, workers, etc?"

I add, and I am not guessing—check the contract details; check the books and the bills and there will be a costing for the purchase of expensive quarry material billed to the Government when the poorer stuff is actually used.

Mr. President, can I make reference to Government's school building programme? That is fertile soil for exploitation. The *Sunday Guardian* of September 3, 2000 reports on the front page: "SEMP schools costs go up", and this is only a matter of days, I should say, all because we are trying to get things done for the re-opening of school.

"Construction costs have soared by \$20 million..."

—and that delays at the affected schools are likely to push these estimates over.

But this is a way of life here in my land. Once more, you know, the bag of explanations for overruns has been opened—heavy rains, unexpected changes in site plans—we have ingenious people in this land—shorter than normal timetables for construction; new structures such as covered walkways or the removal of squatters from sites. That is the newest one. You see, the mentality is, there is money to be spent—US \$105 million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank for the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP), so let us spend freely and those self-same students, in years to come, will be repaying the loan.

Mr. President, I asked the question and Carillion workers asked the same question: With all of these heavy increases in these mega-projects, will workers at Carillion and the others, benefit in these projects? Or, will the profits remain only at a certain level? That is a fair question.

Mr. President, I now turn to an article written by an architect in the *Daily Express* of September 2, 2000, who said, "One airport at four times the cost". You might want to say that is an exaggeration but he is not the only one who said that. Many people have been saying that. This is not an original idea. Many have calculated that the airport expansion project will fly beyond the original estimate. Two years ago it started at \$760 million and now there is an additional overrun in the vicinity of \$469 million. That is only the overrun—heavy runway. It could be more.

Mr. President, experts begin by agreeing that there are problems even in the original estimate. That it might just be even more than a rip-off. Nothing more

than a rip-off. I have to say this because I am a taxpayer, too, and I live here. The major consortium on the project claimed about \$29 million from a certain negotiated settlement for what is called “package trade”. I would like to see one of those packages. They must be very costly, all of those things called packages—multimillion dollar packages. Can I ask this question: Suppose the claim was made for \$60 million and not \$29 million? You know it would have been paid. It would have been paid if it were \$60 million and not \$29 million. Likewise, I also ask: If the claim was made for \$4 million? That might have sufficed, too, but you see it is Government and taxpayers to catch.

You may not agree. Who will not agree? Maybe a lot of people will not agree with the *Express* headline—“\$29 million dollar bonus”. You do not like the idea of bonus. Fine. Why not? Once there is a government project, past and present administrations have suffered terribly because everyone has to cash in on some kind of bonus. We must invent a bonus. How can I ignore the foreign consultancy firm that is poised to cream off from that project, as someone calculated, \$166 million and maybe more to come possibly? That could also have been four times more than the realistic package.

2.35 p.m.

Mr. President, it worries me to read about InnCogen’s operations in Trinidad. I have been told—I do not get letters in my post box—that the company made about \$84 million in one year: while cornering our own T&TEC to buy power whether or not that power is needed, with estimated losses of \$23 million in six months, from the Treasury.

Mr. President, did you see that investigative report article by Miss Maharaj in the *Sunday Express* of September 10, 2000 entitled:

“You paid too much”

This is the burden of this section of my contribution.

“You paid too much”

You were overcharged! The Government and peoples of Trinidad were overcharged. Yes, we always seem to be paying too much and we are so blind that we cannot see it. We do not know how to handle it—[*Interruption*] Thank you.

Investigations are on the way—as I read in that story following the article of paying too much—as to whether Petrotrin was overcharged by Citibank in a 1992

loan transaction. That financial package is worth a staggering US\$158 million. Let me quote from that article. Eight years later, that is now—*[Interruption]* oh yes, one tenth of our national budget—questions are asked about whether Citibank took advantage of Trintomar and its stakeholders, cornering the company to borrow US\$96.5 million or more than 2.7 times the actual borrowing that is required. Somebody has to correct that. I am just saying what we are told. I wish that it is not true. Tell us that it is not true.

Mr. President, my question is: are governments past and present helpless, unlearned, irresponsible or easily duped to the wiles of exploiters: both native and foreign? In the name of justice, in the name of the poor suffering masses of our land, in the name of the people of this country who are the real owners of the nation's resources, if some of these illustrations do not point to a serious crime, then tell me what is a crime? If nationals—I ask about my own people—can participate in a project and do a job for one's homeland: whether it is repairing a road or building a school, a marketplace or an airport, and cream off costs that are three, four or more times their expenses, then that is a national crime. It is treason!

Mr. President, why, I ask over the years, have we refused to find systems to control the invading, restless, voracious monster of greed, graft and grease hand? What is this mad desire for riches at all cost? Do we remember that we have brought nothing in this world and it is certain that we can carry nothing out? *[Desk thumping]*

Maybe Sir Walter Scott has something to say to nationals in a developing country as ours. To the once liberated native who has now turned upon his own, as the exploiter:

“Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath
said, This is my own, my native land!”

Are our people with the expertise and resources engaged in national development? Have they lost their sense of nation and community? Maybe patriotism and personal comfort are incompatible with each other.

I suggest that our present systems have failed miserably as we surrender to local and international vampires who leave us as anemic zombies as they suck our blood. Our systems and procedures are questionable in the awarding of contracts in determining and interpreting fair pricing or overpricing, curbing cost overruns, and trading in the nation's material resources.

I will not hesitate to add the Central Tenders Board and similar systems. I feel they have outlived their usefulness. The Auditor General's Office, I think, is merely a rubber stamp and not equipped to even detect corruption, because we have seen volumes of audited statements churned out from those offices as if to officially say all is well, when we know all is not well. It was never well. Helplessness reigns in that office and similar offices. I will not hesitate to include Parliament's Public Accounts Committee and its corresponding Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. Let me tell you Sir, I have been here for a little while. I am convinced that they are useless as checks and balances in the face of the perennial crises I have identified. They function, but we get ripped off every turn we take. We need the courage to radically reform them or scrap them. I feel they are failed systems, ineffective tools to past and present governments.

I am ready to charge governments, past and present, only insofar as their denseness or unwillingness goes to make our systems effective. They allow themselves to be easy victims of both local and foreign business concerns: some of whose agenda includes greed, graft and grease hand. Mr. President, I could say much more about this. I put it first because I think it is the main feature in the budget: how we raise money and how we spend the people's money and what kind of stewards, managers, overseers and keepers we have been of the nation's treasures. This is what the budget is all about.

I want to speak a little about health. It is encouraging to see the health sector featuring so prominently in the budget, receiving an allocation of close to \$1 billion. I know more will be added after the settlement with the nurses, so you could add to that figure. The Government's budget is going to be bigger. Let us hope that in the new financial year we will see a difference in the health services.

I wish to raise an issue though—in certain reports within the last few months—about the dreaded tuberculosis. Sir, you will remember the TB scare in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. There were denials and confirmations on all sides. They still left us in the dark as to whether we really have a TB problem in Trinidad. What authentic study and work was done to tell the people in Central Trinidad and elsewhere that it is only rumour?

Do you remember that story in the newspapers a few days ago about September 09? The people in San Fernando know that, because some of them were there. The story was about a San Fernando Magistrate who had to deal with a prisoner brought in her court wearing a green mask because it was alleged that he had tuberculosis. The magistrate told the prisoner and all those concerned: "Come to me with a clean bill of health." She refused to proceed with the hearing, and she went to her chamber. Blame her.

2.45 p.m.

Go ahead and blame her and say that she has lost compassion; more magistrates are going to do that. I wonder, if this fellow had a green mask over his face, what we give to the policemen who were in charge and the driver of the van? What are we giving to protect the prison officers? This magistrate was correct, and the day is coming in Trinidad and Tobago where people are going to scorn others. We are going to scorn our own, because we have been careless and irresponsible. Is there a Tuberculosis problem in the nation's prisons? Will this prisoner be taken back to a cell as we know, and possibly put with 12 other prisoners? What about the prison officers there and their families?

Please, Minister of Health, for God's sake help us and stop all the public relations. We need immediate screening of all prisoners suspected of having tuberculosis. [*Interruption*] I am coming to that now, thank you very much for reminding me. We need steps to be taken forthwith for medical attention to all those who have been affected. Listen, Mr. President, that magistrate is saying that such people are a threat, not only to her, but all of society.

This is another very serious matter. The hon. Minister of Health, Sir, reminded us that in 1999 there were 1,180 HIV cases diagnosed in Trinidad and Tobago and half of those were persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, young people; 1,180 cases. I hope my mathematics is right. In one year then in Trinidad and Tobago we have approximately three cases per day of the world's most dreaded disease. One estimate was given recently and it is a very conservative one. It was recently reported that every day, at least, one person dies of AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago. Only second to sub-Saharan Africa is the Caribbean, no wonder they have right now, as I speak to you, the conference in Barbados. The Caribbean is only second to sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. President, it is estimated that in this family which includes Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, I am just talking about the Commonwealth Caribbean, Jamaica and Barbados, are all included in this. Within this Caribbean area one in 50 persons in our region is infected with the AIDS virus; just remember there is no cure. We cannot remain non-committal while the plague of the 20th Century invades and threatens the new millennium society.

I ask the question: where in the budget are special provisions for this most critical area of the nation's health? We await the report of the National AIDS Vaccine Ethics Committee. How long has this committee been appointed by Cabinet? Two years, maybe? It is a long time. What are the findings of the

Cabinet-appointed committee to study the implications of the AIDS vaccine trials in Trinidad and Tobago? We must, as a nation, get serious since this disease has now reached, among us, epidemic proportions. I am troubled and worried about it. Very soon more people will be like the magistrate; people are going to run out of compassion, especially for those adults who refuse to be cautious. People are going to run out of compassion.

When this disease was first discovered and we had a few cases in Trinidad and Tobago, nurses, I understand, stayed far from them as though it was the plague. We definitely need to get serious. The hon. Minister has appealed now to religious groups to lend a hand. I will tell you something: we cannot get across to some of these people, they are not in church, Sir. Certain religious groups I know and other citizens are calling on the Government to assist in the introduction of proper sex education in schools; to find a way of introducing stiffer penalties for maxi taxi, taxi or school bus drivers or conductors involved in intimate relations with schoolgirls. This is not a myth.

We have to get that moral ethic squad to clean up the nation's prostitution avenues and corners and flush out those clubs, which are fleshpots for cheap sex. Do we surrender to the influence of soft porn on the cable channels and the video clubs? Do we think that young people are mature enough to manage the mysterious powers of the hormones? Parents and leaders in the society need to return to those values where morality is virtuous.

The gay question is a touchy one; very sensitive for the church is the question of homosexuality. I understand that AIDS was first noticed in Trinidad and Tobago among homosexuals; now that disease has crossed barriers—heterosexuals and the common tragedy of children of infected parents inheriting this plague. Government needs to know, and all in health need to know that the entire society is under threat from this incurable virus, and the total nation needs to be alerted, notwithstanding the use of needles among drug users and risks in blood transfusion. We must act with courage and determination in addressing this threat to the health and happiness of our society.

At this time, as I said, coordinators of many Caribbean countries are in Barbados. They have been advised by so many, World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), you name it, we are there too. We are planning regional and domestic initiatives to combat this evil. The question I ask: will the heads of governments and the other representatives who are in Barbados, even our representative, we who emphasize tourism so much, will we consider making it mandatory that all

tourists and visitors to Caribbean islands include with their passport an AIDS-free medical certificate?

I know what you would say. We are going to add, of course, that all our local beach boys and beach girls, our local commercial sex workers also need a certificate like that. I know that governments are going to worry; this measure will cause losses in the visits of tourists, that it may be the death of the industry. Well, I hope at that seminar, that consultation in Barbados, they would realize that it is possible to lose an industry, but we can save a society. We definitely have to do it. Sex tourism is not only restricted to honeymooners and other wedded couples, it is also the popular trade where sex is for sale. While we hope to attract abundant tourist dollars, we are telling ourselves that we have to raise, at the same time, about US \$35 million in the region to fight AIDS.

I understand that the United Nations has promised to give us US \$100 million with our programmes down here. We are a threat, not only to the Caribbean, but maybe the whole Western world, this is why the UN is sending this money. It is not only to clean up ourselves, but also to make sure we do not infect anybody in the global village; this is the world's money that is coming down here. Mr. President, this is such a serious matter that it must be high up on the nation's agenda; we have to deal with this immediately. There is no cure up to this point for this plague.

Let me touch on another important matter in the budget, and that is the preparation of young people for the demands of the labour market, particularly in the area of technical/vocational training. I really want to congratulate the hon. Minister for revisiting the concept of the apprenticeship system. It will always be an excellent solution for our unemployment problems. The matter of job creation, Sir, and poverty, particularly in the industrial belt, youth development, as envisaged in the school-to-work apprenticeship programme in the budget, is laudable.

We are aware of the recent community protests in Point Fortin, where residents almost demand jobs at the LNG project, and similarly at Mayaro where there are demands for jobs in industries at Mayaro and Guayaguayare. Have we prepared residents in those and surrounding areas for jobs? Do persons have the required technical skills for such employment? Someone remarked that—and this is important for us in our concern for the preparation of youth and the empowering of young people with various skills—in those industries, whether it be at Mayaro, Guayaguayare, Point Fortin LNG project, Pt. Lisas, Metal Industries in Trincity, the need goes far beyond watchmen or pushers of wheelbarrows. They

do not need watchmen, maybe one or two and a few people to push wheelbarrows. In these industries you need skilled people, and this is where we have failed. We have failed to train our young people and equip them with the necessary skills.

While projects are being negotiated our people should have been in training to fill these jobs. No wonder they have to march now. The managers will say, well, what can you do? We could be watching here or we could mix some cement.

Mr. President, I just want to add that the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development has resurrected this idea. This idea is not novel; he has resurrected an idea, because this question of employment creation and apprenticeship is in the 1997, 1998, 1999 and the present budget; it is there. Let me quote from the 1997 budget:

“It is proposed that the employment allowance...”

The same principle of unemployment allowance—

"which was removed in 1997 that this be reintroduced...The claim of an allowance equivalent to 150 per cent of wages actually paid in respect of every additional worker employed at a salary not exceeding \$4,000 a month."

Undoubtedly, the proposal in the 2001 budget is a fantastic idea. The question we want to ask is: over these years, what was being done? Tell me. What is Government's programme to rationalize existing apprenticeship programmes?

This is not a novel idea; we have apprenticeship programmes all across this land: the National Skills Development Programme, and so forth, we have pumped a lot of money into, \$9 million; the Unemployment Relief Training Programme of the Ministry of Local Government, \$6 million; Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme is a training programme; the National Energy Skills Centre of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries; the new Institute of Technology. What about Servol? They have their training programmes too; St. Michael's School for Boys; Christ College in the Princes Town area, they have all their training programmes; endless training programmes, yet we have a shortage of skilled persons. Something has to be wrong.

Mr. President, I just want to draw your attention to the 1999/2000 Budget Statement page 12 where the Government spoke about the establishment of a National Training Agency. This was a beautiful idea, a grand idea to have a coordinating agency of all the other smaller ones that I have mentioned. Somebody told me that there might be about 500 agencies and institutions in this

country aimed at preparing about 30,000 young people who come out of high school and so forth; a lot of training agencies. What is the purpose of the National Training Agency of which the Government spoke in 1999/2000?

3.00 p.m.

Has the National Training Agency developed any training coordinating policy and plan for the country after 21 months and \$10 million expended since then in the National Training Agency? Where is the plan and policy? Who is to be held responsible and accountable for this? And the very serious question we need to ask is: What has been the role and function of this National Training Agency and the Ministry of Training and Distance Learning in ensuring the proper implementation of all these policies and the co-ordination, too, of these various agencies dedicated to the preparation of the young people? Mr. President, I wonder how much time I have again, Sir.

Mr. President: You have three minutes remaining from your 45 minutes.

Sen. Rev. D. Teelucksingh: I thank you. I just want to thank the hon. Minister of National Security for making mention of the restoration of the old police headquarters. It is one of the loveliest buildings in Port of Spain. I want to add, too, in that same strain, for five years now, both you and the Speaker of the House of Representatives and all of us, in both Houses of Parliament have been talking about urgent repairs for this place, the Red House, and some of us are leaving. This is the nation's legislature and it is one of the loveliest buildings, most handsome of buildings in the city of Port of Spain. Maybe, all of Trinidad. Burnt in 1903; stormed in 1990; shot up on so many occasions.

Mr. President, the question I want to ask is: What funds have been voted in the 2001 Budget under the estimates, for continuation of the roof repairs? It is the only building in Port of Spain that is covered with a tarpaulin besides tents for parties and for preachers. I would like to ask: How much of taxpayers' money—*[Interruption]* If I am coming back to cost overruns? No, I would not go back to that, but it is very important—of all those who have yellow tarpaulins for rent? Mr. President, I cannot believe that in your handsome building like this, the seat of the nation's legislature, that there are yellow tarpaulins flying all over the place. I cannot believe that. For five years we have been complaining about this.

We take poor people's money to carpet this place and when the rain falls the floods are destroying costly carpets. Maybe, there are people in Trinidad and Tobago who will never have carpets like this in their house. But we take their money to carpet the offices of the Parliament. Only to have them sit down and

see this very expensive furnished place be destroyed by water because we could not repair the roof. Can I go back to say—I am not being rude—that they called foreigners here and fete them in a \$100 million fiasco. One cannot believe this. Yes, either World Beat or the Miss Universe Contest.

Mr. President, as far back as 1998—I know you cannot say much on this—this Government appointed Nipdec as project manager aimed at the full restoration of the Red House. And we have been advised that plans for a restored Red House included proposals for office accommodation of Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, to meet with the public and so on, enhanced Committee Rooms—do not talk about the library facilities; they are always in a bad state.

The Government itself has been committed to providing funding for urgent roof repairs to the tune of \$10 million, and Nipdec was required to source the rest of the funds. Maybe, \$100 million to complete the full Red House restoration project.

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. Rev. D. Teelucksingh: Mr. President, thank you very much. I know what Sen. Spence would tell me afterwards. There is always a time in my life when I could break a record.

Mr. President, the proposed relocation of the parliamentary staff; we know about this. We are fixing everybody's offices: offices in Boston, New York and Florida and we are not fixing our own offices. The proposed relocation of the parliamentary staff to the ground floor of the Red House, which was supposed to commence upon the vacation of the ground floor by the Registrar General's Department, cannot proceed as planned. We cannot relocate our staff. This movement of the parliamentary staff, Sir, was to pave the way for the commencement of the much needed roof repairs. Mr. President, let me tell the Government. Unless funding is immediately provided there would be unnecessary inconveniences. And Sen. Daly would say, "we would have to go back to the cubby hole," And there are going to be certainly very, very embarrassing experiences if we have this shifting around during the next parliamentary term. With respect to the parliamentary staff: this is a good time to

pay tribute to them—the sacrifices that they have made to make us comfortable. *[Desk thumping]* If ever there is one group of public servants who have served faithfully under all kinds of difficulties and trials, it is this staff. *[Desk thumping]*

So it is important for me to share these issues with the hon. Minister of Finance and ask him what arrangements are being made to identify funds needed for the start of the next month to commence arrangements leading to the restoration of the Red House roof. And why Nipdec has to source the \$100 million to complete the restoration of the nation's most prestigious building. Be that as it may, when is this full restoration going to begin? If you notice, Tidco would be busy with the roads and Nipdec with the airport. Mr. President, I want to close. I use three more minutes.

3.10 p.m.

Mr. President, allow me to raise an issue from the previous year's budget statement 1999/2000. For the past year, this matter has brought so much hope to hundreds of certain of our senior citizens, namely the depositors affected by the failure of the 1984 Southern Finance Company. Let me quote the hon. Minister who said last year—a year has since passed. The hon. Minister of Finance said:

“...these depositors, who are mainly retired persons...”

I know he is listening:

“...have been deprived of their property for fifteen years. They were offered no hope for recovery by previous administrations.

This Government intends to deal with this situation. I have directed the staff of the Ministry of Finance to work with the Central Bank to determine an ex-gratia payment to these depositors as a measure of relief.”

I know the hon. Minister has done some follow-up work since that time and I will urge the Government to keep that budgetary promise. Do not let it be an election promise. That is an old promise.

I need to say this about the hon. Minister. Many people have said many things about his statement that he took no vow of poverty, but I need to say that I am very impressed with little bits and pieces in his last few budgets about the depressed and the poor. This is important from somebody who has been quoted very often as saying, “I took no vow of poverty”. *[Desk thumping]* It means so much to me to hear him talking about the retired persons and the exploitation in the 1980s by a non-banking financial institution that folded up.

Mr. President, this matter is very dear to me. It has always been. About three weeks ago I visited a sick person who had surgery and she needs funds right now for medical attention. She is one of those surviving depositors. I know a few depositors, Mr. President. Many are teachers and public servants who lost their savings in that 1984 debacle. I most respectfully request, Sir, that Government deal with this issue as an act of compassion and also of justice for those who have given the best of their lives in public service.

So much has been said and will be said about Tobago. I feel very sad that the people of Tobago—in the comments here and contributions in other places too—feel that they have been badly treated. We really need to get together, and this has to be a bipartisan approach to the problem. We really have to get together to solve that issue. For the last five years—and now the parliamentary term is closing—we have not been able to solve that problem of a relationship with a small sister or a brother, or anyhow one calls it. Some people use the marriage analogy. We need to get down and solve that Tobago problem. It is a nagging problem. It is a disgrace in the Caribbean area, as far as relationships are concerned. We have good relationships with so many nations and cannot improve on our relationship between Trinidad and Tobago, the two islands in this partnership.

I would urge Government and the Opposition also, I really feel that both parties—you know, in a sense—I said it one day and I will say it again, an election is coming. I remember saying one day, Mr. President, that during election time the two major parties in Trinidad should do their electioneering in Trinidad and stay out of Tobago. I have said it and I will say it again. Let the UNC and the PNM fellas stay right here and let the Tobago people decide for themselves what they want and who they want and, also, to whom to sell their two seats if they want to do it. [*Desk thumping*] Leave them alone. This is the autonomy for which they have been asking. Yes, certainly, give them that autonomy. Give them that right. They feel used and abused. All the time I hear this. Maybe this is the autonomy that we need to look at, and look at the Tobago House of Assembly Act again.

Mr. President, once again I want to congratulate the hon. Minister and the Government. It has not been easy to run a country as ours where one cannot please everybody. Congratulations. God bless. Thank you, Sir. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Lindsay Gillette): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, I must thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this budget debate, the Appropriation Bill,

2001. Let me first of all say that this is one of the better budgets that I have seen, at least within recent times. It is a budget about people. It is a caring budget. Let me also congratulate the Minister of Finance for his shrewd economic policies over the past five years, for his tightening of the fiscal economy and for his fiscal discipline in bringing us where we are today. As a matter of fact, Mr. President, as I sit in Cabinet sometimes I see many Ministers, and what they all ask for is money. Money is at the centre of everything, and it is very difficult to sometimes manage and say no. To manage or navigate oneself for the past five years and to bring us where we are, with the growth and stability we have experienced, is nothing short of remarkable, and for this he should be commended. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, we speak about credibility. In Sen. Danny Montano's contribution on Monday he spoke about credibility, credibility, credibility, but I am going to use something here which I think—at least from Sen. Daly's point of view, he seems to be using this as the voice of truth or the voice of the conscience of people. On August 31 in the *Business Guardian* it says that the Minister of Finance together with the Central Bank Governor, Mr. Winston Dookeran, invited the IMF to watch over the Trinidad and Tobago finances. This is the real interpretation, Mr. President, pure openness, and that is credibility. Also, Mr. President, in his contribution Sen. Montano alluded to the fact that private business sometimes persuades the Government to really, as he says here, "Clearly to fix themselves or their family businesses". Really and truly, what I want to say is that private business—[*Interruption*]

Mr. President: Mr. Minister, do not comment on that. I ask you to withdraw that statement.

Sen. The Hon. L. Gillette: I withdraw that statement, Mr. President.

Mr. President, one must look at this budget in the context of the other previous budgets. We must look at this whole thing as the aggregate of the previous budgets and see where we are today, and the aggregate of this whole thing really formulates Government policies—what has occurred in this economy over the past five years. As a result of really strong fiscal management, Trinidad and Tobago is well placed to move into the 21st Century and our people can move forward with a clear sense of purpose, identity, mission and enterprise.

For our achievements in human development, as demonstrated in the 2000 Human Development Report prepared by the United Nations Development Programme, the indexes list the following: achievements in life expectancy at

birth, adult literacy rate, combined primary and tertiary gross enrollment and increased GDP per capita. Also, Trinidad and Tobago is now rated within the top five developing countries of the world and this has all come about within the past five years. Mr. President, we can safely say that Trinidad and Tobago, from the socio-economic perspective, is in the strongest position in many a decade. True, we must fix our fiscal policies before we can fix our social problems, and this indeed we have done. I would now turn to certain indicators that I think tell us where we are as an economy.

For the past five years this country has been enjoying the golden age of growth. For the past six years we have had positive economic growth. Growth has averaged 4.5 per cent per annum. As a matter of fact, in 1999 it was at 7 per cent and this is anticipated to continue for the year 2000 to 7.9 per cent, the highest level for the decade of the 1990s. [*Desk thumping*] Unemployment, Mr. President: we have seen unemployment levels falling. It is at approximately 13.1 per cent right now, the lowest it has been in the past 20 years, and this has contributed to the creation of 60,000 jobs over the past four years. Thirty-three thousand of those jobs were created in the expanding services sector; 26,500 in the oil and gas sector; manufacturing—8,700 jobs and transport and storage, roughly 5,000 jobs.

Inflation, Mr. President: I cannot understand why Sen. Jagmohan said that Panadol seems to be doubling in price when if one actually looks at statistics, in September 1998, Panadol was at \$8.93. In May 1999, Panadol was at \$9.38, and in September 2000 Panadol was at \$10.07, roughly a 5 per cent increase each year. The inflation rate in 1999, Mr. President, was at 3.4 per cent. Again, this is expected to remain the same in the year 2000. Previous to 1999 we had inflation rates averaging 5.3 per cent, hence what this is saying is that we have beaten inflation and it is now running at a rate close to those of our major trading partners.

I now turn to debt because I know that it was something Sen. Daly was very passionate about, the country's debt. But let me say something, that our internal debt is well within the prudential range. In fact, relative to GDP, our internal debt was at 21.5 per cent, roughly the same as it was in 1995 and 1990. As a matter of fact, when the European union came together to form one currency and one market, one of the benchmarks that they applied was that as a percentage of GDP internal debt should not exceed 50 per cent, and external debt, likewise, should not exceed 50 per cent. If one looks at our statistics—where is this? I think I will find it later, Mr. President.

Anyway, what I would say is that if somebody leaves university and gets a job, say they get a job and earn \$5,000; they can afford a mortgage and a certain type of car. Ten years later their salary has increased by twice the amount. They get married, they have two incomes, they can now borrow, they can now enjoy a better standard of living, they can buy a bigger house and they can probably upgrade their car. What this means, Mr. President, relative to their cash flow or relative to what they earn, they can afford a better standard of living. What this is saying and, what we must look at in terms of GDP is the percentages and not necessarily just the single debt, and hence as a percentage we are well within our prudential range, despite economic growth.

Sen. Daly: Would the Minister put his hand on his heart and say that the Government has truthfully disclosed all its debt, including guarantees of letters of comfort, in these budget documents?

Sen. The Hon. L. Gillette: I would leave that for the Minister of Finance to answer in his contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Furthermore, Mr. President, when we look at crude oil exports, for example, this now accounts for only 18 per cent of GDP. This was 45 per cent in 1984. Non-traditional exports account now for 25 per cent of GDP, and this in 1984 again was at 6 per cent. Consequently, relative to GDP, non-petroleum activities are increasing its share of GDP accounting now for approximately 78 per cent. Savings, Mr. President: our savings are increasing. As a matter of fact, towards the second half of 1990, as a percentage again we are at 23.4 per cent of GDP as compared to the first half, meaning 1990—1995, of 16.9 per cent.

I promised Sen. John that I would say a bit about tourism, so probably I would. As a matter of fact, I listened to Sen. Daly's contribution when he spoke again about the yachties coming in at Chaguaramas and he asked did the Government, in fact, have a policy on yachties. I do not know. I doubt it very much and, as I said, his research was great. Maybe mother nature was unkind to people in North America and maybe we should thank mother nature, but I would give you a story, Mr. President, about a company called Auto Desk in the United States in the early 1980s.

They went to COMDEX, which is a large computer show in Las Vegas, and they took 10 software packages and the one they expected least to succeed was a programme called Autocad which eventually became one of the world's greatest digitized mapping software programmes, and they built a strategy around this programme. All I am saying, Mr. President, is that in 1995 when those yachties

came to Trinidad, Tidco and this Government were able to accept these people with open arms. They could have gone to Grenada or elsewhere. On the other hand we were able to give the necessary incentives to build marinas and attract people to stay here.

3.25 p.m.

Mr. President, we speak about vision, and over the next 10 years this Government is committed to having less dependence on oil and gas. As a matter of fact, it is known that when a country depends on oil or minerals it eventually over time becomes very complacent as a people. We want to become a learning nation; we want to improve our knowledge-based industries; we want to train our intellectual capital; and we want to keep that here and to this end, we must educate our people. I must commend the Minister of Education when she says education for all. I think this is what we are doing right now. This Government is committed to doing that.

In order really to develop a learning nation also and to develop a knowledge-based economy, we must, of course, liberalize our telecommunication sector. To this end, this Government has been working very assiduously over the past six months in creating and designing legislation to ensure the telecommunication sector does, in fact, open. It will be laid in Parliament shortly. What I am going to do is just talk to you in terms of Government's policies with respect to telecommunications.

Mr. President, monopolies were basically given monopoly statuses in the early 1990s, and a reason for that was to build a local Public Services Telephone (PST), and a public services telephone network was a very expensive proposition and I will give you an example. What happened is that companies from all over the world came to this country and they examined it. You had dense areas and less dense areas. For example, in Port of Spain, you may have densities of 100 homes per mile and in Biche densities of 20 homes per mile. So the cost of doing business in Port of Spain was significantly greater than doing business, for example, in Biche, where the densities were less and that is what you call cross-subsidization. What happened is that companies said, okay, give me the monopoly status and I will build and subsidize it, and hence monopoly statuses were generally granted to operators like what we have here presently.

We are presently operating under a 1936 Ordinance, and the 1968 Act, which really came into effect because of Trinidad and Tobago Telephone Company in 1968. They needed legislation to operate. Think of where we have arrived, in

terms of the whole globe. There is Internet; wired services; wireless services; satellite-based services, using the KU band; the Americas' one cable that brings in information from North America into Central America and into South America; the oxygen cable and video on demand services. So we no longer only have voice services, which is the legislation we are operating on presently since 1938. So Government looked at this matter and created legislation to ensure that we have competition within the telecommunication sector in all services.

Mr. President, there was also something called universal service obligations, which this Government again, is committed to. What this says is that once somebody operates a network—it could be a voice network; it could be a data network; or it could be wired or wireless services—they must provide services to all throughout the country. At present, for example, there is a tele density of 20 per cent, and what that means is that for every 100 people there are 20 telephones. In the developed world, the tele densities exceed 50 per cent. As a matter of fact, in a recent World Bank Report it rates countries by technologies, converging, emerging and submerging. Converging countries are like countries in the United States of America and Europe and emerging countries are like us. Mr. President, under the universal service obligations, we are committed as a Government and in terms of policy to ensuring that there is voice in every home, data, Internet services, and wired services and for whoever competes, whether it is the incumbent or other suppliers who come to compete in this country.

Mr. President, I want to talk a little in terms of interconnection. What is interconnection? It is very difficult at this point in time to award another wired service provider, and the reason for this is, it costs a lot of money. It will cost billions of dollars to put down another wired telephone network operator in this country. What happens in the whole world is legislation is created that says, incumbent operators must interconnect with other suppliers and use their existent infrastructure. So, for example, I may have a voice service here, and I may want to communicate with somebody else who is on the incumbent's network like the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT). I must therefore interconnect, and for that you get a price of interconnection to TSTT. As an example, let me use a rate, maybe 30 cents a minute, but it must be fair. What I mean by that, is the incumbent supplier may also operate other services like data services, and offer wired services. Whatever they charge themselves, they must also charge competitors the equivalent, and this is where the fairness in terms of interconnection comes along. Hence there are no cross subsidies. So this is something that we have to do, so we will create the opportunities for wealth creation through knowledge into the near future by liberalization of the telecom sector.

Mr. President, right now, we operate under internal rate of return legislation, which says that we need to get a return on the existing TSTT network of 17 per cent. What happened was that companies ran inefficient with internal rate of return accounting, because people would eventually buy more and more hardware; they will eventually load up the networks with huge depreciation costs so that you will get your 17 per cent rate of return. We as a country are moving towards price cap regulation and what this means is, let me set my price at a particular value to the consumer, and everybody operates within that price and competes way below it. So what you actually get is the price being driven down by competition.

Mr. President, let me also tell you again about a fallacy that exists out there. On the interconnection, remember, if you have an incumbent monopoly supplier who has 30,000 subscribers and if, for example, you allow competition to come into the market, and you increase those subscribers through more efficient services and technologies to 100,000, remember 70,000 of the network subscribers will have to interconnect and pay the local network supplier a particular fee. So, in fact, what happens is you get more revenue not less revenue. Having the idea of receiving less revenue is a fallacy and you have to understand it in terms of the context of the whole telecommunication system.

Mr. President, this Government is presently implementing a backbone. The Government sees the future in e-commerce, e-government and e-everything. As a matter of fact, the whole economy—digital cash as it is being called. We are in the process right now of implementing a backbone from ministry to ministry allowing e-mail messages, e-commerce or whatever it is to go from ministry to ministry, and hopefully into the near future, going towards the paperless environment.

Mr. President, to this end, Government, recognizing that somehow we need to lead this new revolution into the new millennium, has appointed a committee to review policies on electronic commerce for Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, we have received such a report as of June 2, 2000. What this committee was really mandated to do was to identify four major areas where action is required: develop a world class information technology and telecommunication infrastructure; increasing participation in e-commerce by government business and individuals; clarifying the market place rules for e-commerce operation; and, of course, building confidence in the use of e-commerce for current and potential users. So we must have the necessary framework as we move into the global economy to do e-commerce transactions. As a matter of fact, if you look at the statistics in terms

of e-commerce—and I wish that Sen. Prof. Ramchand was here because he asked me to speak specifically about this—America's telecommunication indicators say that in the year 1999, there were \$150 billion in e-commerce transactions and this is forecasted to reach one trillion dollars, 50 times over the next five years.

So what we see in Government, really, is that over the next five years you will have this huge backbone—it probably would be the largest in Trinidad and Tobago, and probably would be the largest within the Caribbean region—and within the next three or four years you could take this backbone and connect it probably into the private sector where a lot of e-commerce transactions will also occur. This backbone will eventually communicate with backbones throughout the Caribbean region and, probably, through North America. That is how you actually become closer as a global economy, and it is all based on technology and information.

Mr. President, let me give you an example of what communication does when you liberalize communications and it does not really cost a lot in terms of capital expenditure. All you have to do is to have the will to create policy and say, listen, let us deregulate and open up our country in telecommunications.

3.35 p.m.

There is a company in the United States called Web MD Health. What it does through a portal or a web page which one goes to when one requires a prescription filled. One goes to this web and there are hundreds of pharmacists behind this web page just filling out prescriptions and eventually providing delivery if required.

What is to prevent this from actually coming to Trinidad and having our pharmacists filling our prescription? That is what you call the virtual office. When deregulation occurs, what actually happens is that countries who use services—whether it be call services, help desk services or processing services—eventually go to other countries like us where the telecom costs are much cheaper, efficient and reliable and eventually tap into it.

It could be in the area of call centres, of pharmacies, and even in the areas of education. For example, if one wants help on a piece of software programme, dial a 1-800 number, it goes to the United States and is routed back into one's country and there are people behind a computer screen processing the information. That could be at all levels. It could be at the lower levels, medium levels, and at the

university levels. All in all, Mr. President, it is very important and this Government is very committed, as a matter of fact, in bringing legislation to Parliament soon for deregulating the telecoms industry.

Mr. President, I thank you for allowing me to give this contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Eric St. Cyr: Mr. President, before I address the 2001 Budget, let me join with my colleagues in congratulating Sen. The Hon. Carlos John on his maiden presentation. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development on his sixth budget presentation in five years, which must stand as a record. [*Laughter*]

The preparation and delivery of a budget is an extremely taxing exercise—intellectually and physically—and it is good to see the hon. Minister in such excellent physical shape and fully collective and calm. We think he has done the country a great service over the years and I think we should put on record our appreciation of his service. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I took the time to work through the documents and come up with a fiscal operations table. It is just to say that the information is all in the documents provided, but I dare say that if one is not skilled in these areas, one probably might not be able to come to grips with what the budget itself is saying.

I have gone through the information. It is working from the first two pages in the Draft Estimates of Revenue, and it is all there. These are the figures I have come up with: Looking at the current revenue, we have \$10,364 million of tax revenue; \$2,006 million of non-tax revenue for a total current revenue of \$12.370 million. On the expenditure side, current expenditure on personnel of \$3,677 million accounting for 30 per cent of the current expenditure, goods, services and minor equipment amount to \$1,600 million or 13 per cent of current expenditure, transfers are \$4,638 million or 37 per cent of the current expenditure. Interest and debt charges are \$2,375 million or 19 per cent, and I want to target that, because when I look below the line I want to make an addition there and come up with the one issue I really want to address here today; that is the debt service ratio which I think we need to debate.

I made the current surplus just \$80 million which is less than one per cent, which when I take it below the line, I add \$245 million of repayment of past loans. We are anticipating capital revenue of \$847 million, and those three items come to \$1,172 million of capital funds available for expenditure below the line.

The development programme is attracting \$962 million and we come now to capital repayments and financing. The capital repayments and sinking funds are \$3,038 million and I made the necessary financing \$2,828 million. I know that there was a change in cash of \$319 million, so the figures recorded here for financing and my own differ by that amount. When I compare the \$3,038 million of capital repayments and sinking fund with the \$2,828 million of financing, I see that there was a net improvement in the capital position of \$210 million and I think that this is very responsible financial management.

I continue the analysis by grouping the debt service that is capital repayment and interest payments together, and they come to \$5,413 million. The total gross revenues, both current and capital, are \$13,462, and I come up with a debt service ratio of 40 per cent. I think that is high. That is what I really want my presentation, my discussion in today's debate to be about. It is not that in a static way, 40 per cent is necessarily high, but we are dealing with a very uniquely structured economy with a certain history and a certain perspective and, in my own probably more conservative way, I would think that we would need, in the years ahead, to monitor what happens to our debt rather more carefully.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, I wonder if I could ask the hon. Senator—it is difficult to follow all the figures—whether he has taken into account the fact that there may be commitments made for additional debts which were not shown in the figures in this budget. Has he taken that into account, or would those be extra debts? I am saying that there may be some commitments that have been made—letters of comfort and the like—which are not necessarily shown in your data. Are those taken into account?

Sen. Dr. E. St. Cyr: No, I have not taken those into account and I did intend to come to them during the course of my presentation, but they are not included in these figures. One of the more interesting statements in the Medium Term Policy Framework 2001—2003 is on page 7 where it says:

“The most important downside risk to this scenario relates to possible lower oil prices.”

Mr. President, for my concern really to make sense we need to look at the whole problem historically. My initial joining of the debate really comes from the hon. Minister's original presentation on August 28, on page 3, where at the very top of page 3 he said: “We doubled foreign investment”. My question is, is that good? He goes on to say, “We reduced the public debt” and, of course, my question there is, is that true? Thirdly, he said, “We more than doubled our foreign reserves” and my question is, how?

We know that there was a total of borrowing just at the end of the financial year of US \$250 million plus some yen which amounted to US \$104 million for a total net borrowing there of \$354 million. So, I would expect to see a good increase in the foreign reserves because of that borrowing. When I say how, I am really suggesting that we could increase it quite easily if we borrowed just before we reported.

If I may, Mr. President, I would like to make two comments on the budget presentation. I myself believe that the budget presentation should be a very strictly confidential presentation, and although I would expect that the inner circle of the administration would be privy to the content, perhaps, just prior to its presentation, I would think that the time may come when the budget, while it is being presented, if it is also already in the hands of people so that they could be reading it during its presentation—I would think that that is a practice that a wise country should seek to avoid.

3.50 p.m.

There are times when you need the element of strict confidentiality and so, I do not think that it should be shared, other than strictly confidentially, just prior to presentation. I do not want this point to come over necessarily as rapping anyone's knuckles, but I do think that as a nation, I need to make that point so that a tradition could be established where we do not run into the problem that Dr. Hugh Dalton ran into sometime in the British Parliament pertaining to a budget leak. I do not wish to say any more on this openly, but, perhaps, the point has been made.

The second point I make is that my understanding of the budget statement is that when it is presented, it has international circulation almost instantly and so, the credibility of the nation is borne in international financial circles by what the budget statement says. Again, Sir, I do not wish this necessarily to be an extremely bitter pill, though I want the seriousness of the point not to be overlooked. The statements in the budget then must all be really robust statements. I do not think that one should leave open to question any statement such as one could put to the one that:

"We reduced the public debt;"

And have the query: Is this true?

You see, looking at Appendix 16—to which Sen. Daly and others have referred—of the *Review of the Economy*, I do not think, really, that we have

reduced the public debt. In fact, during the period 1992—2000, in most years, our public debt, both internal and external, have shown an upward trend, the internal debt more decidedly upward than the external, so that is not a correct statement.

If I may quote also from the *Medium-Term Policy Framework 2001—2003*. On page 11, we are told that:

"Government will maintain its presence in the international bond market, sourcing two loans of US\$250 million and JPY11 billion during 2000. As such, the external debt stock is expected to increase from US\$1.5 billion (TT\$9.3 billion) as at September, 1999 to US \$1.8 billion (TT \$11.4 billion) by the end of September, 2000."

So that even in the documents which form a part of the budget, it is admitted that the external debt rose and so, it contradicts this statement here that:

"We reduced the public debt;"

More seriously, Sir, the contingent liability is an integral part of the national debt, since if it were not, then there would be no point to letters of comfort. If a letter of comfort carried no seriousness to it, then those making loans would probably not make them. I am going to behave as though the contingent liability is an essential component of the national debt and I have gone through what has happened to the contingent liabilities of the Government from 1992.

They rose in 1992, 1993 and 1994 by comparatively small amounts—\$18 million, \$256 million and \$472 million. Then, they went down in two years—in 1995, \$185 million; in 1996, \$99 million and then from 1997, they have risen astronomically. Between 1997 and 1998 by \$2,157 million; between 1998 and 1999, by \$1,326 million; between 1999 and 2000, by \$3,434 million. These figures have been faithfully reported in the *Medium-Term Policy Framework* so that it is not that they are being hidden or any such thing, it is just that they do not allow that statement:

"We reduced the public debt;"

—to stand.

One would hope that that statement, perhaps, made in a certain context, the context of claiming success on many fronts, slipped in there and I would hope that if any damage had been done by that statement that the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development would put it right before the end of the debate here.

I know that in the presentation here on Monday morning, the hon. Minister began to respond to that point by arguing that much of those debts had been incurred prior to 1996 but had not been booked, but I did hear one of the speakers on the Opposition Bench raise the point that that would be a valid counter argument only if there were no contingent liabilities now in the pipeline not yet booked, but that once these things are continuously going on like that, then it is reasonable to assume that unless there is a major change in the cycle, that there is an average amount of contingency debt in the pipeline to be booked all along.

Talking, though, about contingent liabilities, we had one come to light yesterday and I read in the press today where it was said by one of the ministers that the Senators have a right to know these things so that there was nothing untoward and nothing secret about it.

I see another letter here where there is a letter of comfort given by the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development in support of a seven-year securitized bond for \$54.1 million for a National Maintenance, Training and Security Company Limited loan, so one knows that there are a number of these things out there. For my own comfort, I would ask please, of the hon. Minister, whether it is possible to have, if not a detailed list, but some measure of the quantum of contingency liabilities that are in the pipeline.

Now, Mr. President, I would like to justify why I have focussed on this one particular area of the hon. Minister's budget, when there are so many parts of the budget which are very, very acceptable and very important to the country. Before I explain myself, let me say that realistically we are in an election period when we would expect the country to go to the polls in months, if not in weeks—hardly days—and many of the measures the hon. Minister put in here, I could have anticipated and I think many of them are good in themselves. If some have come over as goodies of the season—and I am not thinking of Christmas—I frankly do not think that they were in any way overdone and I think, in the nature of the country, my view is that the hon. Minister was quite responsible in the way he handled some of these things.

The question that I am asking myself really is: What are the economic policies lying behind the budget in terms of how we conceive of the functioning of the economic system? Because, as I hear the contributions on the side of the Government, the many plans they have—and I thoroughly support the plans for education and human resource development—I think if we do not go in that direction, we would be really off target.

3.50 p.m.

There are times when you need the element of strict confidentiality and so, I do not think that it should be shared, other than strictly confidentially, just prior to presentation. I do not want this point to come over necessarily as rapping anyone's knuckles, but I do think that as a nation, I need to make that point so that a tradition could be established where we do not run into the problem that Dr. John Dalton ran into sometime in the British Parliament pertaining to a budget leak. I do not wish to say any more on this openly, but, perhaps, the point has been made.

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4.05 p.m.

When I listened to the last speaker, the hon. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, talking about telecommunications, again, I say: very good, but the question is who is paying? In other words, is the economic system generating the level of income that enables us to afford these things? That is question one. Question two, are we in anticipation of increased income, financing some of these expansions by borrowing? If so, are we borrowing wisely and—if I could tie that in with Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh's concern—are we, when we implement projects, getting value for money? In my view, personally, one of the great weaknesses of this country is that public projects cost far too much.

If I may give an example of a case that I was quite close to 15 years ago, a certain public facility in the downtown area was being planned and the initial estimate—I do not remember these figures accurately—came in at \$10 million. A month later when the second refinement came, it was \$18 million and going up. Along came a contractor offering to design and build and do it for \$10 million. It

might have been that the contractor was hoping to use that as a sort of loss leader to get a bigger contract that was going. The point I am making is the way we have been doing our projects in the public sector: we start at some global figure, by the time we get a brief and measure an estimate, it goes up. By the time we get the project in place, it probably comes out several times more costly than initially. Had we known that would have been the cost, probably, we would have said, “no”.

In very many cases, if we would say to an international construction firm that is what it costs, they would be flabbergasted that it costs so much. I am not saying that those very international firms, when they come here, come in at prices much below. As you know we have had experiences with the Twin Towers and the Medical Complex and so on. It is an area—I really seriously think—we have to seriously learn how to pin down. Could it be that the use of Tidco—from the report I saw—that they are better equipped to manage these things? But if so, then they must bring them in well within these astronomical costings.

Mr. President, my question, really, to the budget is: what are we trying to do and how? In order to attempt to justify my concern about the debt issue, I would like to just take a short historical tour, reminding us that we did have an old economic order here, just after the war. Then came a strong nationalist movement that moved us in the direction of independence. One of the key elements of an independent nation is an economic system, well in its own control, which could generate the level of income which could make for an independent nation to function as an independent nation.

In the 1950s we embarked on a series of development plans. The first from 1958—1962 in which the emphasis was on infrastructure development. During that period, the economy got a boost because that is the time in which we first went offshore for oil, the Soldado Fields came in. That first period 1958—1962, was a reasonably successful era of our history. The Texaco Refinery came in so we were both doing well as a refining centre and offshore oil had started to come in.

We moved to the second development plan between 1964—1968 when the thought was that we should control the commanding heights of the economy. Again, we had some oil revenues coming in from the East Coast. But, by the time we came to the third development plan, we found that there were very few financial resources to effect the necessary change. That is when we had that very famous statement: “Planning had lost its mystique.” The plan was abandoned. Effectively, what was being said is that we had a plan on paper; we did not have the resources with which to put it in place.

For many years, at the end of the 1960s to the early 1970s, the country was in the doldrums. Then came OPEC, and the price of oil went from approximately US \$2 per barrel to approximately US \$10 per barrel. Suddenly, petro-dollars started to come in, and a certain threatened resignation was changed, and we continued to be led by the “Father of the Nation”.

I am putting this in context because, I read of what is happening to truckers in Europe, the issue is the cost of fuel. I know a great part of it is that they have put high taxes on their fuel. But there are also, at this time, high oil prices because of genuine market conditions. My concern is that if the developed economies go into recession, that could well impact negatively on the price of oil.

4.15 p.m.

I am anticipating my main argument. Do not for any reason get the impression that I do not recognize the value of debt in capital formation, but I am putting it this way: if we make large commitments to debt in a time when the economy is booming, which to a point is what we did in the period 1975 to about 1983, then if perchance the main commodities that we depend on for revenues were to falter, then we could be left with our independence threatened. I think that this is really what happened between 1986 and 1991.

We had been changing the old economic system by industrializing, modernizing the society, developing our human capital, diversifying the base, and many of the things that were done in the 1970s such as the development of Point Lisas and the infrastructure which went with Point Lisas, the electricity generating systems, the roads, the water, and some of our public buildings and so forth, we changed direction fundamentally in the period 1986—1991 from pursuing that strategy, because we had gotten ourselves in a position on account of over-borrowing which allowed the international financial institutions the right to come in and say, "Structural adjustment is what you have to do and these are the rules."

We came to the government of 1986—1991 which I referred to as a phase of the NAR/IMF. The International Monetary Fund will always tell you that you have to cut your suit to fit your cloth; you have to live within your means, budget balance, real rates of interests and so forth.

We continued with stabilization during the 1991—1994 period, which is the era I call the PNM, the InterAmerican Development Bank and the World Bank. What the IADB would tell you is, environmental protection, that is their hobby horse, and the IBRD, the World Bank, would tell you, privatization, that is their hobby horse. But you see you are in the circle.

We then came to a period of growth with foreign investment, which is the period I referred to as the UNC and AmCham. [Laughter] We no longer hear a great deal about the incorporated Chambers of Industry and Commerce of Trinidad and Tobago, they still exist, but what we hear of all the time is AmCham.

Then I asked the hon. Minister: How could part of the answer be that the tremendous growth which has taken place in this country between 1994 and now, undoubtedly, be on the back of foreign direct investment? Taking the long view, my question is: Have we as a nation changed the direction in which we were going, willingly? Are we comfortable to continue going in this new direction or are we there just because we did not manage that boom of 1973—1983 properly, which then allowed the international agencies to take over and really put us back in their discipline? Some would call it neocolonialism, some would call it by the more respectful name now of globalization.

Implicit in the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development's presentation is that all those policies are set. Our fiscal policies are set, our monetary policies are set and we have had policy continuity. This is why I do not think any single government should really speak as though the credit for doing things all belong to it—it is a small country cornered and being swept along, and where up to the 1980s there seemed a way of having a measure of independent, policy option, we lost it and we are continuing in that direction.

We spoke earlier on of the three partners, that is, the tripartite of Government, Business and Labour, and of inflation and ineffective management—I do not want to say mismanagement because that might be loaded—of the major oil boom of the 1970s.

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.

Mr. President: I think we can very well break for tea at this stage and the Senator will continue after the tea break.

4.24 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Dr. E. St. Cyr: Mr. President, I was just about to bring my presentation to the main point I want to make and it is this. After many years of the nationalist struggle and the coming of Independence we were working towards a strategy that would put a strong economic base to an independent nation. I believe that the thinkers of the 1930s, the Trade Union Congress did make one of the strongest presentations to the Moyne Commission on the reorganization of the economy.

We came with a strategy of taking command of the national economy, and I think that the high point there was what was being done in the 1960s and 1970s at Point Lisas. I did say that things went wrong and I do not want it to come across naively that it was mismanagement. I do not know to what extent the entire society realized that we are all responsible. For instance, we did, during that boom, get into some very serious problems of inflation. We also, as a nation, got into some very vulgar, high-consumption lifestyles. And the long and short of it is that we effectively lost round one of the attempt to put a measure of independence to our economy and society.

The question I want to put now is: Have we learnt better how to manage our economic system from that economic experience? I think it is in that context that I was arguing here essentially today, that when the economy is doing well we have a tendency to over-borrow. I was careful to say that there is nothing wrong with borrowing, once the asset that the borrowing finances enhances the productive base. So that the loan could be easily serviced and you generate large returns. So I am not against borrowing. But in the context of a very fragile economy, we have no influence whatsoever on our commodity prices and a lot of our supply is international, so that when our commodities do not perform, the base is knocked out from the economy. So my concern is that our borrowing strategy must be extremely, carefully managed and monitored.

I want to take the opportunity, on this point, to say to the hon. Minister of Finance, that I am not sure about how well the price stabilization fund is being managed. I observed that out of an extra revenue of \$600 million, in the first year, he has raided it to the tune of about \$185 million. In other words, he has dipped into it first time, and when I look at the funds listed, I do not see that price stabilization fund. So that it is not identified. My understanding of how the public borrowing financed by the Central Bank is being treated, is that all funds are pooled together and so effectively, that stabilization fund is not sterilized. It will only be effective if it is held in foreign exchange and invested abroad.

Again, it comes back to a crucial lesson I think we should learn in budgeting here, that when we make the budget the marker commodity price, such as the

price of oil at \$22 per barrel, whatever revenue that brings, we should measure that. If it brings less, we draw from the stabilization; if it brings more, we put into the stabilization. But we did say last time around that the stabilization fund would only serve its purpose if we have a few initial good years, where we are able to build up a sufficient buffer so that we are not at the risk of exhausting it with one blow. But we do have a tendency to over-borrow in good times. The problem is even worse if the purpose for which we over-borrow is not to generate income. And certainly, this is the case where roads are being financed from borrowing, I do not see anywhere that you can really recover and service.

So that the nature of the borrowing is also important. I make a strict distinction between borrowing for putting in a steel plant or an energy-based project and borrowing for infrastructure. I would remind us that the borrower is always subject to the lender, so we must be very cautious in our borrowing.

5.10 p.m.

So, Mr. President, by way of winding up, I believe that we have sort of come full circle. In other words, the way our economy now fits into the world economic system is not vastly different from the way it fitted in 1950. Now, I do not want it to come over as saying that this Government has thrown our gains away, because that is not true. I am saying that when things went wrong in the early 1980s, we lost round one and, since we were saddled with those heavy debts, then we were driven to the international financial institutions. I would not be surprised to think that they would have been just waiting for the opportunity to bring us back in line so that their capital could be used with their expertise to exploit the resources here, both the natural and the human resources.

So, Sir, we have to keep building up what Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt referred to as our stock of social capital, the essential element of which is an understanding of how the world system works and how our own society works, how the two fit together and all the institutions that go with it. So our economic history of the last 50 years is a crucial area which we must understand. But that said, I would think that the two elements that are crucial to putting in a proper long-term springboard would be the area in which the Government is now pressing, and I said that full marks there. They are the human resource development and the other area on which I have spoken so often, supporting Prof. John Spence on this, and the area of raising factor productivity in the production of wage goods, the essential element of which is agriculture.

I wish to take another opportunity to say here that the underpinning of all economic activity, both in closed and in open economic systems, is one's factor productivity in wage goods production, which is essentially food, which derives

first and foremost from agriculture. So I really wish that in our budget presentation the statement could have reflected a deeper, more profound understanding of that policy element. I think, Mr. President, I have said enough to let it be understood that the excellent work over the years of the hon. Minister is recognized and appreciated. The specifics of this year's budget I think displayed both an appreciation of the months ahead but in no way, in my view, is lacking in good sense of responsibility, but my long-term concern is that we do not commit ourselves improperly in the area of debt. I thank you very much, Sir. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Selwyn John: [*Desk thumping*]. Mr. President, I should like to begin by first indicating my support to the measures of the Minister of Finance in the 2001 Budget. Before I get on with my contribution, let me offer my congratulations to my colleague, Sen. Carlos John. I think those who do not know him would have a lot to listen to in the future. He is a John too. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] He is not a Johnny-come-lately and, of course, in due course the Johns will dominate the benches of the Senate. [*Desk thumping*]

I should like also, Mr. President, to convey to Sen. Eudine Job my congratulations, first for her contributions in the Senate. I have not spoken since she has been here but I want to indicate that I have known her for some time. In my capacity as a union leader I have had cause to be on the other side of discussions with her representation of union members and I feel that she would make a very good contribution here in the Senate. [*Desk thumping*] However, let me also congratulate Sen. Job on her recent marriage. I wish her the best. [*Desk thumping*] You know, my children grew up in a trade union atmosphere. Let us hope hers, when they come, would grow up in a parliamentary atmosphere.

Mr. President, I would look at the debate on the budget with a little concern in that when we hear the contributions of people like Sen. Montano who claim that the budget is not a budget, there is nothing that he could speak on or that there is no benefit to the country from the proposals of the Minister of Finance, and then we listen also to the contributions of Sen. Daly, Sen. Dr. St. Cyr and Sen. Marshall, one has to really—maybe the best thing happening to us is that the debate in the Parliament, both in the other place and here, is not getting the media coverage that it should, because one would tend to feel that we are wasting time.

I would draw attention to the fact that I have heard many union members so far in the debate. I am glad they are here. They will listen to me too [*Desk thumping*] because I have been speaking in this Chamber from time to time and, you know, one does not see anything in the print media, and whether it makes

sense or not, I think a free press owes it to the country to highlight or to—whether one's contribution is good or bad—let people know what one says. [*Desk thumping*] The fact that part of this debate tends to look at the next couple of months and the campaigning also takes place here, you know, that too should be out there. But what we are here about—and I feel honoured as a trade union leader to be part of the contribution to the budget, and I feel that we have been—as a labour movement, looking at the developments, one cannot say that we have not benefited.

When we look at the Minister's attempt to keep inflation to the point it is at, that is beneficial to us in the trade union movement. We regard that as maybe we got an increase in pay. Because of the fact that inflation could be kept at that point, we may look at our proposals and our demands for increases a little differently than we normally would. I also would like to consider some of the difficulties that may face us as a country, as a trade union fraternity. At this time the round of negotiations in the public sector is going on, and even in the case of my own union, we are negotiating at present.

Let me announce that today was a successful day for us in our negotiations with the CPO. We may have settled the outstanding pension for daily-paid workers, a matter that has been on the table since 1966. It has come to a point that we could sign. [*Desk thumping*] This is a matter that was raised by Sen. Jagmohan in his contribution, his concerns about the daily-paid pension plan. We have reached to the point where we could sign, through you, Mr. President, to Sen. Jagmohan. I feel it is a good sign for the other unions that we, in dialogue, could reach settlement on issues that are before us.

As you know, Mr. President, the issue of the nurses has been one that came up in this Parliament on several occasions. The teachers have, I think, done a good thing by getting their bargaining unit delinked from the rest of the public service so they are able to deal with the issues of their negotiations and industrial relations, as they say, from a professional point of view. Hopefully, and I do not know, we do not come to the Minister of Finance and discuss with him or negotiate with him terms and conditions for the bargaining units with which we deal. One of the problems over the years, and it has been raised, is the role of the trade union movement throughout the period of crisis in this country.

Let me mention this, Mr. President, that the trade union movement in the public sector has sacrificed since the year 1983 without any increases to talk about. So that if there is any uproar at this time, the signal from the trade union

movement is that the time has come for us now to receive some adjustments so that we would continue to—well, I cannot say to have that balance that we had. We have lost considerably. We have lost by legislation reducing pay by 10 per cent. We have lost things like our cost of living allowance. We have seen increases in prices in goods and services, in the utilities, but we have not been able to have corresponding increases in terms of raise in pay or better conditions *per se*.

5.25 p.m.

Mr. President, the fact is, I make the statement in Parliament that the trade unions' contribution to the improved economic climate in this country cannot be underscored. We have sacrificed and reached to a point that the trade unions would—and they are right at this time—look for improvement in pay and working conditions. [*Desk thumping*] What we feel would happen is that the trade unions would do their part also in improving the quality of life of that sector of the population that has been under pressure for this length of time.

I would like to make a point and maybe address it to the trade union movement. I have been in this Parliament for the last five years having been appointed on the Government Bench and recommended by the National Trade Union Centre of Trinidad and Tobago (NATUC). One may criticize me for not coming here and threatening the Government or trying to bring down the Government, because I belong to the trade union sector. One must understand that the trade unions cannot continue to feel that we are in a world that we were in 20 years ago. We have to control our own destiny that is dictated, not by forces inside, but mainly by forces outside. The global economy is not something that we are in a position to turn around. We have to develop ourselves to deal with the issues that confront the movement.

Mr. President, sometime ago, this Senate was informed of an agreement that was signed between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank of a highways upgrade loan, in which a conditionality was imposed. Workers who were employed by the Highways Division of the Ministry of Works and the Roads Division of the Tobago House of Assembly had to be terminated and maintenance work had to be contracted out. This agreement was made in 1994.

Hon. Senator: By which Government?

Sen. S. John: I do not know, but whichever Government was here in 1994 entered into that agreement. The workers that were involved totalled

approximately 10,000 in all. There were approximately 9,100 workers in Trinidad and the rest were in Tobago. This was not unique to us here in Trinidad. Conditions like that were being imposed by most, if not, all the multi-lateral lending agencies, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago felt that they should enter into such an arrangement. Mr. President, to cut a long story short, no trade union could accept that kind of arrangement. We cannot stay and see our members being put out of work, particularly, from the dictates of the multi-lateral lending agencies.

Mr. President, I could talk about my union because on two occasions, I had to go to Washington to have discussions with the Inter-American Development Bank on this matter, and they pointed out that their loans must take into account the question of the ability of the borrower to administer and carry out its operations in a manner which was agreed upon. We felt that it was not only the Government's task to fight issues like that, but since the trade unions were affected, they must also assist in the fight.

Mr. President, today, what we have been able to do as a trade union movement—and this has been confirmed by the Inter-American Development Bank—is to get the Inter-American Development Bank to remove that conditionality. It was removed because the trade unions were able to point out to them that the cost they were speaking of had to do with all the operations that were involved—the administration, the consequential wages, salaries and material that had to be used. We as a trade union movement were able to show them that if we continue to do the operations with proper administration, we could bring that cost to a level that could be done cheaper rather than contracting out work. This is a problem in the country that we have been talking about—the contract system of work in which, even though there is a fixed contracted price, there are overruns and increases on those prices, particularly where there is a situation like the global economy where foreign contractors are outbidding the local contractors and having the benefit of all these things.

Mr. President, what the trade union movement has been able to do, and it has been confirmed by the Inter-American Development Bank, was to reduce the cost of operation by 18 per cent, which is much lower than if they had contracted out the work, and also improve the productivity of the workers by 38 per cent. They were satisfied after one year of operating it in that manner, and today, the Inter-American Development Bank has agreed to remove that conditionality from the highways improvement loan. I have not seen the Minister of Works and Transport, but let me thank the Minister for his support in that issue. The workers

who might have been laid off at that time have now been reinstated and we are able to say, at least, we have been able to have the multilateral lending agencies change their thinking, and hopefully we feel that they should continue that way.

Mr. President, I say so because I am not too sure that with a change of Government at this stage, and from what we heard from Sen. Danny Montano, that workers could get justice from another government coming here. [*Desk thumping*] I want to feel that after four and half years of dealing with the previous administration, as a trade union leader, I had lost hope in the ability to get implementation of even agreements that were reached between that government and the trade union movement. I have no problem thinking that the then Minister that we dealt with at the time, Sen. Draper, Member for Port of Spain North—he was a senator—would sit with us and have dialogue and reach agreement with us, and my side would be coming out the meeting buoyant and I am sad. When Mr. Giuseppe asked, “why do you not cheer up?” I would say, “Mr. Draper again agrees with something and we are not too sure whether it would be implemented.”

Mr. President, we have had this throughout that whole period until this Government, which is led by a trade unionist, who knows the suffering of workers and came and changed all of that. All those matters that were hanging fire from 1991—1995 were able to be settled. The last, I would say, is a pension plan that had been outstanding since 1966, and today I could say it is now settled.

5.35 p.m.

Mr. President, our discussion on the budget, as a trade union movement, recognizes several features. One, that from a planned expenditure of \$13.4 billion, out of a projected revenue of \$13.6 billion, there would be a surplus. We are happy, as a trade union movement, about this because it brings a measure of relief to us, in that we could anticipate at least the economy being buoyant and jobs being readily available. At this time—and we could say as a movement—there is a boom, a mini boom, however you look at it. The construction industry is in full swing; there is a shortage of labour in construction. I myself have some difficulty with it because my union is building houses and the tradesmen are being attracted by higher remuneration and we have to be fighting to retain some of them. This is a good sign for us; a good sign for the economy and for the country, because once construction is in full swing, the economy tends to be up, as well as employment.

We want to congratulate the Government on the measures that have been in place that could create this atmosphere where we are seeing the benefits of the economy trickling down to people in the lower strata.

The question of the price of oil: we feel that the Government has capped it at a conservative figure. Maybe it could have been a little higher, but I think that the Minister was correct in fixing it at US\$22 per barrel. This should give us some comfort and maybe the stabilization fund for this financial year, for this period, would benefit immensely from those surpluses.

Then again, one has to look at the countries that are in difficulty because of the high price of this commodity. Even OPEC has now been looking at whether they should not increase the amount of oil on the market to bring the prices down and hopefully, it ought not to interfere with the forecast made by the Minister. We have to consider the fact that the Government has continued its emphasis on the economy being less dependent on oil. I would feel that we are well on our way to developing an economy that would be more sustainable.

With the global environment, quite a lot of work needs to be done, moreso, the cooperation of the trade union movement which has already begun. We have been meeting as social partners under the tripartite forum and we are addressing issues in which the ordinary worker benefits, even though he does not really understand. We are hopefully trying to bring about the understanding of the ordinary worker on issues like this, by changing the education programme. We are now going to workers rather than them coming to us. We are seeking the cooperation of employers to get some time during the working day, 10 or 15 minutes, to deal with certain issues, because ordinarily if we arrange a seminar we are confined to the number of persons who are there. How many persons would show interest in coming to sit in a classroom atmosphere? So when we go on the job and address workers, we are able to get a message to more people at that time and we field some questions. We feel out the workers and their thinking on certain things.

As a matter of fact, one would be surprised at the sort of questions posed to us when we deal with the issues that are presented in this budget by the ordinary worker on the shop floor. One cannot underestimate the kind of thinking. That is the reason for my disappointment on the media coverage of the debate in Parliament. I understand one radio station is broadcasting us almost every day, but when it is aired, workers are on the job. I feel that what we used to have some years ago, 8 o'clock at night, there should be a programme that could highlight the debate in Parliament on issues similar to those which are raised in the budget.

Mr. President, we are happy to say that some of the requests that we have been making over the years have now been realised in this budget. We have seen issues such as releases, budgeting done in which moneys for wages are put there, but materials for workers to carry out the job are not put into the budget and workers are accused of idling. I have seen National Housing Authority workers demonstrating in front of the head office, not on grievances or issues of dismissal and so forth, but merely to have money issued or released to get materials so that they could work.

We have seen the Minister now making provision from the 90 per cent wage to 10 per cent material ratio, to an improvement in which the material part of the vote has been improved. What we would like to see also is some consideration for protective gear and implements that are needed. We have to improve the technology for workers to produce. Instead of having cutlassmen who work from 5 in the morning swinging a cutlass to clear places, why not have bushwhackers? We get better work from them.

Twenty years ago on a visit to Singapore, Mr. President, the workers there used bushwhackers on the verges, the curbs and the pavements. We are still in that era in which workers have their cutlasses with their files and toil to do a task that they could produce more if the technology is improved for them. We ought to move into the modern era to have these things done. It is a matter that we raised in our discussions with the IDB and they seemed enthusiastic about it. They are prepared to sit with the governments that they deal with to discuss issues like that.

While I am on that, we have a very big disappointment in that the Government's effort to improve legislation on injury and health has not been passed in Parliament. A Bill was presented, brought to Parliament and the Opposition opposed it. They refused to support it. [*Desk thumping*] After almost 20 years of considering an improvement to the Workmen's Compensation Act to provide for employment injury and health, a Member of the Opposition in the other place submitted that if his workers come one day and say they are not working because of health and safety considerations, because of conditions that could either injure them or kill them, he could lose. So the Opposition on that basis refused to support measures that would provide for protection of workers in the case of injury to their limbs and death on the job. I am hoping beyond hope that it may not be too late for the Government to bring it back, and let the Opposition deal with the masses of workers who intend to come and demonstrate their support for that measure. [*Desk thumping*]

I remember myself being part of a committee 20 years ago with now Justice Monica Barnes as chairman, appointed by the People's National Movement and that same party, when the Bill was ready for parliamentary approval, opposed it because it would affect one of their Members who employed about 12 persons. So thousands of workers in this country continue to have little or no coverage on issues of health and safety. As I say, maybe people are not sensitive to workers and their welfare. As I mentioned, every time we met with Sen. Draper, the then Minister of Public Administration, and reached an agreement, I used to be the saddest man, because I know that we did not, and he did not, have the ability to convince his colleagues to implement.

Sen. Brig. Theodore: He was willing but the party would not let him. That is why Draper is not here. *[Laughter]* They were holding back “de” plan.

Sen. S. John: Another matter that has been raised in the Senate was the issue of the minimum wage. We support it as a trade union movement. We are represented on the Minimum Wages Board as one of the social partners. What the Government did was to bring a universal minimum wage and we had some hiccups because, remember, some of the Independent Senators were not prepared to support the Bill as it was. It went back; there were consultations and it became a point that even though we had the assurance that the employers generally were in support of the minimum wage, we lived to see that we have over 100 cases before the court where employers—the fact that that came into force—reduced the pay of people who were getting more than the minimum wage, telling them that the Government fixed that so that is what they would pay.

5.50 p.m.

Then, again, we have to consider improvement on that and the trade union movement has been and would continue pressing for an increase in that minimum standard. We feel that \$10 an hour is a reasonable figure for people who are not represented by the trade union movement or have the protection or the representation of the trade union to fix better standards than that. We urge the Government and the Minister to review that and raise it as time goes by, so that what we are dealing with would be a \$10 an hour minimum wage, which is \$80 a day. If one looks at the average pay of people, one would understand the difficulty for a family—a man, his wife and probably two children—to get along on that.

We feel that the Government's measure in establishing the Agriculture Disaster Relief Fund is a good one. That was contained in representations to the Minister by the trade union movement to have such a relief available to farmers, particularly those who are affected by flooding and natural disasters.

I have been hearing of the farmers in Aranguez. I came out of Aranguez. I was born in Aranguez. I grew up in Aranguez and I could tell you of the difficulty of the farmers of Aranguez and the difficulty for a farmer, when his garden has reached the point for him to reap, he is suddenly hit by a flood and his whole year's work is gone because of a natural disaster. We feel the protection that is being offered and the introduction of the Agricultural Disaster Relief Fund has been a good thing.

We also feel the increase in the ceiling of the mortgage loans and the increase in the stamp duty are also good things. We are in the housing business, too. We build houses as a trade union. We offer, besides the normal bread and butter issues, shelter to our members and we feel those are good measures. They would encourage more people to get into the building of houses, not merely the low-cost housing units. There are people in the upper brackets as well who need houses. We have made the point.

I do not think the Government alone is expected to provide housing for the population of Trinidad and Tobago. The Government has done a lot. It could do more, mind you, but it is incumbent on organizations and people like us to lend assistance and get involved. It is not an easy thing for a trade union to get involved in business but we have bitten the bullet and we have succeeded. We have finished the first estate at Real Spring in Valsayn and I invite Members of Parliament to go and look at it. It is just at the side of the Valsayn Teachers' Training College. We are about to finish another one in Lopinot. I am proud of those houses.

I feel that far more could be done by organizations. First, by the trade union movement in assisting its members and the public with shelter, and by other people looking at it as a commercial thing. It offers quite a lot of benefits—assistance in creating more employment. Let me say, over the last couple years, we have kept almost 1,000 construction workers employed regularly. I think they have benefited, as well as the recipients of the houses. Union members, too, have benefited.

We welcome the tax exemption offered by the Minister in his support of art, culture and sport. We come across many workers who are active sportsmen, some of them representing this country in cricket and football and you would not believe the kinds of attitudes shown by employers to people who are selected to represent the country. Many of them do it by losing pay. We are proud when they succeed. We follow every movement, but few people know the kinds of sacrifices these sportsmen have to make. I am calling on the employers of this country that

whenever an employee of theirs is selected to represent the country, they should be prepared to assist at least by meeting their wages. They should not lose by doing so. [*Desk thumping*] I feel that the Government has done its part and succeeding governments, once it is drawn to their attention that some of these national sportsmen are unemployed, efforts have been made to offer to them some sort of employment.

In the private sector, do you know how many of these people lose their jobs because they were selected to represent their country? I mean, it is not fair. We are proud of them. Some of these employers are named father of the year and all kinds of things, but when the union goes to them and says, “Look, we are asking for consideration of pay for this worker who is selected to represent us.” They say, “No.” They tell us they are prepared to make a contribution if you have a list. We tried it one day and the employer put \$20. No. That is what we are faced with. I think the Minister ought to be complimented on giving that incentive.

The family assistance to single mothers—I am asked to draw attention to the reality of life. There are single parents—mother or father. It is a difficulty whether you are a mother or a father. We are suggesting that serious consideration be given to this. I think I heard other people recommend it and the trade union movement is in support of that.

We compliment the Minister on improvement in pensions for retired public servants. We have come across people who served in very senior positions—one permanent secretary who retired 30 years ago—living on the pension that came out of that employment 30 years ago. One has to look at those things. I feel the Minister has started something that is very productive. We cannot, when people have served us, turn our backs on them and the trade union movement congratulates the Minister on that. Workers are now affluent.

The one time concession to taxpayers on the filing of tax returns, we welcome that.

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. [*Hon. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. S. John: Mr. President, I am winding up. I did not want to talk for so long. I had rationed myself to 20 minutes.

We welcome that and we welcome the improvement on the basic personal allowance. That, to us, comes like an increase to workers. We are in just that bracket where workers have to pay some taxes; some of them have to pay a lot of taxes.

Generally, this budget allows for us in the trade union movement, a lot of flexibility. In terms of government employees, it allows us the opportunity for improvement in wages, in salaries and in allowances. There has been, in terms of improvement to daily-paid workers particularly, at long last, the introduction of a medical benefit plan. It is for public employees. We want to congratulate the Government on agreeing to it. Workers are not generally looking for hefty wage increases, but if they could get ease from direct expenses, from medical and other benefits, it helps.

Let me address one issue here before I finish. We have, over the years, inherited a strange phenomenon, that we are required to employ many people for security purposes. You would have heard the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association talking about security in schools and we had security in the post office and in every government building. The number of security personnel who have to be employed is a cost that affects many people in this country but it more particularly affects the employment of the daily-paid workers in the public sector. There is nothing wrong. It is employment for people. But, where the emphasis has been now on security, and mind you, security where we wonder sometimes: What is really being secured?

They still emptied 34 computers in the Curepe Presbyterian School last week with four watchmen, caretaker and everything. In the Ministry of Works and Transport this week, 22 vehicles were parked overnight. The next morning, no alternators or starters. It is becoming a problem to us. It is a problem. What do we do? Why do we have to engage so much security personnel? We never had that before.

6.05 p.m.

I have witnessed going to the licensing office in St. James to renew my permit and I had to wait until 9 o'clock, because the security did not arrive. I am raising this as an issue. I think we ought to examine this and find ways and means of spending the resources in a manner that could be productive to us in this country.

In our discussions with the Inter-American Development Bank, what has come out is that the cost of our operation becomes very high when we spend the resources on trifles, as they call it. I am prepared, from the trade union

movement, to enter into dialogue with the powers that be, to find ways and means of reducing these costs. What I feel is, if we could have more productive jobs that, in terms of government's goods and services, could bring savings to us, it would benefit not only the Government and its resources but also the country generally.

I want to end my contribution by congratulating the Minister. I know what it is to serve in that capacity for five years. I have been in employment with my own organization. This is my fiftieth year. *[Desk thumping]* I want to thank Sen. Jagmohan for the compliments he paid to me. We worked together for approximately 42 years in the trade union fraternity. *[Desk thumping]* Both he and I are retiring at the same time. *[Laughter]* I think I have served and I have done my part.

I have seen a change in industrial relations; where the trade union movement accepts their part in a dialogue. They are part of the productive units. They sit and they are prepared, and they continue to meet with the employers to find ways and means of improving conditions for workers. But, more so, to make the jobs more profitable and productive. I think it is a welcome sign.

We appeal to the Minister, there is need for assistance to the trade union movement in getting resources. Just as you give any of the other non-governmental organizations, the trade union movement must also benefit. We have to meet agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Paris Club. We must be able to have dialogue on an even setting with them. How do we do it? How do we train our people to do it? We feel that the expenditure—the Minister's provision in the budget—for the trade union centre should continue because we need to carry out our education programme. We need to bring our officers on par with the people with whom we have to dialogue. But more so, we need to be able to deal with the other social partners on an equal footing.

Mr. President, thank you. *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. Jearlean John: Mr. President, I liken the time of my contribution to that of a night watchman. Thanks to my good Senator, brother Selwyn John. I have an audience; spectators are not gone as yet. I know this role is very important, because it is one to keep the team alive and in tune for the next day's play. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this 2000/2001 budget debate.

Again, I would like to extend my congratulations to Sen. Carlos John on his maiden contribution. Mr. President, I am sure that you will agree that the

quadrupling of the Johns in this House has added a new dimension to this Senate. *[Desk thumping]* I think it is a case of four Johns are better than one.

Mr. President, I also want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for putting people first. This is reflected in many of the measures allocated for in the 2000/2001 Budget. Those of us who have received formal training in management were taught this principle in theory: people-centred management is one of the terms used to describe it. But, Mr. President, you need persons with an eye on the future; a deep, social consciousness and the strength of character to take the bold step to do something with this now universal phenomenon.

A national budget simply put, is really, a treatise on the nation's financial health. When I read the *Review of the Economy 2000*, the introduction outlines the financial indicators. These, I really would not go into because we had such outstanding contributions from both sides of the Senate. I am certain the Minister and his staff would have studied these very carefully, as a national budget, and that is not compiled in abstract, but predicated on realistic expectations.

Mr. President, it is for this very reason I support this budget. I have been following the debate, both here and in the other place, and indeed I have no choice but to sit here and listen. I support it, not because it is a bag of goodies—the hon. Minister of Finance was clear that this is not so—but because the measures were carefully thought out to ensure that there is a trickle down effect. That is important to me and I will tell you why.

Mr. President, I do not know if you recall some years ago, because of a very intense crisis in an African country—I believe the country was experiencing an extended period of drought—which resulted in a severe shortage of food: people were dying. Some socially conscious artistes came together and sang a song: the proceeds of which were donated to that country to buy food. The title of the song was “Do they know that it is Christmas?” Many times when I see the poor and dispossessed I remember that song “Do they know it is Christmas.” When Bob Marley sang “meh belly full but meh hungry” and “a hungry man is a angry man” he told us something. That is why I like walking through the streets. I do so every time I can. In the street there is a different set of expressions: the people are real, they know whether their bellies are full or if they are hungry. When we sit in this House to debate pieces of legislation, it affects those lives. It becomes the guiding principles: the rules for our own protection. One of these days a man, for instance, with a bag of avocado will have to produce a receipt to convince someone in authority that he came by it legally, and the old aunt who, he claimed, gave it to him, will have to be found to back up his explanation.

Mr. President, someone has to keep the hope alive to ensure that our people know it is Christmas. We have to keep it real in this place. One imperative of a government in office is to promote the well-being of citizens and cushion the burden of poverty on the more vulnerable in society. What does this mean to the people of Trinidad and, for that matter, Tobago? The population of Tobago is approximately 51,000 with 59.5 per cent in the age range of 0—34 years, a very young population. Of that, 27.6 per cent is in the bracket of 0—14 years. How does the budget impact on them? That is why I was so pleased with the introduction of universal education—Tobago is included—and the School-to-Work Apprenticeship Programme. More than 50 per cent of the Tobago population is under 35 years of age. Mr. President, the problems affecting the mainly rural Tobago exist also in some Trinidad communities, for example, Toco, Matelot, Blanchisseuse, Brasso Seco and Sans Souci.

6.15 p.m.

I remember being director of a state agency and this agency was charged with the responsibility to train people who did not have basic skills. I had the time of my life explaining that marketing, to a young person in Barataria, Tunapuna, La Romain, was different from marketing to some person in Charlotteville or, for instance, Toco or Matelot.

Mr. President, the young persons from urban centres have access to the newspapers, television, and more likely than not, taxis, maxis and buses pass up and down their main road. To market in Charlotteville—and you know, Mr. President, that is one of my favourite places—I suggested that the institution find the village elders or approach the church, as that too is a communication tool in these rural areas. When I attended Charlotteville Methodist School more than 50 per cent of the students who sat the Common Entrance Examination failed, in my year. I am talking about over 20 children. There was some aspect of post primary then, but that school-leaving certificate took them nowhere.

I, fortunately, passed for Roxborough Secondary, to the eternal gratitude of my father, I had not shamed him, but my female cousin, however, who was already 12, had not passed, so she went on to sewing school. I do not want to speculate on where she is today and how different her life would have been if she had, indeed, passed her Common Entrance Examination. This is a real example and it is one which should be applied when Sen. Prof. Ramchand puts the Motion before the Senate, what is education and what is education for. The child from Charlotteville faces the same difficulty as the child from Matelot, the child from

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Blanchisseuse, Brasso Seco, Penal Rock Road or Chin Chin; they are cut off and locked out, almost, of a system they did not create.

The hon. Sen. Montano spoke of an acquaintance's experiences in Cuba, but if this Government had not taken some bold steps and initiated its plan for universal education, one would not have had to go to Cuba, because Blanchisseuse is just up the road, Sir.

Mr. President, when you are born into humble circumstances the experiences of those circumstances never go away. At the very least there is something that keeps you grounded. I believe it is against this background that the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development took on an almost personal crusade to be there for the small man. No one can deny that the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development is himself a humble man; he has stated so on many occasions, that he too came from humble beginnings.

If my grandmother, indeed, were alive, she would have thanked him, because she would have been grateful for receiving \$720 per month now. The old age pension increased by \$100, and there are real people who are overjoyed because out there, there are real people affected by this increase. In here it is called a budgetary measure, out there it is the difference—[*Interruption*]

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. President, on a Procedural Motion here, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until the conclusion of the contribution of Sen. Jearlean John.

Question put and agreed to.

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Sen. J. John: Thank you, Mr. President and hon. Senators.

That \$100 is the difference whether you go to school or "yuh ent" go to school. It is the difference between whether you drink milk tea or you drink hot water tea, as we say in Tobago. It is the difference between whether you eat or the days you are going to go hungry. It is the difference between what you juggle, meaning whether you buy the "pressure" pills and then you leave the "sugar" up

to God; \$100 makes a difference to many people. [*Interruption*] The spectators have gone now.

Sen. Barbara Gray-Burke gave an example in her contribution of children finding themselves orphans because their parents died in an accident, but the reality is that many children find themselves orphaned and both sets of parents are alive. Mr. President, that was my experience.

My mother decided to migrate to Trinidad but, obviously, forgot to inform my father; I guess she left him. My father nursing his broken heart, at that time it was called "tabanca", but whatever it was called the six children from the marriage found themselves *persona non grata* in the home, because my father found himself experiencing that phenomenon called second spring.

Mr. President, I being the second child, at 10 years old I took charge of the family, which included a several-months-old baby, my youngest brother. I packed us up, turned up uninvited on my grandmother's step, determined not to return to my father's house. My grandmother and grandfather lived alone and in peace in their house. Having already raised their children, they were suddenly saddled with the responsibility of raising six young, robust children on an old age pension. I think at that time it was between \$40 and \$60.

Mr. President, \$720 to mother would have been a king's ransom, as my ever generous father gave her \$35 on pay week. We have what we call "trust week" in Tobago, the week "yuh didn't get pay". My grandmother, as I am sure many grandmothers, would want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development for that \$100 increase, because to them it is not just a budgetary measure, it is survival.

In conclusion, I want to put it to the Senate that the Opposition consists of both honourable and patriotic people, but there are differences. I believe that we should stick with what works. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] I have been fortunate to witness the goodness of this country through many sets of eyes. Our people in the final analysis must be able to look back on this time, our time, this place, and this stage, and say of us that we kept the faith. Let them say that we helped them realize their hopes and their dreams, and let them look around at this great and good nation that we are all so proud to share, and say, "only in Trinidad and Tobago".

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Mr. President, I thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Thursday September 14, 2000, at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.22 p.m.