
THE House of Assembly Debates

(OFFICIAL REPORT)

FIRST SESSION 1991 – 96

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, November 26, 1991.

Pursuant to the adjournment, the House of Assembly met at 12.15 p.m. on Tuesday, November 26, 1991.

PRESENT

His Honour L. A. WEEKES, G.C.M., J.P., (Speaker)
His Honour T. C. ESTWICK, B.Sc., LL.B. (Deputy Speaker)

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD, B.A., M.A., (Econ.), J.P., (Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs and Minister for the Civil Service)

Mr. H. deB. FORDE, Q.C., M.A., LL.B., (Leader of the Opposition)

Hon. B. M. TAITT, B.A. (Hons.), M.P.A., LL.B. (Hons.), (Minister of Health)

Hon. P. M. GREAVES, Q.C., B.A., (Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Works, Communications and Transportation and Leader of the House)

Hon. M. A. KING, Q.C., LL.B., (Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs)

Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN, A.I.C., M.I.A.S., J.P., (Minister of Labour, Consumer Affairs and the Environment)

Hon. N. K. SIMMONS, (Minister of Justice and Public Safety)

Hon. H. A. BLACKMAN, B.Sc.(Econ.), (Minister of State, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs)

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR, M.Sc. (Econ.)

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS, Q.C., LL.M.

Hon. C. V. WALKER, (Minister of Education)

Mr. L. L. BRATHWAITE, J.P., (Chairman of Committees)

Hon. E. E. GREAVES, B.A., Ed.M., (Minister of Housing and Lands)

Hon. W. W. HALL, G.C.M., H.B.M., (Minister of Tourism and Sports)

Mr. C. LeR. TROTMAN, M.A.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS, B.A., Cert. Ed.

Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON, LL.B. (Hons.), (Minister of Community Development and Culture)

Hon. H. B. St. JOHN, Q.C., LL.B.

Mr. L. R. TULL, Q.C., M.A.

Miss B. A. MILLER

Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM, Q.C., M.A., M.Sc. (Econ.)

Mr. J. O. TUDOR

Mr. D. W. BOWEN

Mr. G. W. PAYNE

Mr. R. C. EASTMOND, B.A., LL.B.

Prayers were led by Rev. Father Ivan Harewood.

MINUTES

Mr. SPEAKER: The House is in session. Minutes of Tuesday, November 19, 1991.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, I move that those Minutes to which you have made reference be taken as read and confirmed.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I second that, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: If there are no corrections, then let these minutes stand confirmed.

PAPERS

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of the Insurance Corporation of Barbados for the year 1990.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' NOTICES

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for Christ Church West's Resolution to annul the Social Security (Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg leave to give notice of the following Resolution:

"WHEREAS the National Insurance and Social Security Act, Chapter 47 (the Act) provides in Section 50 that all regulations made under the Act should be subject to negative resolution.

AND WHEREAS the National Insurance and Social Security (Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations, 1991 contained in Statutory Instrument No. 140 were made under the provisions of the Act on the 30th day of September 1991 and laid before the House of Assembly on the 19th day of November 1991.

AND WHEREAS Section 41(7) of the Interpretation Act, Cap. 1, provides that Statutory Instruments which are subject to negative resolution:

- (1) shall, as soon as may be after they are made, be laid before this House; and
- (2) shall be annulled if this House, within the statutory period makes after any such instrument has been so laid

resolves that the instrument should be annulled.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT this House annul the National Insurance and Social Security (Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations contained in Statutory Instrument 1991 No. 140."

Aside.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: For the time being, I will amend it in Committee.

Mr. SPEAKER: The same Honourable Member, Resolution to permit live broadcast of major debates.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to give notice of the following motion:

"WHEREAS it is the right of the people of Barbados to receive information particularly on matters of importance to their social and economic well-being,

AND WHEREAS communication of debates of this House by live broadcast on radio and television is an

affective way to give meaning, definition, and respect to that right,

BE IT RESOLVED THAT this House permit the live broadcast of all major debates, in particular debates on Budgetary Proposals, including any Supplementary Budgetary Proposals and on motions of no-confidence."

NOTICES OF QUESTIONS

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for the City - Government's overdraft balance with the Central Bank of Barbados.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Mr. Speaker, Sir, notice of Question 35 to ask of the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs: Will the Minister state the Government's overdraft balance with the Central Bank of Barbados at close of business on November 22, 1991?

FIRST READING OF BILLS

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill to amend the International Monetary Fund Act, Chapter 18A be read a first time, Sir.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question that the Bill be read a first time was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to revise the law governing the International Business Companies be read a first time.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question that the Bill be read a first time was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, I am moving that the following Standing Orders be suspended for the remainder of today's sitting: Nos. 6, 16, 18, 20, 42(5), 43, and 44.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I second that, Sir.

The question that those Standing Orders be suspended for the remainder of the day's sitting was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. SPEAKER: Order No. 9.

Order No. 9 was called.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order No. 9 has been withdrawn. Now we are doing Order No. 1. Which one? Order No. 9.

ORDER NO. 9 – TO MOVE THAT THIS HOUSE
RESOLVE ITSELF INTO COMMITTEE OF
SUPPLY TO CONSIDER THE GRANT
OF SUMS OF MONEY FOR THE
SERVICE OF THIS COUNTRY

On the motion of Hon. P. M. GREAVES, seconded by Hon. B. M. TAITT, the House resolved itself into Committee of Supply and Mr. L. L. BRATHWAITE took the Chair.

12.25 p.m.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The House is in Committee of Supply.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1991-92 NO. 1
– \$41 785 428 HEAD 36 – MINISTRY
OF HEALTH

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Mr. Chairman, this supplementary is being sought to supplement the estimates of expenditure Head 36, Ministry of Health.

As you are aware, there has been a major programme of refurbishing and upgrading of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the estimate as indicated has fallen short. The sum of \$2 million was included in the Ministry's estimates for 1991-92 under Head 36 Ministry of Health, Hospital Services sub-programme 03, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Object No. 623: Structures. This was to complete the work on this expansive project and to undertake other refurbishing work.

A supplement of \$1,626,849 is required to meet the claims from the contractor who requires to be paid. Now, Sir, most Honourable Members on that side would be aware that this is an IADB project and in the context of an IADB project. Although the funds are coming from the Inter-American Development Bank they first have to be voted by this House so that the expenditure falls within the ambit of the Law. Afterwards, based on the presentations made to the IADB there is a refunding process.

The revised cost of the project has resulted in the increase of professional fees to \$301,248.69. So the provision of \$152,669 in this year's estimates has proved

inadequate and an additional amount of \$148,579 is required. The project is scheduled to be completed after we have had two extensions from the IADB by the end of December this year. The amount approved for 1991-92 was \$1 million, and expenditure at the end of October 30, 1991 was \$897,678.75. The balance available is \$102,321.25. We require an expenditure of \$1,739,169 to complete the project, and therefore a supplementary of \$1,636,848.07 is required in order for us to make the necessary payments.

We also need some additional money for professional services to the tune of \$1.7 million, but in keeping with the current economic situation we have determined in the Ministry, in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, that we would delay some other programmes within the Ministry so as to make the sums available.

It is timely to take this opportunity to bring the House up to date as to the position of the upgrading project at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

The project had as its objective the improvement and expansion of the existing physical facilities of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and its institutional strengthening through the provision of advisory services and training. The physical programme included the construction of a five-storey annex, and in this annex we have a 34-bed neo-natal intensive care unit, a 10-bed surgical intensive care and burns unit, a doctors-on-call accommodation and lounge and we have also a new mechanical and engineering workshop. Then there is a three storey in-fill block which provides for a mini-operating theatre for day service, an additional 60 beds for obstetrics and gynecology and an additional orthopedic ward.

12.35 p.m.

The project also made provisions for, and this has been completed, the refurbishing of the main operating theatres, the obstetrics and gynecology theatres, the main laboratory and the ophthalmology department.

The main extension is a self-contained block. It consists of a surgical intensive care unit, an obstetrics suite, a neo-natal intensive care unit and a burns management unit. An elective theatre and new offices for the engineering department have also been provided. That main extension was completed on schedule in January 1988 at a total cost of \$6 923 477.18.

Mr. Chairman, work on the refurbishing of the Hospital project was conducted while the Hospital was still in operation. One result of this has been that the project had to be executed in phases. Work was delayed overall about two years. The Inter-American Development Bank understood and granted extensions at each step along the way.

Refurbishing work on the main operating theatre suite was also executed in phases so as to keep two theatres operational while the other three were being upgraded. That accounts for the time when the other people used to be on that side when you would recall that they were operating theatres closed down at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital while this work was going on and much score was made of that. It was necessary for us to do that. We had to close four of the operating theatres while three were being upgraded.

Phase 1 comprised of the refurbishment of two theatres and a section of the instrument cleaning and sterilisation area. Phase 2 comprised the remaining three operating theatres and the other section of the sterilisation department, also the main corridors and the installation of down-waiters to take sterile equipment from the main sterilising department to the operating theatres.

The operating theatres were completed in November 1990 at a total cost of \$4 166 440.01, a cost increase of \$256 000. This was incurred owing to problems encountered during the work. These problems had to do with the original drawings for the Hospital which were not explicit in some areas. As they sought to do refurbishing work they discovered a number of technical difficulties which resulted in the following: We had to replace a complete floor and walls in theatres 3 and 4. We had to replace the walls in theatre 0. They have a theatre numbered 0. I do not know why but there is a theatre called theatre 0.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am not addressing the Honourable Member for the City. She knows about these things, Sir, but there are certain other Honourable Members over there who are not familiar with these matters. I wish the Honourable Member, refreshed as she is from her sojourn outside of the country...

Mr. CHAIRMAN: We have been going quite well so far. Just continue.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: There is theatre 0, theatre 1 and theatre 2. It is three of those theatres that we had to replace the walls. We also refurbished as a result Ward B4. This became necessary as a result of the work in theatres 3 and 4. It also occasioned the refurbishing of certain areas in the central sterilising department because of work in theatres 0, 1 and 2.

The ward spaces and offices of the in-fill block were completed on April 10, 1987 at a projected cost of \$1 086, 258.06. Originally the contract for the expansion project did not include the construction of a new accident and emergency department but when they attempted to deal

with the one that existed, it became apparent that it would cost almost as much to refurbish the old accident and emergency department as to build a new one. Certain structural problems were discovered. For example, we found that the original floors were not in fact reinforced as they ought to have been so the underlying floor slab was found to be under-reinforced. We took the opportunity to deal with that. We decided to demolish the building and construct a new building on the same site.

The original cost of the refurbishing works on what was the casualty was estimated at \$1 million. We built the new accident and emergency department at a total cost of \$6 668 200.34. This was completed in April, 1990.

Mr. Chairman, in order to improve the quality of services being provided the existing obstetrics and gynecology department is being refurbished at an estimated cost of \$2 571 657.83. Owing to the increasing workload which the department is experiencing, two new theatres are being provided each with its own equipment. The work on this project is expected to be completed at the end of November, 1991. This will be the last major work to be done there.

Apart from improving the structure and putting in the new buildings, we had to put new equipment in the Hospital. We did this at a cost of \$5.3 million which has been provided for the project. This includes equipment for the operating theatres, the neo-natal intensive care unit, the burns and surgical intensive care unit, the laboratory, engineering and maintenance department and the accident and emergency departments as well as we took the opportunity to replace some outdated equipment.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps the most important aspect of the total project has been the provision of a component for strengthening the Hospital's management infrastructure. PAHO is the executing agency responsible for the implementation of this part of the project. Now, the specific objectives of the institutional strengthening are as follows:-

1. Improving the management efficiency of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital through a more effective management information system particularly in the area of hospital administration, accounting and medical record keeping.
2. Improving the quality of training for health personnel including training in the use of modern equipment.
3. Developing in-service and continuing education programmes.

4. Improving the equipment maintenance system by the implementation of an effective preventative maintenance programme.
5. Improving the medical and nursing care standards in emergency, surgical, neo-natal intensive care and nosocomial infection control areas.
7. Strengthening the integration of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital into the national health care system by improving the network linkage between the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the primary health care services and, indeed, all of the other health care services which we provide.

PAHO were the consultants for this project. They have submitted their final report on the institutional strengthening in November 1990. I have set up a committee in the Ministry for the implementation. It is expected that during this financial year we would have completed successfully many of the recommendations.

To date, work has started in personnel, finance and supplies. Some 27 officers have had overseas training in formal attachments in areas such as purchasing and stock control, personnel management, hospital administration, burns treatment and surgical intensive care, public health with special reference to hospital infection control, neo-natal intensive care, nursing administration, medical records and statistics, hospital supplies management, plant, maintenance and equipment engineering and financial management. We have had in-service courses in human resources and manpower development, burns treatment and neo-natal care, accounting and engineering and information systems development.

Mr. Chairman, I feel it is fair to say that during the last four to five years we have done almost everything that is humanly possible to transform the Queen Elizabeth Hospital which I remind you, Mr. Chairman, is a teaching institution, into one of the most modern hospitals of its size and kind anywhere. We had not, to my mind, been completely successful in transforming the entire system but I believe that the ground work has been laid and the continuing implementation programme will ensure that over the next 25 years the Queen Elizabeth Hospital will be equipped both from the point of view of its physical capacity, physical capability and the development of its human resources to handle what is necessary for the health services in the country. And it will form part of a network of health services, other aspects of which form a broad development programme which is probably not within the ambit of this resolution to discuss.

12.45 p.m.

In January this year a PAHO consultant in hospital administration was recruited to review the recommendations with a view to setting time frames for the

implementation of the recommendations in terms of priority. We have going on now some in-service training of staff especially in information systems. This has taken place. We have now completed training of all the persons in medical records, all the people in the accounts and all the people in the engineering departments.

What we are seeking to do in the Ministry, Mr. Chairman, is to have a network, an information systems network that will see through the use of Modems a relationship between the Queen Elizabeth Hospital....

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Modems – M-o-d-e-m-s. Mr. Chairman, what we expect is that there will be a relationship where for example persons who go to a polyclinic will have their information immediately available to the medical records officer who is dealing with that individual. So that much of the difficulties of transfer of persons from one part of the health service to the other will, over time, disappear.

There is a number of other aspects related to this project and which will cost in the end just over \$40 million when it is completed. We expect that it will be completed by the end of this year, as I said, and while the economic situation in the country does not warrant that there would be supplementary votes, the fact is that much of what we are seeking to supplement – and this is especially for the Honourable Members on the other side – will in fact be refundable on presentation of the necessary documentation. So that this is not an extension of the spending in the truest sense of the word but it is necessary in terms of the Administration and Audit Act that we have the funds voted in this Parliament. And hence I have come to the Committee, with the acquiescence of the Minister of Finance to seek this supplementary which I hope that the Committee will find it convenient, if possible, to accede to.

Mr. Chairman, I stand ready to answer any and all questions asked by Honourable Members. But I thought that especially since we did not have a chance to debate this during the Estimates that I should give as full information as possible in the introduction of this supplementary.

I beg to move that Head 36 stand part.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: I beg to second that.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member for the City.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Mr. Chairman, Sir, Honourable Members are commenting on how thoroughly the

Honourable Minister of Health has introduced this subhead. But I will explain to this Honourable House how it is so easy.

I begin by quoting from the Barbados Labour Party's Manifesto for the year 1986 lest there be any doubt, not 1991, Sir, 1986. This is already a document of the House:

"The construction"

Note the language, how close it is to that of the Minister:

"The construction of a new five-storey annex and five-storey in-fill block, and reconstruction and refurbishing of parts of the main building of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Work on this project has already commenced."

This is 1986 May.

Aside.

Miss B. A. MILLER: I will read it again for instruction:

"The construction".

Hon. B. M. TAITT: On a point of order, Sir, I do not wish this Committee to be misled. This project that I am speaking about for which we got the money from the IDB, the money we got was in 1986. I do not know if the Honourable Member is talking about the same project. But I just draw it to your attention, Sir.

Miss B. A. MILLER: It is the self same project, Sir. This is a Barbados Labour Party project that is five years old which is to be found in our Manifesto of 1986 described exactly in the same words that the Minister has used here this morning:

"The construction of a new five-storey annex and five-storey in-fill block, and reconstruction and refurbishing of parts of the main building of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Work on this project has already commenced."

The tense was present in 1986. It went on also to say in the same words that the Minister used today, the self same project:

"The institutional strengthening of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital through advisory/operational services, in medical/nursing areas and the expansion of the overseas training programme."

It goes on further to say:

"Paying all expenses of persons who have to go overseas for medical attention in cases where treatment is not available in Barbados."

The Government no longer provides that service. It goes on further to say, Sir:

"Expanding"...

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Sir, on a point of order. I wish the Honourable Member would not mislead the House. She says the Government no longer provides this service, Sir. If you were watching, Sir, you would see that the Clerk just brought me an envelope and this file here, Sir, is for a medical aid scheme which I now have to approve.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: That is your problem. But you cannot mislead the Committee.

Asides.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Can we have some order, please.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: You say the Government is no longer doing the scheme. I say that is a downright misrepresentation. This one is going to be approved. And yes, we have the money. And yes, the people are going.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is one thing to have a service on a paper in a file. It is another thing for there to be money so that when people make application to the medical aid scheme there is money there that they can go abroad and have their operations. I say that the Government is no longer providing the services, what I mean is that when people apply, they do not have the money.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I challenge the Honourable Member to name one person who has applied and did not get the money.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: On what has the Honourable Member risen?

Hon. B. M. TAITT: On a point of order.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member is on a point of order.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The Honourable Member is misleading this Committee. I challenge the Honourable Member to name one single, solitary person who applied to the medical aid scheme and who did not get the money.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Yes. Name one.

Miss B. A. MILLER: The Minister does not have to challenge me. I am not the Minister. Tell me how much money is in the fund now.

Aside.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Just a moment. Let me advise all Honourable Members that their contribution must be addressed to the Chair and it is unnecessary to shout across the Table.

Aside.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I think the Honourable Member for St. Peter is out of order. Let the Honourable Member continue.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the point I am making is that this is the self same IADB Inter-American Development Bank project which the Barbados Labour Party started in 1986 and it is beyond disgraceful now, that in November 1991, almost the end of the year, the Minister of Health comes in here to ask for a supplementary which he hopes will complete this project at December of this year. Five years, Sir, this is in the same style as the St. Joseph Hospital.

The money is coming under a head for a department described as the PDIU that is when translated, Sir, the Project Design and Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Health. The Minister says that he stands ready to answer any and all questions. I want to know what is the Project Design and Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Health currently designing? I also want to know what projects the Project Design and Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Health is currently implementing? Because this one that we have before us, Sir, is an old Barbados Labour Party project which is now, happily, coming to amend after five years. But it is important for us to know, because that is a unit headed by highly trained competent people with a staff. I want to know what it is now designing, what is on the drawing board now for the future and I want to know what it is currently implementing? In other words, what work is there for the officers in that unit? I want to know, Sir, what projects are in the Ministry of Health's portfolio, apart from the St. Joseph Hospital. What projects are presently in the Ministry of Health's portfolio and what is the status of those projects?

12.55 p.m.

The Minister made mention of a 34-bed neo-natal intensive care unit, burns unit, doctor's lounge, workshop – that was the only addition. A huge 60-bed obstetrics and gynecology and orthopedic ward, and lecture theatres. He made no mention of that, but that was part of the project as well. The truth is, Mr. Chairman, Sir...

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I don't want her to get the record confused. I did mention ...

Mr. CHAIRMAN: On what has the Honourable Member risen?

Hon. B. M. TAITT: On a point of order, Sir, I did mention the lecture theatre. If you can't hear, you can't hear. I said it.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I can hear very well.

Miss B. A. MILLER: ...various operating theatres and whole host of other things. This was a large project, Mr. Chairman, Sir, and the truth is that if you go up to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital today you will see that this is in effect a new wing. It is more than an annex and in-fill block. When you look at it we have added physically a new wing. In addition to that what it has brought is the expansion and upgrading of several important services in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

This Minister of Health, the Honourable Member for St. Michael West, sitting over on the other side, Sir, on divers occasions in this House has denied it, when I from this side, made the point that the reason why it has taken so long for the new wing at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to become operational, had to do with the fact that equipment which was part of this whole project package had not been ordered, and some of what has been ordered has been improperly ordered. That the Government also did not have the wherewithal to establish posts for nurses and other health care professionals to start that new wing. The Honourable Minister steadfastly denied time and time again that that was the truth. I am hearing now, this morning, words which will indicate to me that that was in fact the truth because this new wing, this whole IDB Project, should have been completed years ago; should have been fully operational years ago. I have every reason to believe, unhappily so, Mr. Chairman, that come December this year it will still not be completed.

This is a project much in arrears in terms of cost, money, in terms of staffing, in terms of the provision of services, Mr. Chairman, Sir, but it raises many important questions to do with the whole matter of the delivery of health care in Barbados which concerns us on this side of the House.

The Minister made mention of a new accident and emergency department which was not part of the project as he said, but he has brought it into the debate and I wish to ask a few questions about that. This new so-called accident and emergency unit which is to be allegedly distinguished from the Casualty, all reports coming to me and of my own experience and knowledge, Sir, lead me to understand that it is not working in the way that it was expected to. In other words, Mr. Chairman, Sir, there are still

large back-up queues at the Casualty of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital on any given night in the week, particularly Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Member has one minute more to go.

Miss B. A. MILLER: I beg you pardon, Sir. One minute. I know I can come back, because I have a lot to come back about. Part of the problem with that, Sir, is that when the net work of polyclinics were working at optimum, before 1986, when polyclinics had general practitioners in them and were open and available to people up to 8 o'clock at night all of those non-emergency matters were siphoned off away from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, but when the Honourable Member for St. James South, who is not now in his seat, and whom people may have forgotten, was once a Minister of Health, he dismantled that part of the service which the polyclinics offered. We had that on-rush again into the Casualty of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and this accident and emergency department has still failed to solve that problem. People forget these things, Mr. Chairman, Sir. People forget that the Honourable Minister of Health was not so long ago a Minister of Tourism, he too dismantled every tourist office Barbados had abroad, just as the Honourable Member for St. James South dismantled the services of the polyclinics.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Very obviously, the reference to the Ministry of Tourism forms no part of this Resolution.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Why not, Sir?

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Why does it?

Miss B. A. MILLER: It goes to show similar behaviour.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Not in my estimation.

Miss B. A. MILLER: It is a policy which informs Government decisions that dismantling, rather than build up and upgrade, this Government is into dismantling. The Minister made a lot about a ward called Ward Zero. Again a recurring decimal in Government affairs, everything is scoring nought and zero in Government affairs. I take my seat, Sir, and I will speak again on this matter.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Order.

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM: Mr. Chairman, Sir, notwithstanding the confidence and the optimistic manner with which the Honourable Minister introduced this Resolution, I think it fair to say, Sir, that all is not well at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The evidence that reaches me in my professional capacity, the anecdotal evidence which is everywhere across this land about the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and my own experience in visiting there

from time to time suggests that all is not well at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. To that extent I would like in the course of my short contribution to the debate, Mr. Chairman, to direct a few specific questions to the Minister with respect to the functioning of the Hospital.

Though we welcome these new structures that have been added, the five storied annex or the new wing, however you wish to describe it, I think there are two points that need to be made in a hurry.

The first thing is that structures do not make a hospital. There are two broad sets of components that constitute a hospital. Clearly we would want to know that we have appropriate modern and relevant building structures and I may add equipment. But over and beyond that we need a high level of care, we need doctors who are well trained and highly motivated, nurses who are highly trained and well motivated and indeed all the para-medical staff need to be well trained and well motivated.

The first point I wish to make relates to the absenteeism among the nurses at the Hospital. I am told, Mr. Chairman, that some weekends, the absenteeism now for months has tended to move between about 80 and over one hundred nurses absent. Every weekend in Barbados you have between 80 and 100 nurses who do not turn up for work at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. A low of 80 and a high, let us say, of 100. The figures are, in truth and in fact, as far as the high is concerned, well beyond 100. It is amazing as the Honourable Attorney General is whispering. It is amazing that in a relatively small institution as the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, you could have 80 to 100 nurses absent every week.

Now that has enormous implications for the quality of care which patients, your cousins and mine, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters enjoy at that institution. In fact, sometimes you have to run around, I am advised, and ask three nurses on one ward, ask two of them to leave and go and attend to wards that have no nurses at all. Now, if indeed my information is accurate, Mr. Chairman, it points to a collapse of morale, a serious collapse of morale among the nursing staff at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. We are pointing to a severe and acute problem and I think that the Honourable Minister ought to inform the House as to what is a back of all of that. Why is it? Something must be wrong when 80 to 100 nurses, every weekend, could be absent at that institution.

1.05 p.m.

Some wards are manned by one nurse and sometimes the nurse is not scheduled to work on that particular ward at all. That is a very serious problem and I do not think that it ought to be swept under the carpet. We have had a problem of similar enormity and size in relation to the Royal Barbados Police Force. That is now public, Mr. Chairman, and everybody knows about that problem where

sometimes at some of the out stations some nights you only had two policemen on duty or one. It is about time that that particular problem at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital be out into the public so that it can be addressed and we could all work to finding some solution to this particular problem.

While on structures though, Sir, we in Barbados are good at putting up new buildings. Where we fall down however and, this is particularly so in Government, is in maintaining existing buildings. As much as we welcome the modern new structures that constitute the Annex and have added a diversity, I hope, and a new range of services to the hospital, the old hospital which was built twenty-five years ago or more looks very tired indeed. The building looks very tired indeed. I go there from time to time, as all of us do visiting, Mr. Chairman, and I get the impression that that old hospital is in need of refurbishment, repair and renovation. I hope that, while we concentrate as we often do in Barbados on the new structures, we find time to pay attention to repairing and upgrading the old structure.

That indeed was part of how the Barbados Labour Party that started this project had conceived it. It was not only supposed to be a new structure or wing but that attention ought to be paid to the old hospital that was looking very worn indeed.

Now the second problem with respect to services has got to do with the point that has been made by the Honourable Member for the City. The Casualty has always been in my experience, Sir, going back 25 years a problem area. We in the Barbados Labour Party believe that we had addressed that problem and had temporarily licked it when we had implemented the policy whereby the polyclinics were opened up to 8 o'clock and they were doing minor surgical procedures whereby a lot of non-emergency cases which would have normally landed in the Casualty of the hospital were actually decentralized and were treated across the country where the polyclinics were operating.

I believe that without sound advice and good reason that policy was discontinued when the Barbados Labour Party left office in 1986. But I believe the problem which we have of overcrowding and long delays at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital stem from the fact that all of the complaints are now again channelled and directed to the Casualty where they could have been dealt with outside of the Casualty as was the position in the two years or so before the Barbados Labour Party left office in 1986.

So that I would like the Minister while boasting of the new structure to tell us how the new Casualty Department is run. Actually, the new name is Accident and Emergency Department. Casualty is now a name of the past. I would like him to tell us what is the average delay experienced in the Accident and Emergency Department. How long do people have to wait there? The evidence reaching me is that it is still far too long and that we are

experiencing once again some of the acute problems of delay and congestion in the Accident and Emergency Department which we used to have in the past.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, there are other aspects about the nursing situation which I think we need to discuss at this time. In the last five years or so, a large number of Barbadian nurses have left for the United States of America. They signed and went to greener pastures, or so they thought, to the United States of America and I think it is fair to say that in that respect they might have been encouraged by the Honourable Minister himself. What I would like to know, and I am not suggesting that there is anything bad about that, is exactly how many nurses have resigned in the last five years that have gone to take up appointment in the United States of America. I would like him to tell us how it has impacted on our own delivery of nursing care in Barbados.

While on this whole question of nurses and nursing training, I think it is about time the Minister tell us what is the reason or why is it in Barbados that we are the only country in the world that this happens, where we have three institutions training nurses. Why is it that some nurses are trained at the Community College, some are trained at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital itself, and some of them are trained at the Psychiatric Hospital? It seems to me that this is a classic case of triplication of effort and that it represents a certain amount of wastage, poor planning, and a certain lack of coordination. I would like the Minister really to tell us what is the rationale, justification, and good sense behind this system where in three institutions in small Barbados we have nurses being trained.

Now I move to the question of supplies and the fact that in Barbados, too, an additional point, we have long queues for operations. I am not persuaded that you have a modern and efficient hospital in Barbados when we have people waiting for six months and more for a routine operation. I am advised of that and I have seriously understated it when I say six months and more, but we are talking about a year, 18 months and in some case two years. Why is it that in Barbados that situation is existing? How can we boast of having a modern and efficient hospital in Barbados when our fellow citizens who are in need of surgical procedures have got to wait for hysterectomies for 18 months and we are told that we have all of those doctors in the hospital? There was a time, Mr. Chairman, when I used to do memory tests by going through the names of the doctors as set out in the telephone directory. I began with Ashby, Bancroft, Brown and ended up with "W" in the days when all we had were thirty or forty doctors in Barbados. I knew every name by heart. I never had met these gentlemen. The point is today that we cannot begin to do an exercise of that nature. There are so many specialists. Such a vast range and a large number of doctors at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Yet, we are told for a simple routine operation like hysterectomies that

women have got to be waiting in this country for nine months up to a year or 18 months. We have all of these new and modern structures involving additional operating theatres and still we cannot have the operations performed. Something is wrong. The Minister must not get away with giving a confident and hopeful presentation about the situation there, because in truth and in fact when we look beyond the structures at the level of care and the level of services we find that something is fundamentally wrong. We have a problem of acute absenteeism, collapse of morale, and delays at the Accident and Emergency Department. We have a backlog of cases needing routine and medium size surgery which in another era when there were few doctors operating, people used to get those operations within a matter of weeks and months.

1.15 p.m.

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a particular aspect to which I want to advert. I am very surprised, as I suspect other Members of the House are, that a supplementary has come to the House at all, given the fact that the Government is under commitment to cut its expenditure by as much as \$112 million by the end of the financial year under the auspices of the IMF programme. The fact that we have a supplementary before this House brought by the Honourable Minister of Health only testifies to the enormous power and influence that the Minister of Health must exercise in the Cabinet. I am sure, Sir, that with Government cutting its expenditure by as much as \$112 million that no other Minister will be allowed to bring a supplementary to the House, and in that respect to bring a supplementary to the House for more than was originally voted under its initial Head. This supplementary before this House is a tribute to the tremendous power and influence of the Minister of Health in Cabinet.

The point I want to make, Sir, is that this Committee has to protect the purse strings of Barbados, and the Financial Administration and Audit Act is drafted at Section 6 to put Parliament in a position where Parliament must vote funds to spend, and that no funds should be spent out of the public purse unless Parliament approves it. This business, Sir, of Ministries spending and then bringing the matter to Parliament for us to rubber stamp really is a fundamental breach of the spirit and provisions of the Financial Administration and Audit Act and is a matter which we have to stop in order to make sure that this Parliament is not a rubber stamp for decisions that have already been taken; but that this Parliament retains its paramountcy in controlling the public purse of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have fundamental objections to a Government department spending without the approval of this Parliament and then bringing to Parliament supplementaries to get us to act as mere rubber stamps for actions which Parliament has not approved. I say that it is outlawed by Section 6(1) and (2) of the Financial

Administration and Audit Act and I am not going to sit in this House and condone any action by any Ministry which is a fundamental breach of the Financial Administration and Audit Act.

Now, Sir, the Minister in his presentation, indicated that the project for which the supplementary is being sought is scheduled to be completed by December, and at the end of November, Sir, we are being asked to approve supplementary expenditures that are larger than the amounts the House was asked to vote in March. It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, by any reasonable deduction, that clearly the Ministry of Health cannot spend on this project between November 26 and the end of December more money than it spent on the same project between April 1 and now. To that extent, the implication must be drawn that in many respects we are not being called upon to approve the voting of monies to be spent some time in the future, but this House is being called upon to approve and to rubber stamp Government's expenditure.

Therefore, my specific question to the Minister – I listened to his presentation which I thought was clear but incomplete – how much of the funds that this House is being called upon to vote represents funds to pay arrears for work already undertaken and how much truly represents expenditure for work to be taken in the future?

Sir, I have to make a point of this. In 1987, I castigated a former Minister of Finance for allowing Government arrears to accumulate. I was told then – if you will recall – that there was no such thing as the accumulation of Government arrears, that the Government was playing by the rules. I have lived to hear the Government itself castigate that former Minister of Finance for allowing arrears to accumulate. But more to the point, Sir, we are now hearing of a situation where a Government of Barbados is under an IMF programme and one of the preconditions that must be met as part of that IMF programme is the clearing of the sum of \$30 million of arrears. Mr. Chairman, this is a very serious thing. The information that the Government of Barbados must clear \$30 million in arrears is information that was provided by no less a person than the Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados. It is one of the preconditions of the programme, as we understand it, Sir, that is not even stated in the Letter of Intent. The question that arises from it is how could we be in this House here as guardians of the public purse and allow Government to accumulate \$30 million in arrears without our exercising our responsibility to approve Government's expenditure in advance.

I am saying, Sir, in addition to this particular matter, the House should not be satisfied with less than the fullest accounting of how much of the money that we are here being asked to approve represents monies to clear the \$30 million that the IMF is insisting that Government must clear. I believe that in these matters every time this

House compromises on matters as fundamental as the control of Government expenditure we give this Government more and more leeway to indulge in all kinds of infelicities and improprieties. Every time, Sir, and on every occasion that these infelicities and improprieties arise, I believe that we in the Opposition have a responsibility to point them out.

Again, Sir, I have already put on record my objection to supplementaries that are larger than the initial vote. It is bad, financial practice. It says that there has been a complete breakdown in Government's financial planning when Government comes in the midst of a financial year and ask this House to agree to a supplementary that is bigger than the initial vote itself. Something has fundamentally to be wrong with that system of budgeting. I have already said that I shall not be voting in this House with the Government whenever it brings to the House supplementaries that are bigger than the initial vote. It is offensive to everything that we understand about financial planning. I want to say that one of the reasons why Barbados is in the financial mess that it has found itself in is nothing to do with factors of the sixties and seventies. It is precisely because of battles like this. In 1988 and 1989 this House was bombarded with supplementaries that were larger than the initial vote and despite our complaints about them, Sir, the House railroaded them through and has ended up at the end of the day with expenditures far greater than what the House at the start of the financial year regarded as being sober and being judicious.

I, therefore, Mr. Chairman, from a purely financial point of view want to hear the Minister of Health speak in a more forthcoming way, not just in relation to the support that is being sought for this programme. I want the Minister of Health to explain carefully to this Committee which is a Committee to control Government's expenditure decision what form of financial planning exists and operates in the Ministry of Health that could put his Ministry in a position where he is now asking us in November to vote by way of supplementary mode, as we were asked to vote in April, to cover the whole financial year. I want him to explain what precepts of financial management exist, if any, and I want the Minister to be clear in telling this House how much of this money that he is asking me to support against my better judgment is to clear arrears as distinct from supportive work to be done in the future.

I will not miss the opportunity to congratulate him. I am sure that very few of his colleagues will be in a position this financial year to show his power and muscle and might to bring to this House any supplementary at all, Sir,
1.25 p.m.

Aside.

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: I believe, Sir, that the Minister of Health in a way has to be congratulated for having satisfied his Cabinet that in the context of a situation where his Government is cutting its expenditure for the rest of the financial year by \$112 million in six months that he can command a supplementary of almost \$2 million.

I am obliged to you, Sir.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am not finally replying, Sir. I have to give some answers.

Aside.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Minister caught my eye. He did give the indication that he was not finally replying.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Rather than addressing the same point twice, if I could speak now he could address it once. That is all I am saying.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Two Honourable Members are on their feet.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I will answer this one and then answer yours. First of all, Sir, I appreciate the questions raised by the Honourable Member for St. Peter. I assure him that I am going to respond in the manner in which he expects me to respond and in a manner which I know he will understand.

I want to deal with a matter. You will recall that on more than one occasion I have said that I do not wish the Ministry of Health, as far as it is humanly possible, to become a political football and more particularly the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The Honourable Member for St. Joseph made a statement. He was raising a question but he raised it the lawyers way, he raised the question by way of a statement that on its face is the kind of statement that would easily be absorbed by even the least casual listener. He said something to the extent that absenteeism in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is something that was fundamental and that it was clear reflection of the moral.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would put it to you that if what he says is a clear reflection of the moral that the information which I give to him now by the same logic should be clear indication of how high the moral is. He said that there are 80 - 100 persons absent every weekend. I have just asked the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to give us information for the last few weekends from September 30. I want the Honourable Member to write them down. I want every Honourable Member to write them down. I am going to say it slowly.

On the weekend of September 30 to October 6, Saturday there were four staff nurses absent and three

nursing assistants absent. On Sunday there were four staff nurses absent and no nursing assistants.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: This is the weekend information. They have a book. They have to sign in and sign out. You mean they are giving me wrong information? That is a matter for you. If anybody gives me wrong information that is a matter for them. But let me tell you the information which I am giving this House has been given to me by the officials at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

On the weekend of the 7 – 13 October, Saturday there were two staff nurses absent and three on Sunday. There were three nursing assistants absent on Saturday and three nursing assistants on Sunday.

From the 14 – 20 October, Saturday there were three staff nurses absent and three nursing assistants. On Sunday there were three staff nurses absent and two nursing assistants.

From 21 – 27 October Saturday there were seven staff nurses absent and one nursing assistant. On Sunday there were four staff nurses absent and three nursing assistants.

On October 28 – November 3, on Saturday there were three staff nurses and three nursing assistants absent. On Sunday there were three staff nurses and three nursing assistants absent.

From November 4 – 10, that Saturday there were nine staff nurses absent and three nursing assistants. That is the day when there was a lot of rain. On Sunday there were five staff nurses absent and four nursing assistants.

On November 11 – 17 November, that is the last weekend for which we have information, on Saturday three staff nurses and one nursing assistant absent. On Sunday there were nine staff nurses, again, Sir, a lot of rain and three nursing assistants.

Now, that information has come from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I think that even when you add this up it is not 80 for the month. It is diabolically mischievous for anyone...

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM: I object to that.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I have not said anything about the Honourable Member yet. I am saying that it is diabolically mischievous for anyone, and I believe the Honourable Member would only fall into this category because he was misled, to try to give the impression that 80 persons....

Sir, any time there are 80 persons absent from any institution in Barbados they have to shut it down.

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM: I was the person who made the statement. The comment cannot be made outside of the context of me. It has to relate, therefore, to my speech. No distinction of that nature makes any sense. I am objecting to the notion that I am mischievous.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Two Honourable Members are on their feet.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: It is the person who gave the Honourable Member the information that I am attacking. Any person who would take a Member of the House of Assembly and mislead him to the level at which this...

Aside.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: We are having too much talk across the Chamber. I do not appreciate it.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Sir, any time that 80 – 100 nurses could be absent at any one time or in any one day, then you would have to close down the institution. It would be impossible for it to function.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: You do not know anything about it. Do not get involved in this. That is the one area that we do not have a problem. Barbados as a country has the highest quota of nurses employed in a hospital as of now. Six hundred and thirty-seven nursing positions are filled in Barbados. It was during the time that the Honourable Member for the City was alluding to. The last information given to me by the Matron – I meet with the Matron and the Administrator every month. Every single month as God send I meet with them and they give me a nursing report, a doctors' report, and operations report. They give me reports about the Hospital in every detail. If there is one thing I am certain about because I personally got involved and told this House before, it is on record, but the Honourable Member might not have been in here. He only recently came in since January. He came back. He might be forgiven. I have given this information and if it is one thing that I am certain about, it is that over the last four years I have spent a considerable amount of personal time involved in clearing up difficulties and improving and enhancing the morale of the human resources in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

1.35 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to give you some indication. When I became the Minister there were 446 nursing positions when I became the Minister in 1987. And in between then and now it has moved from four hundred and forty something to 637. All throughout the

Caribbean, in the Pan American Health Organization, Barbados is regarded with a high degree of pride because we have been able to stem the difficulty and the problem regarding nursing shortages. The way we have done it is in response to a question raised by the Honourable Member himself. He made the error which a woman who should know better has been perpetrating throughout Barbados that we have too many institutions teaching nurses. Again, Sir, when I became the Minister there were 15 people graduating from the Community College.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I know you heard it already. Fifteen people. Today we have coming out of the institutions – Let me put it this way, Sir – in the Geriatric Hospital there is now only one single nursing person who is untrained on the staff. In the Psychiatric Hospital there are only three persons on the staff who are untrained. So in between the time I became Minister and now we have trained or are in the process of training 103 registered mental nurses. That is for the Psychiatric Hospital. There were no physical or other resources for the Community College to train the numbers which we needed.

– We provided in the Ministry of Health and paid for out of Ministry of Health facilities to allow for a larger number of nurses to be taken in. The result is that we are certain and guaranteed that there will be 60 nurses a year coming out of the Community College over the next few years because we provided facilities in the compound of the Ministry of Health to increase the numbers. The Community College was taking as many as they could. We went to the Cabinet and got permission to pay a stipend and we started paying a stipend again. As a result we have had an over application for places in nursing where they only used to be 15 and 20 people applying, we now have 60 or more applying.

The result of our training at the three places are these: The Community College is training 60 per year. The Psychiatric Hospital has classes going, first year, second year, third year. The first three year class has finished and those persons have graduated only last month. They have gone back to their respective places. So they have a total of 103 in training. They train in bloc so they go back to their respective places. By 1993 we would have trained 103 persons.

Where is the other place you said we are training?

– We are training at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital 24 nursing assistants. I am surprised that a person who is President of a nurses' association instead of hoping that we would have enough nurses to relieve the present nurses of stress and strain walking around on political platforms saying that we are training people in three places. What we have been able to do has been so accepted by the rest of the world that we are now in discussion with Jamaica because Jamaica has

asked us if we would train some of their persons for them through PAHO.

We are now....

Asides.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Can we have some order?

Hon. B. M. TAITT: We have arranged for the Pan American Health Organization – We have promised that we are going to allow persons to come from the other islands in the Caribbean to do the registered mental nursing programme. Because when the decision was made to move training of nurses to the Community College it was also decided that they would eliminate the registered mental nurse programme. I make no judgement about the efficacy of that. Suffice it to say that as time has gone on two phenomena have bared themselves. One is that in the time since nursing went to the Community College only 2 male nurses applied for training.

I do not know why and seeking to analyse it suggests that those persons who are interested in being male nurses, especially with regard to registered mental nursing did not see themselves able to or were unwilling to go into the environment of the Community College. Two, the training which is done there is a comprehensive training and adheres to a view that once a person has been comprehensively trained that person is capable of dealing with mental health in all of its ramifications. That is not the view that is accepted by those persons who have to administer the mental hospital. But in any event what it has allowed us to do, since we had a number of tutors, who in defence of their own position found themselves unacceptable to the Community College; what we had in this system was – and this would have been wastage – we had five or six or seven tutors who by virtue of the terms of reference of their employment they could not be dismissed, they could not be otherwise severed without having to pay large sums of money and so they were doing make work programmes in the system.

What this Minister and the one before me concluded, and I think correctly – that is the Honourable Member for St. James South – and the Cabinet concurred that since we have tutors on staff that what we ought to do is to utilize their skills to help relieve the shortage of nurses. To that extent we said it was a temporary programme. We told the President of the Barbados Registered Nurses Association it was a temporary programme.

I want to say this, Mr. Chairman, as Minister of Health I am satisfied that it has served the purpose which we set out to have it serve, that is to say, it has relieved comprehensively the pressures which the nurses really used to have when we had only four hundred and something places at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. And furthermore

in all the other institutions we had shortages of nurses. We are now in the process of relieving that.

I want to come to the Honourable Member's question.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Let me answer that. At no time between 1987 and now – that is what I can speak for – has there been a resignation of more, between resignation and natural retirement, there has not been more than twelve persons leaving the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I will get the specific detailed information for each year and give to this Honourable Committee. I give that assurance but I do not have it on my finger tips. But at no time did we lose more than twelve persons by a combination of retirement and resignation. As a matter of fact the number of persons leaving Barbados to go to the United States adds up to about three to seven. At the top, it might be seven. We have had persons resigning to join their husbands in Canada. We had another one who recently went to join her husband in the United States. That is per year. About not more than twelve. We have in fact reached a position where we have a net situation where there are more persons coming into the Queen Elizabeth Hospital than going out. We have not had that situation since 1969.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: And St. Joseph.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Honourable Member has two more minutes.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: We cannot discuss St. Joseph Hospital. I will answer the Honourable Member who asked a proper question. When we went to....

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I want to answer your question. When we went to discuss the Estimates we in the Ministry anticipated that we would need, given the nature of its being an IADB project, \$2 million for this project. As the Honourable Member is aware this is paid out of structural structures which is included in the planning of the project design and implementation unit. Structures include all projects that are going on. At that time we had a project going on at the Geriatric Hospital, we had a project going on at the St. Joseph Hospital, we had a project going on elsewhere so that structures would then be, according to the thinking at the estimates committee, could withstand reduction by \$1 million. The million dollars was therefore reduced from structures and we were reduced by \$1 million in relation to this vote. Because, however it is an IDB project, IDB said there would no extensions beyond the end of this year, it has become necessary to meet all of the outstanding payments before the end of the year in order to

present to the IDB lest we should lose the repayment. The result therefore is that we are not in fact in violation as the numbers might suggest, but what we did was to say we would reduce the payments in those projects where the funds are coming from the Consolidated Fund.
1.45 p.m.

As the Honourable Member knows, in order to pay the additional moneys out of this vote we have to get the supplementary, otherwise we will be in violation of the law and hence we have agreed to reduce sub-programme 07 – Geriatric Hospital by \$500 000 and to reduce plant, equipment and furniture by \$100 000 and the care of the disabled in the context of the Children's Development Centre where we were putting on a roof cost \$250 000 and the general management and coordination services because the projects have not been slowed down, the professional services will not have reached the level as anticipated so we reduced that by \$935 428 which gives us the total, give or take a couple dollars, of the \$1 739 169 that we are asking for. So really what we are doing is fulfilling the requirements of the law by coming to the Committee and asking the House to approve the expenditure from this Head but in actual fact the Ministry of Health itself is not expending this amount of money over and above what was put in the Estimates. We necessarily must get it in the Estimates as the Honourable Member is aware. I hope that explanation....

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Time.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The Honourable Member is saying it is acceptable to him so I am satisfied.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: The Honourable Member for St. Peter was sitting next to me when the last question was answered by the Minister. The Honourable Member for St. Peter said the explanation was acceptable in part, so don't let the record show something else.

In the light of that explanation, Sir, I am going to have to discuss this matter with the Honourable Member for St. Peter in greater detail at lunch because I had every intention of voting against this supplementary because as you recall, Sir, since 1989, the Barbados Labour Party maintained a consistent position in this House in respect to supplementaries and it was that where the supplementaries were large and appeared to be substantially in excess of the original money voted in March at the Estimates we were not going to support them and we voted against several supplementaries, including the ones that helped to burst Barbados last year when the Government came for \$91 million in supplementaries. We took no part in that. Sir, subject to what I am advised at lunch, in the light of the Minister's reading from the file just now, I will reserve my position.

I just wanted to make a point to the Minister in relation to the medical aid scheme. He knows of a case involving a young child who was very severely injured in an accident in the bus stand some years ago. It was somewhere around '87/88 and the matter is pending settlement. In so far as he is speaking to the Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs, I believe it is appropriate that I make the comment at this stage, because the medical aid scheme in the last three years has expended substantial sums of money through... I said the last three years. I am not talking about now. She said it is broke now. I am not in that, Sir.

In the last three years substantial sums have been remitted from Barbados to Toronto and have been dispensed through the Consul General's office in Toronto to satisfy creditors in Canada, particularly medical creditors.

I am being pressed, to settle the matter, by the insurance companies and the lawyers therefor on the other side, but we are having difficulty in collecting the figures from the Toronto office as to how much that office has paid out on behalf of this young boy and of course his mother who had to go up and look after him. I wonder if the Minister, since the Fund needs to be replenished, can use his influence with the Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs to ask the Consul General's office in Toronto to send to us, as quickly as possible, a detailed accounting so that we can add it into the costs and get it paid out to the medical aid scheme as soon as possible. That is the only matter that is really delaying a settlement at this stage.

Sir, as I understand the supplementary it is in respect of money which has been voted but the Government is not asking that this \$1.7 million be a new vote in the true nature of a supplementary. I would wish the Minister when he finally replies to explain whether it forms part of Government's accounts payable which have to be cleared up or cleared off before the International Monetary Fund will start its disbursement of funds to Barbados, all assuming that the Letter of Intent is accepted. That is the real point that I wanted the Minister to answer, is this part of the \$33 million or \$35 million accounts payable which our new financial bosses from Washington are insisting must be cleared before we can get any of their dollars.

Now the Minister of Health has some skills in oratory and he obviously used them to good effect because, I don't agree necessarily, that he had to persuade the Cabinet, he certainly had to persuade the Minister of Finance because the Minister of Finance would have had to approve this and I suppose in all of this we are seeing the healing that the Prime Minister spoke of on Sunday night. I don't know how one Minister who accused another one of not being full of candour with the people of Barbados who could ring \$1.7 million out of his hand. It is sleight of hand.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: On a point of order, Sir, since I am the Minister introducing the measures, since he mentioned the sum of money he must mean me, Sir, and he is suggesting that I have accused somebody – I am not sure. He is saying that this Minister accused ... He is suggesting that I accused the Prime Minister of not dealing with

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I categorically deny any such implication, Sir.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: Sir, we are about to close off now, but I heard the denial, Sir. That is how I read it and understood it and I am sure that the Prime Minister from Zimbabwe when he saw the fax of what the Minister said in New York he would have understood it in the same way as you and I, Sir, understood it.
1.55 p.m.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: Yes, I understand you understood it in that way.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This all relates to the matter under discussion.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: Yes, Sir. Thank you for not denying that you understood it the same way as I did, Sir. Much obliged to you, Sir.

On the motion of Hon. P. M. GREAVES, seconded by Hon. B. M. TAITT, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported progress to His Honour, the SPEAKER, and asked for leave to sit again, and Mr. SPEAKER reported accordingly.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, I move that this sitting be suspended until 3:00 p.m. today, Sir.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question that the sitting be now suspended until 3:00 p.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.
1.58 p.m.

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER: This sitting is resumed. When the suspension was taken, the House was in Committee of Supply. To that it shall revert.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Committee has resumed.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Yes, Mr. Chairman, there are some matters leading on from earlier debate which I would want to pick up on. One has to do with the question of monies expended and staffing at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in particular. The Honourable Minister of Health has been heard to say that some of the persons who were recruited for employment at another hospital, namely the St. Joseph Hospital, are now to use a Barbadianism "subbing" at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, a thoroughly unsatisfactory state of affairs. You have a staff complement for a hospital and you should not be reduced to a situation where people who have been encouraged to give up employment abroad and to come home here – the staff at the St. Joseph Hospital – now find themselves without employment and the Minister is in the embarrassing position of having to find alternative employment for them.

The Minister led us to understand that the Queen Elizabeth Hospital has a proper and full complement of staff, certainly enough to carry out the quality of care that we would expect from that institution. But questions have been asked in the public domain about the cost. We hear that in the order of \$65,000 or perhaps \$67,000 a month was being paid out in salaries at the St. Joseph Hospital. The Minister has been heard to say that some of those people are, in fact, substituting at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. A question has been asked if some people are not in the receipt of two salaries. It is possible.

Aside.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: You are not debating the St. Joseph Hospital and I am hoping that the Honourable Member will not spread her wings too far.

Miss B. A. MILLER: We are discussing the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, but the Minister himself has said that people who were hired to work at the St. Joseph Hospital are now on staff...

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Minister is on a point of order.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: On a point of order, Sir. The Honourable Member is making reference to a matter which has already been settled. We had a debate in which I said that. I will respond to it if she raises questions. But she cannot say that I have said that. I have not said that in this debate.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I was careful not to say that it was said in this debate.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I would just advise that you do not go too far.

Miss B. A. MILLER: This debate is not confined to what the Minister has said in this debate.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Yes, but it is confined to the Head under discussion.

Miss B. A. MILLER: ...to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I am concerned, Mr. Chairman, that there are doctors and other health care professionals working at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital who are really supposedly on the payroll of the St. Joseph Hospital. But there are questions about whether or not there are also on the payroll of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and therefore in receipt of not one but two salaries, and the Minister is saying that is probable.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I was saying from my seat that the question she is asking is a proper question.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: That is the danger we have of responses to asides.

Miss B. A. MILLER: We are concerned about that, Sir. But there is one item that the Minister is not paying very much attention to in this debate but on this side it is a subject of much concern. That has to do with the provision of drugs and medicines at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The National Drug Service, which also supplies the Queen Elizabeth and other health institutions in Barbados, is we are told going to be the subject of cutbacks like so many other Departments of Government. I am inviting the Minister to deny this and to deny it in some detail, Sir, because the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have been making the point time and time again that in some of the social services user fees are going to have to become a reality of life.

We are concerned in the Barbados Labour Party that user fees cannot become the order of the day, particularly in respect of the National Health Service which supplies drugs for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, particularly at a time when the Health Levy which was introduced by the Barbados Labour Party and for which we make no apology, this year is in the order of some \$34 million, which as we would say in Barbados "loss away" in the Consolidated Fund. The Health Levy was originally designed among other things to provide the cover for what in effect you would call user fees of this kind. It is very difficult for the party which conceptualised and put on the ground the National Drug Service to be supportive in any guise of an attempt to duplicate charges. The Government must not feel that because it hides \$34 million in Health Levy in the Consolidated Fund...

Aside.

Miss B. A. MILLER: May I refer the Honourable Member to the Estimates 1991-92?

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Can we have some order?

Miss B. A. MILLER: Part I Current Estimates – Revenue, Page XIX, Code 08.01.09 Health Levy, Estimates 1991-92 \$34 million, Revised Estimates 1990-91 \$33 million, Estimates 1990-91 \$35 million, and Actual Revenue 1989-90 in excess of \$34 million. This is not small money. This is a lot of money taken out of people's earnings on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. People were given to understand, certainly by the Barbados Labour Party Government, that this Health Levy would go towards certain earmarked services headlined "Health". It will be very hard now to entertain any thought – the Honourable Member for St. Peter is suggesting impossible. For me, as a former Minister of Health, it would be certainly impossible and I agree with him – that any charges can be attached to the National Drug Service that could possibly be described as user fees either for prescriptions...

Aside.

3.10 p.m.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Absolutely. The Government would have to abolish the Health Levy in order to be able to justify this kind of user fee. I would want to invite the Minister of Health to be able to deny this in a categorical and comprehensive manner. No glib form but no substance: "It isn't so. I say it isn't so." People want to be reassured. These are matters critical – life and death.

I want an assurance too, Mr. Chairman, that we are not going to have any cuts in the area of family planning.

Asides.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Mr. Chairman, Sir, there are certain services which in any language, on any side of the House, and under whatever conditions have to be inviolate. The Minister and I are *ad idem* on the whole question of cuts on social services as they relate to health services. I know that he is going to have to effect economies; he is going to have to cut and contrive. I know that there is a lot of fat and wastage in the system. I know that there are new systems, new technologies, new ways and means to live within today's health budget.

The point has to be made that when pressured, Ministers of Finance will sometimes put pressure on Ministers of Health – that is not to let the Minister of Health out – and this goes for Ministers of Education; but they have to use their skills, as the Honourable Member for St. Peter has pointed out, to be able to persuade their Minister of Finance and their Cabinet. So, I am very interested to hear from the Minister of Health on the status of the National Drug Service and any possibility of user fees of any kind being introduced, not only in the National Drug Service but for that matter anywhere in the Health Service. I think the people of Barbados are waiting to hear these things. A certain Letter of Intent has indicated certain things and people are therefore on notice, but in respect of

the Health Service the people of Barbados are not on notice. As maligned as the National Health Service was, I do not think, Mr. Chairman, Sir, that there is a person born in Barbados who would dare to reverse the National Drug Service and to take it from young people under the age of sixteen and from people over the age of sixty-five and from those who suffer cancer, hypertension, diabetes and asthma and other of the chronic killer diseases in Barbados. If you look again at the Barbados Labour Party's manifesto of 1986, we had thought that certain ophthalmic, certain dental and certain other medical cases could have come on to the National Drug Service. The Government has not yet been able to achieve this, but Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is very important that people know exactly what is in the Government's planning in the light of the current economic situation in respect of the drug service.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Member will conclude in one minute.

Miss B. A. MILLER: I am coming to a conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Sir. There is one other very important query that I want to make of the Minister of Health. The Chief Medical Officer's Report. I cannot say with any certainty when that was laid in the House – in what year.

What is the most recent CMO Report? There are several reports which ought to be laid on the table of this Parliament on a regular annual basis. The majority of them are not but the Chief Medical Officer's Report, certainly during the Barbados Labour Party's time in Government was one that you could count on at the end of the year. Within six months or so of that you would see the Chief Medical Officer's Report. It is a very important report. It has implications for several other departments of Government and as a statistical review it has the most critical function to play and as an epidemiological review it has an even more important function to play. In other words, Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is not a report that can afford to fall into arrears and I would want some assurance from the Minister as to when we can expect to see the 1990 Chief Medical Officer's Report. Thank you.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am not winding up, Sir, just responding as I think some of the points the Honourable Member made are very important. She said that there are some areas in which we are *ad idem* and I believe that because I do not wish this issue of health to become purely political that it is important that those areas where we have agreement be highlighted on both sides of the House. Let me say that I appreciate the point raised about user fees and I would want to give her a specific statement on that.

Unfortunately, there are a number of persons in the developed countries, more specifically the United States who, I would go so far as to say, view with envy the strides which have been made in this small country over the last 25 years, indeed over the last 50 years, but in

particular during the last 25 years in the development of our health care. Many of those persons form part of the international donor community, and they have their own concepts of what ought to be. I remember that many of the concepts recommended by the Kaiser people who were probably the most progressive of any group coming out of the United States still were anathema to us in Barbados. The fact is that the American Medical Association and indeed, the whole hierarchy of the American governmental system now find that health has become the most important domestic issue in the United States because there are 37 million people in that system that have no access whatsoever to health care.

We, in Barbados, have through the commitment of a number of public officers, people in public health, the commitment of both governments at each opportunity that they have had responsibility for health to a system which recognises that health is a fundamental right of every person born in this country. I wish to give this House the assurance that there is no change and cannot be any change in that approach to our health care. This concept of user fees – the people pay the user fees every time that they take money out of their salary every weekend – so, they are paid in advance. We are paying them up front. I notice that somebody purporting to be an important person in the Pharmaceutical Society is now saying to the newspapers that we have to start charging people \$5 to go to a pharmacy. Let me say that it will not happen while I am Minister of Health. We cannot have poor people going to a pharmacy...

Asides.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am saying that this Minister of Health will not preside over any system in which anybody has to pay \$5 when they go to any drugstore to get their medicine. I think that it would be immoral. I want to make it quite clear. This Government is not involved in that and will not be. This Government has demonstrated time and time again as that government did. We may disagree on management and methodology and there are times when we have disagreement at the level of politics but there are fundamental things on which we are agreed.

I know there is now a man walking around, a professional lecturer, who wants to change the educational system, after he has passed through it, and all connected with him passed through it. He wants people to be paying to go to school. These are fundamental things in this system that will change the character of Barbados so that none of us will be able to recognise it.

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital – the doctors and the pharmacists and everybody must understand the health care system is a bulwark on which the peace and quiet of this society rests. It has always been so and it must continue to be so. We pay for it. Anybody who believes that is

socialist, that is their problem. It is not ours. It is that aspect of our system that we do not intend to change or should not intend to change. Those persons who wish to pay should be given the right and the privilege to pay and therefore we should always have a system of private medicine available in this country.

3.20 p.m.

It must not in any way subsume the very fantastic system which we have been able to see emerge over time. It is our responsibility. I say it is the responsibility of every single individual who becomes Minister of Health to guard that with his or her life.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The Minister of Finance is not a man from Mars. The Minister of Finance is part of the system that I am describing and would have been part of this system from the beginning. And as he reminds me, he was a Minister of Health so he understands.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The point is that we are on common ground. This concept of user fee is a system which brings in all kinds of abuses.

One of the problems which I discussed at a meeting of the Continuing Medical Education Programme which they had a weekend or two ago, I said to the doctors that we must guard against having some of the abuses which are now rampant in the United States, this whole business, for example, of the revolving door concept where persons who go for medication move from one specialist to the other only to discover five specialists later and a lot of money down that they did not need to go to that specialist in the first place.

Once you have a fee for service that is an inevitable corollary to that kind of approach. What we must do, and the Honourable Member said it – I take nothing from what the Honourable Member said – and what I have been imploring the people in the Ministry of Health to do is to recognise that efficiency must be our watchword. We must get the maximum efficiency out of every dollar we spend and especially in these times it behoves every one of us, and more particularly those in the social services, both education and health, to see that we make that extra effort and go that extra mile to ensure that we stretch each dollar to its limit.

There has been fat in the Ministry of Health over time. That is partly because of the system of management we have in the public sector. That system of management does not allow so much for management as it allows for accretion. What we are required to do in these times is to

find the management systems and management ways and apply them.

I have devoted a substantial part of my time as Minister of Health to developing the human resources in the broad Ministry. That requires that each person be given an opportunity to become familiar with the latest techniques in management, supervising and operating so that in the final analysis when people come as a group because that is what health care must be about, it must be a concept of the team and each member of the team whether it is the maid, the pharmacist or the doctor, has an important role to play.

I am moved by the fact that there is a man at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital who is responsible for cleaning. He is a general worker. By using a system which we recommended back in 1987/1988, we have given him the opportunity to be responsible for a floor. Anybody who now goes to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital would note that the floors of the corridors of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital are as clean and spick and span as any floor you would find in any North American Hospital, in fact one of the most because that individual has been given the opportunity to shine in an area in which he is competent. He is probably one of the best workers at the Queen Elizabeth if not in Barbados and his job is general worker to keep a corridor clean. But he does it with such class and such ability. He is an inspiration to some of the people higher up in the hierarchy. Not all of the consultants in a system will operate at a level one wishes them to operate but that is part of the management structure that we are spending time on.

The Honourable Member asked a question also about the Drug Service. The Drug Service has been, as I have said before, one of the most efficient organisations that we have in the public sector. The Drug Service is operating at a level that makes us proud. It is a World Health Organisation agency in the sense that it is one of the services around the world that is utilised as a world health model, if you will. It has been able to get almost maximum production out of the monies which are spent. It has affected some very worthwhile economies in its approach over the last ten years. We have recognised and the Minister of Finance has recognised that the Drug Service is one of the fundamental planks on which the health care system in Barbados will operate.

I will say to his everlasting credit that there has never been any query raised about the level or size of the Drug Service Estimate. In the Ministry we apply stringent measures and ensure that not a cent more than is absolutely necessary comes forward for drugs. The Director of the Drug Service is efficient. Therefore, when his estimates come and we discuss them, we discuss them as professionals. So that when the estimates for the Drug Service go forth to the Ministry of Finance the Ministry of

Finance has not found, since I have been there, any fault with them. I expect that to continue. We will give a high quality service both internally as we put forward the management necessities and externally as we serve our people out there.

Now, I think this Committee deserves a comment from me on the recent question of some private pharmacists saying that they were going to withdraw their services. The Drug Service received a letter from an attorney in which the attorney said a group of private pharmacists said that if they did not get paid they would withdraw their services. They did not identify who this group was. I have to say that it was impossible for anyone to be able to respond in a definitive way to a communication which said that a group of pharmacists will withdraw their services.

We have a contingency plan in the Ministry. It is no secret and if anybody withdraws their services, then we would have to follow that plan. But the fact is that everybody in Barbados knows that we are short of money. Therefore, for anyone to attempt to pressure us in the areas of health care at this stage is really to be unreasonable. What I can say to you is that the larger pharmacies in Barbados and generally the Pharmaceutical Society, as I understand it, have not in any way attempted to pressure the Ministry. I heard the garbled story last night on the television which suggested that some people said that they have not got their money. There is a large number of people that can say they have not got their money. That is not a secret. We cannot afford to pay everybody at this time.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I do not have responsibility for the pensioners but if the pensioners are not being paid in my constituency I will want them to be paid as quickly as possible.

3.30 p.m.

The fact is that this is not a secret however. It is not something that anybody ought to be trying to make political hay out of.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: If the Honourable Member has an interest, he would have declared that interest. So I am not going to be guided by anybody saying that the Honourable Member is a pensioner. I know him from the time I was a boy. He cannot be a pensioner.

But, Sir, the only point I am making here is that I do not wish and I really try hard to avoid confrontation with any of the groups in the system who are dealing with the Ministry of Health. When the junior doctors took their

action, I had long discussions with the Chairman and the Barbados Association of Medical Practitioners and I conceded that they had a point but I had to draw to their attention that they were not alone in the system. There are people who have worked long before we had the problems who did not get paid overtime or did not get paid travel. That has happened from time immemorial in the system. But good civil servants always understand that what you do not get in the morning you will get in the evening.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: It has been thus and always will be. So this concept of I am going to pressure you and if you do not do this, I will do that is not the way we have done things in Barbados. And therefore I talk to them and ask them, ask yes, I have no difficulty in asking them especially when they are right, when I know they have a point, and ask them to look after the higher requirements of our service. Most of them, all of them tend to respond positively.

I would ask any pharmacists who have not been paid promptly to understand that we who are in the business of health care have a higher responsibility than some others and therefore we have to exercise that responsibility in a slightly different manner. I hope that in respect of the last question asked by the Honourable Member I have responded.

And so far as the CMO's reports are concerned, as you know these are primarily within the ambit of the Chief Medical Officer herself. The last one that has been completed – I think the Honourable Member asked about the last one that was laid – I believe that we have laid 1987. That was the last one. I can say that 1988, 1989 and 1990 are in process and should be laid shortly. Because for the same reasons which the Honourable Member has identified I have been very concerned and they are now being proof read as I understand it. We are bringing two of them in one document and the following one will follow almost immediately.

I hope I have answered the queries and I stand ready to answer some more, Sir.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I want to raise a few matters, some of general import and one or two of rather more specific import. The Minister of Health in his usual style has spoken in very eloquent language on a number of general principles and in doing so he has shown that he really has not learnt much from the present predicament in which Barbados finds itself. Indeed he has not learnt much from his own experience as Minister of Health because if he had he would have known that to paint rosy pictures is very good and to make a lot of fine sounding speeches about how good things are and all the model that Barbados is and is not, I think his experience

should have showed him that those things are not to be spoken of as glibly as we were wont to hear them in the past. He should understand, Mr. Chairman, that the myths of today become the reality of tomorrow and *vice versa*.

This country, during 1991, has experienced these things in no small measure. There was a Greek philosopher called Thales who said that everything is in a constant state of flux. By that I understand him to mean that you cannot make a lot of absolute statements and believe that they are going to mean anything.

When I said the Government has not learned much from its present predicament, I am talking about the kind of promises made by members of the Government in the recent past that have come to dog you. It is all very well to say that you are going to transform the Queen Elizabeth Hospital into the most modern Hospital of its size and kind anywhere.

Certain remarks made by the Honourable Member for St. George South were order, by Mr. CHAIRMAN, to be expunged from the record.

Mr. L. R. TULL: I can put it the same way I put it and let us look at it. Let us get into the syntax and all that, Sir. I am saying, Sir, it is very easy to make a lot of high blown rosy promises to people in Barbados about all sorts of things. But what has happened and come home in 1991 is that people of Barbados are tired of a lot of fancy rosy promises and that what they require is honesty and candour from representatives of the people. If there is a fault in that, Sir...

Hon. B. M. TAITT: If the Honourable Member would give way, Sir, I just wish to say that what I said, all of it is factual and has been published and is available. It might have been rosy to his ear, Sir, but all that I have said so far is factual. It is not any promises. The facts are there for anybody to go and dig up if the Honourable Member wishes.

Mr. L. R. TULL: You see, Sir, when public debate is characterised by a lot of hyperbole, when simple situations are described in such a way as to move them out of their normal context, there is a danger that just what is happening in this country will happen. The Honourable Member got up and he said that he does not eat at the IMF and therefore he will say what will happen and what will not happen in the Ministry of Health. We are caught up in the vortex of change. We are in a situation in Barbados in November, 1991 that no one in November, 1990 would have even contemplated. Therefore the words of today are a lot of hot air of tomorrow.

When the Minister spoke in here today you would have thought that everything was fine and dandy with the health system in Barbados and indeed with the Queen

Elizabeth Hospital. But that is not the truth that things are fine at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the health service generally in Barbados.

I am not saying, Mr, Chairman, Sir – before anybody gets hot under the collar – that we do not have a good health service. We have a good health system, we have a good hospital. Much of what the Minister said – when he was not using immoderate language – is absolutely true. Barbados' health profile is one among the best in the developing world. Our health system is one that is the envy of many countries, first world and developing. But having said that we must not go on to give the impression that everything is okay.
3.40 p.m.

The Minister said for instance that there are now 637 nurses or some such figure. That does not mean anything. There could have been six hundred and thirty something nurses working before that but all of the posts were not filled. So that is to give the impression that the nursing establishment has increased.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Yes, Sir, why does not the Honourable Member give way?

Mr. L. R. TULL: Sir, why doesn't he speak when I am finished?

Hon. B. M. TAITT: No, because the people who are hearing you don't remember.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: What has the Honourable Member risen on?

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Listen, Sir, I made the point that it increased by two hundred plus. That is the point I am making. It is not a hyperbole. It increased by two hundred plus and I will give you the details.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Sir, if the Honourable Member plans to get up often to throw me off track he is wasting his time. The Minister got up to explain and he has not told me whether 636 nurses and nursing assistants and whatever they are were working before. He is talking about the filling of posts.

The Minister for instance does not talk, when he was dealing with the question, of his intervention with the junior hospital doctors or their representatives. He talks only about money, he does not talk about the general morale. In fact he spoke about morale when he was speaking about the nurses. What is happening at the moment, and from what I am hearing, the Minister should really deal with these things instead of telling us that it is a utopian situation at the hospital.

I understand, Sir, that the hours worked by junior doctors are too long. I am not making any case for them. I am making a case for the patients, because of all the talk we are hearing in these debates you would think that the new building, the new theatres, the number of nurses and all of that is at the heart of the health system. We are concerned about the patients and what is happening, Sir, is that the junior hospital doctors, some 80 to 100 of them have to work too long hours. They work the regular hours, they do over time and they have something called on call. On call means that you do not sleep at night, that you are up all night waiting for the telephone to ring to rush down to the hospital. It is a system that was in place for a long time. The Minister is boasting that he brought in on call.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Minister has ample time to respond in his final response. Just continue.

Mr. L. R. TULL: This system, Sir, is working havoc on the patients because a human being, even if you are a doctor, because some people seem to think that they are next thing to God, has a physical capacity like any other human being and it is not possible for people to work 24 hours a day and still provide quality service to patients. The word is that a lot of patients in hospital are not getting proper care during the night by doctors because the hours are far too long and they are not responding to the on call calls so to speak.

I want also to mention something else that I want the Minister, instead of all this fine language, this lot of rhetoric, to deal with a number of problems that are crying out for solutions. One relates to the question of policemen on hospital wards. People go into the hospital for all kinds of reasons but sometimes they go because the police take them in there. And policemen are sitting down on public wards for 24 hours a day within a few feet of patients causing a great deal of anxiety among the patients in those public wards. I am sure the Minister has no difficulty with that. The Minister would not feel comfortable that he is in a room and he has a policeman in uniform sitting down a few feet from him, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I have talked to a number of patients in the hospital who, perhaps have had their recuperation delayed by the constant presence of a uniform officer in the wards, quite often barking out orders to people on the wards. I want him to look into that because it is wrong and I don't want any answer that it was happening a long time, the Government is there to govern. It is wrong. It needs to be looked into and it must be changed. If the Minister by the look on his face does not know of it, I give him time to find out, but it is happening all the time and something must be done about it.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Member has one minute to conclude.

Mr. L. R. TULL: One minute, Sir? If you give me two, Sir, I will deal with rationalisation of this training and I would not come back, Sir, but the Minister said earlier in this debate, Sir, that in respect of the psychiatric hospital there were only three untrained nurses at the psychiatric hospital but he has training staff at the psychiatric hospital. I want to know if the Minister is keeping a full time training staff at the psychiatric hospital to train three people? He also says there is only one untrained nurse at the geriatric hospital but he also has a training facility at the geriatric hospital. He has boasted that he has trained practically all of the nurses at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital but Mr. Chairman, Sir, he had a nurses training facility at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, one at the psychiatric hospital and one at the Community College. Now, either I have misunderstood what he is saying or it is the most colossal waste of resources that I have heard of for a long time and that has come straight out of the mouth of the Minister and that deserves an explanation, Sir.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: At this point let me just advise that the debate has another half an hour to go and if the Minister will respond then he should stay with the final fifteen minutes.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Mr. Chairman, I have to clarify this position. Mr. Chairman, they are raising important issues which must be responded to. We cannot have any debate subsequently. I want to deal with ...

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The only person who caught my eye would have been the Minister but I just gave other Members the opportunity to make their point now because the final fifteen minutes should be allocated to reply.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The last point the Honourable Member raised does not require a lot of genius to figure it out. If he were thinking about it he would recognise it takes three years to train a nurse for general nursing. It takes three years to train a registered mental nurse. During the time when you have your full complement people get older, people resign, you understand it does not remain static, that is the error which the Barbados Labour Party Ministers, like O'Brien Trotman, that colossal clown - I withdraw that, Sir.

Asides.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: There are a hundred nurses ... Mr. Chairman, they are going to discuss Sandie's school in Welch Village now, Sir?

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I will hear what is part of the debate and that certainly is not part of the debate. I have so far given Members ample opportunity to speak, and I

would think that they would understand that the rules must be observed.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: He does not wish to hear. The Honourable Member was only interested in making points but he does not wish to hear because he has just been caught out in the most simplistic argumentation that was put forward and now that it is being put to rest he does not want to hear. Part of the problem that we now have is that somebody with brains like his, Sir, had the same foolish concept back in the 1980s and as a result we did not have training of anybody for three years. That is why we ran into the problems we ran into in 1986/87. Because there was no one to replenish the persons who leave either because they resigned or the persons who leave because they ...

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: No, you are missing the point. Trained persons come to 65 years, trained persons come to sixty years. Trained persons have to leave and go away and you have to replace them with trained people but it takes three years to replace one. It is not that you are going off to a labourer and bringing in a labourer to replace a nurse and that is why you have to have the training continuing.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: No, I am not winding up. He says that junior doctors do not respond to on call calls. That is a slander on the junior doctors.
3.50 p.m.

Mr. L. R. TULL: On a point of order, Sir. I am objecting on two things: (1) He accused me of slander, which is unparliamentary, and (2) I did not say that they do not respond to on-call calls. What I am saying is that they respond to the calls but do not function. That is what I am saying. They cannot. They fall asleep.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am saying that to say of doctors that they are going into the hospital on-call and not performing is a slander against doctors.

Mr. L. R. TULL: I am objecting to that, Sir. It is no slander. I said, Sir, in elucidating that the people have worked beyond their capacity. They work long hours sometimes 24 hours a day and they cannot function when they go.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: As I understand it, I do not understand that he is saying that you said that they are going into the hospital and not providing the services.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The fact is, Sir, that from time immemorial....

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I just want to clear this issue. If I understand the Honourable Member to be saying that the Honourable Member for St. George South has made the statement that he is objecting to, then I would agree that is not what should be done. But right now I do not understand him to be saying that you have said this is how the doctors are operating.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Yes, take that. Mr. Chairman, the point I am making is that doctors have been trained in a specific way from time immemorial. This argument which the Honourable Member is putting forward is raging in North America as to whether it is necessary to be trained in the way they are now trained. That is with the long hours. Doctors have been working long hours from the time doctors were in existence. But the doctors at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, as I understand it, would not normally work any twenty-four hours non-stop. But a doctor's calling is not like a lawyer's calling. A doctor is supposed to be able to work under trying circumstances.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Sir, apparently I have offended the lawyers. I withdraw any offence at all to the lawyers.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The Honourable Member has just become acquainted with the problem and is not bringing the full force of his rational being to bear on the issue. Therefore, I am going to leave that and move on, Sir. Suffice it to say that the doctors and the doctors' training is a matter which the doctors are dealing with and must deal with.

In the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, I have just decreed that no individual should have more than 15 on-call days in a month. In fact, we are going to try to keep it to 10 on-call days. This will mean that a person will only be on-call, all things being equal, ten days or ten nights in any month.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The Honourable Member is behaving as if this is a system when he talks about the on-call system. The point has to be made that this is a system by which all of the doctors in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital have been trained and have worked from time immemorial. Furthermore, it has been reduced considerably.

Aside.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: We are having too many interruptions in the debate.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The Honourable Member, therefore, is way out of his league when he starts to talk about this and this is a matter which can be checked. As a matter of fact, if you remove all on-call, many of the junior doctors might find themselves having not satisfied their requirement for their graduation to registration. That is what I am told, Sir.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I may be talking foolishness but that is what I have been told.

Sir, he said that we paint a rosy picture on everything. He said the policemen are sitting on public wards for 24 hours, 7 days a week. Therefore, if that is happening, it is contrary to the direction of the Minister. No policeman has any right in any ward in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital unless he is sick.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: No, when they guard people, they guard them outside of the ward. A policeman is not given authority in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. That is contrary to the rules of the Hospital.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Well, I am not responsible for any policeman who goes where he should not go. I am saying what the rules are. The Honourable Member asked me if I am aware. I am just telling him what the rules are. If he is now going to tell me that it is happening, it is like saying that you have people who drive around on the wrong side of the road. I can only tell you what the rules are. The Honourable Member was discussing it in terms of what obtains at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I give him the assurance that I will check it and stop it.

As I understand it, when people are deemed to be in custody, the police officer determines in his perception what custody means. When a person is in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, they are under the jurisdiction of the Hospital Director and, therefore, any policeman that is in the Hospital with any patient can only operate on the direction he gets from the Hospital. Those are the rules by which this Hospital and all hospitals and certainly the English system operate. A person cannot normally be arrested in a hospital.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: All that you have to do if you find that the rules are not being followed is do what you necessarily have to do. I am not going to get involved in what happens in police custody. But I know that I was walking through the Queen Elizabeth Hospital after I became Minister and I saw a prisoner shackled and I told the Matron to see that he is unshackled. You cannot be in a hospital sick and be shackled.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Mr. Chairman, there are people who are shackled to the bed in the hospital.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am saying to the Honourable Member that I gave instructions to the Matron of the Hospital that nobody is to be shackled in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. It is theoretically impossible for a person to be shackled....

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I did not say that I did not believe it happens. I thought the Honourable Member was asking me what is the rule and to look into it. What he is saying is that there is a violation of what he knows to be a clear rule concerning people who go the... I have been talking, Mr. Chairman, only recently, about patients' rights. A person who goes into the hospital is a patient. A person does not go into the hospital as a prisoner. If a person is a prisoner, the person should be at the hospital at Glendairy. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital is not a prison and therefore it is not to be used as a prison. You can only get shackled if you are in prison. I hear they shackle people in the Courts and almost everywhere they shackle them left, right and centre. I suppose it must be contrary to the new mood or the new mode of methodology in this country to shackle everybody.
4.00 p.m.

Asides.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am saying that that is contrary to the human rights of people in the country.

Asides.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: The fact is that a hospital is not a prison and as soon as a country starts allowing the hospital to be treated like a prison then the country itself is losing its mores. I am saying, Mr. Chairman, I will give the Honourable Member the assurance that as Minister of Health I will investigate it and if necessary will come back to the Honourable Member and to this Honourable House with the information.

I said earlier that I would give some details. In 1988 there were 16 staff nurses who resigned, 2 midwives, 3 nursing assistants, 8 retirements, 4 were seconded, 2 were

boarded, i.e. found to be unhealthy and one died. A total of 36. The new staff that came in was 40, so we had a net of 40 coming in.

In 1989 there were 20 resignations, 7 retirements, 4 medically boarded, 3 sessional staff nurses. That was 34. 53 went out. That was for the full year.

In 1990, there were 23 resignations, 11 retirements, 1 secondment, 1 transfer, 2 died and 1 was boarded. A total of 39 and during that year 90 came in.

In 1991 we have 58. I do not have the resignations.

On the question of the number of nurses per shift from seven to three in the morning there are 180 persons on duty. From one to nine 90 persons are on duty and from nine p.m. to seven a.m. there are 90 as well. So you can see that if 80 persons were absent, eighty out of ninety there would be only ten nurses in the hospital.

Asides.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: According to the Honourable Member that would be 80 out of 300. It means that for the whole day if 80 persons were out of 300 you would see that we would be in deep trouble. This is not so.

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM: Before the Honourable Minister replies finally as the debate is coming to an end of the time allotted to it, I would like to enquire about the specific issues. I think we have left general principles now.

About 18 months ago, I took to the hospital an elderly lady for whom I had responsibility. She had fallen ill in her house and was unable to walk. She spent three to four days in the Casualty, as it then was, before she was taken to the ward, and when she got there she developed bed sores and hospital infections and subsequently died. She never came back out. It led me into making a quite detailed enquiry about the incidence of hospital infection and at least two doctors told me that the incidence at the Q.E.H. is extremely high. Hospital infections quite often turn out to be very difficult to cure; often they are fatal.

I would like the Minister to tell us whether he is aware of this problem and why is it that we have such a high incidence of hospital infection. Bed sores, apparently are common everywhere once you are not moving around. Particularly when you are elderly, you are vulnerable to bed sores. There is nothing new about that but the incidence of hospital infection at the Q.E.H., I was advised was particularly high and I wonder whether there was any particular explanation which the Minister would provide.

The second thing is that I have learnt over the last year that the incidence of patients falling off beds in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is also very high and I wonder

whether there was any particular explanation for that. It is certainly not a situation that we should allow to continue since from time to time people get very badly hurt.

There is a bigger matter. About two years or so ago, there was an announcement in the Press by the Ministry that we would be moving towards open-heart surgery in Barbados at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I have participated in a discussion with doctors of the Rotary West subsequently on this matter and there were two schools of thought. There was a school that felt that we should move towards open-heart surgery, expensive though it would be both to establish and to maintain, that we should try to attract all the cases from the Eastern Caribbean, perhaps even beyond, that could be handled here. The other school was that the initial cost and the cost of maintaining the system with all the support services would be so high that in truth and in fact we should move to identify early cases in Barbados in need of open-heart surgery and send them abroad through a cooperative arrangement with one or two institutions in North America.

I was wondering where do we stand now on this matter and whether we are likely to be moving ahead with open-heart surgery or whether we are likely to opt for the second option that I referred to and whether the current climate of austerity may have anything to do with the decision insofar as what has been taking place.

My final thoughts relate really to the reports which lawyers on a daily basis request of the doctors of the hospital. I notice that the programme of the IADB project is involved not only with structures but with improving the accounting system and the reporting system and I was wondering whether you can assure us that we can look forward to better and more frequent reports. There are often long delays resulting from the new technology that you would put in with respect to the storage and retrieval of information.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Mr. Chairman, I just want to ask one brief question. I wonder if the Minister can tell us if there is any doctor on the pay of the St. Joseph Hospital who does no public work at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Why I ask this is because I heard the Minister sometime in the past referring to the doctors who are paid from the St. Joseph Hospital vote but he wasn't concerned they were doing work at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I would like the Minister to state if there is a single doctor or all the doctors who are paid out of the vote of St. Joseph Hospital who doesn't do public work at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I am stressing public. I am not talking about seeing their own private patients.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I think that there were very constructive questions asked and I would like to answer them each in turn but I think the most important one is the

third question asked by the Honourable Member for St. Joseph about the open-heart surgery. His question was which direction we are going in. The Heart Foundation had a study commissioned by Professor Waldron as to the efficacy and desirability of having open-heart surgery in Barbados and the result of that study coincided with the Ministry's view based on other information which had been gathered that it is desirable for us to move towards having open heart surgery.

4.10 p.m.

The methodology which the second school of doctors suggested is in fact the one which we now follow where all persons in Barbados who have any kind of cardiac difficulty that requires advanced treatment are transported to the United States, mostly the North Shore Hospital in Long Island, New York. We have an arrangement with that Hospital where they take all of our patients and we do not pay them. In fact, we pay a peppercorn. We make a donation of Bds. \$20 000 a year. Some of these operations would, of course, have cost Bds. \$200 000.

When they were starting their programme, they managed because Dr. Ishmael, I am calling his name not pejoratively, happened to be on staff. He is a cardiologist with them. He worked out a programme where from Caribbean, generally the Eastern Caribbean, but from Barbados, this programme was put in place. We now do it through the Medical Aid Scheme. There is a large cross section of people in Barbados who have had open heart surgery of one kind or another by going to that Hospital. However, now that they have been doing their own for considerable time and they have reached the required quota of patients, it is obvious that during the next three to five years they will find it impossible to continue the rather generous arrangements which we have. We have to do some forward planning and be ready so that two years ago this Parliament, in fact, agreed to the sum of \$2 million for what is called an angiographic suite.

The angiographic suite is a set of instrumentation that will be required to be in a separate building which will allow for angiograms to be done in Barbados in a specific way now that Dr. Ishmael and Dr. Massey can do angiograms. They do them in a very laborious way and only occasionally whereas if the people go to North Shore they can get their angiograms done in no time. The angiographic suite is on stream. We have, in fact, ordered it. It is being held by General Electric for us.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Not pending payment. We had ordered one that would become available by 1991. In 1990 they had one that even had more features than we anticipated. By some error made by General Electric they had had one that was available for Venezuela and somewhere else. Then they did not want it so they made us

an offer that they would give us that advanced one at the same price we had ordered if we would take it.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: It is General Electric in the United States. As a result of our economic difficulty the Ministry of Finance has agreed that the angiographic suite is so important bearing in mind that each single member in here, except possibly the two Honourable Members that sit at the end and the lady are prime subjects for cardiac problems because they are younger and ladies do not have them as frequently as men. Since the Honourable Member is the only lady chances are that in this group she would be exempted but all of the Honourable Members especially the ones under stress.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: What we have done, therefore, is that in the meantime Dr. Harris from our staff is in training at North Shore. He has been in training since last year. We have just sent up the anaesthetist because the open heart team will have to be trained as a team. That is our first open heart surgeon. He is a young FRCS. They have to be young. They must have a certain profile. He fits the profile and has gone off for training. We have, in fact, been training towards the angiographic suite. The Ministry of Finance has accepted that this is something that must be. Within the Hospital that is one of the areas that must not, in fact, be interfered with. We have had to delay its implementation but we are still on track in terms of when the doctors will come back.

What we are proposing to do is that in the early stages after the angiographic suite has been developed that the doctors would come down to Barbados in the first instance. That is, the team from North Shore would come down with our own doctor and would perform the open heart surgery here in Barbados and by that process train as well other persons who would be members of the team so that within the next 18 months we should see the system coming on stream and we would have the number of doctors.

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I am saying the system would come on stream and we would do the angiograms here. Then instead of sending them up to do the angiograms we would do angiograms here and we would only send the ones who need open heart surgery. Then within that next 18 months our people should be ready because this programme is a two-year training programme. They should have open heart surgery in Barbados within the next two and a half to three years. This is the actual surgery. I hope no one would hold me to it, keep the calendar and come

back two and a half years from now and say "you did not come through." That is the planning.

On the question of the patients falling off beds, the Hospital beds which were supplied over the years were not all beds with rails. From time to time sometimes the odd patient – I say the odd because it is a very rare occasion. As you know, I think it was the other side's Government who instituted a system of reporting of all accidents that occur in the health institutions. There is an accident return form that has to be filled out about every accident that occurs in the Hospital, whether patient or worker, the slightest accident. The numbers coming in for persons falling off beds in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital would be about one per year. I may be off by a couple...

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I say to you that I have not got a lot of reports about patients falling off beds. The other area, the nosocomial, that is what I mentioned earlier but I mentioned it by the technical name – the hospital infection is called nosocomial. Nosocomial infection is, in fact, the result of overcrowding.

One of the things that are not appreciated in Barbados because we have not addressed it until recently is that there is overcrowding in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Except in the paediatrics ward, there is from time to time overcrowding in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. One of the major reasons why it is necessary for us, in my very strong opinion, to have the St. Joseph Hospital, is precisely to reduce the incidence of nosocomial infection by reducing the incident of overcrowding in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. You would be surprised....

Aside.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: It has nothing to do with rhetoric. The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that there is overcrowding at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. This is recorded. It has been sent to us. It has been clear. It is one of the things which we have to try and prevent. We can only do that by providing more beds. It was one of the rationales that was put forward for the present expansion of the Hospital. Even when we have 650 beds which is where we will be when we have completed this project there will still be hospital infection.

4.20 p.m.

I read a document recently in the US News and World Report in which they said in the United States some 500 people die every year from hospital infection. It is not something peculiar to Barbados or the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. It is something that spreads across the entire western system. I know nothing about the eastern system. And they say that the nosocomial infection rate in

Barbados, as measured by the US standard is higher than the norm which they have for the United States and has always been that way. We had from 1987 or 1988 a Hospital Infection Control Officer. We now have a Hospital Infection Control Division at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and its mission is to reduce considerably the level of hospital infection.

The Honourable Member for St. George South asked whether there was any doctor at the St. Joseph Hospital being paid from St. Joseph Hospital not doing any public work at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. There are three doctors that were employed by the St. Joseph Hospital who are working at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. One was already on the staff of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and is continuing to operate as a Consultant Surgeon at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The second one is an Obstetrics Gynaecological Consultant who works with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and does public patients. The other one is an internist who is working at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and does public patients and continues to be paid from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The other two are paid from the St. Joseph Hospital. My understanding is that they are both working and doing public patients. I can vouch for that, at least in one particular, in that where the persons who were in danger of not getting what is a routine operation when I made contact with the hospital, in fact this consultant undertook not only to do that one but is doing a number of other similar operations. So that it has been beneficial.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Mr. Chairman, Sir, just one question again, Sir. Would the Minister explain the phenomenon of improving the health profile of Barbadians with an increase in the numbers of in-patients in Barbados? We agreed that the health profile of Barbados is improving all the time. How is it explained that there is, also, at the same time an increase in the number of in-patients in the hospital.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I think that the first reason that comes to mind is that Barbadians are now living longer and patient days for persons are now longer than they used to be. So that the average age of persons in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital has risen considerably. There is a number of geriatric patients who are ill who 20 years ago would have gone. Although we have more beds, we have more people staying longer in the hospital. That is one of the explanations.

The question that Head 36 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

On the motion of Hon. B. M. TAITT, seconded by Hon. P. M. GREAVES, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported to Mr.

SPEAKER the passing of one Resolution in Committee of Supply, and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On the separate motions of Hon. B. M. TAITT seconded by Hon. P. M. GREAVES the Resolution was read a first time, a second time and agreed to.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order No. 1.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1991

Order No. 1 was called – To move the Second Reading of a Bill to amend the Severance Payments Act.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the Second Reading of a Bill that would amend the Severance Payments Act. The purpose of this is to revise the method of calculation of severance payment.

The Severance Payments Scheme, Sir, makes provision for the payment of compensation to employees who are dismissed by reason of redundancy or natural disaster or who terminate the contract of employment after a period of lay off or short time. The compensation which is assessed at four weeks pay for every year's work, once the employee had been employed for more than two years is paid by the employer. The employer is then entitled to a rebate from the Severance Fund. If the employer is unable to meet the payment, the severed employee can claim compensation from the Fund. The Fund is financed by contributions from the employers and any deficiency in the fund is met by an advance from the Government. Originally the contribution was a fixed amount which varied according to some six wage brackets. From 1978, Sir, the contribution has been assessed as a percentage of the wage of the employee. From January 1978 to December 1978 the contribution was 0.6% and it was reduced to 0.50% with effect from January 1979 and was reduced further to 0.25% in 1982. With effect from April 1991 the rate payable was increased from 0.25% to 1%.

From the beginning of the scheme until August 1977, Sir, the rebate was 50% of the amount of the severance payment. It was reduced to 10% from September 1977 and was increased to the present rate of 25% from April 1984. During the 1970s the scheme was in a fairly sound condition and the fourth actuarial review which covered the three-year period to December 1981 indicated that the Severance Payments Scheme had accumulated reserves of some \$5.7 million as at the end of the period.

It was further stated that the modifications of the contributions base plus salary increases had caused income to increase from \$2.1 million in 1980 to \$4.7 million in 1981 with a total outgo equal to only 30% of the total income in that year. The period 1977 to 1980 saw the level

of unemployment decline from 15.7 per cent to some 12.6 per cent. The period 1982 to 1984 saw expenditure of the Severance Payment Scheme increase from 44 per cent of income to 87 per cent in 1983 and to 112 per cent in 1984. This was a period, Sir, of increasing unemployment which coincided with a reduction of the contribution rate from .5 per cent to .25 per cent of insurable earnings and an increase in the rebate from 10 per cent to 25 per cent. 4.30 p.m.

After experiencing an operational surplus in 1983 substantial deficits were incurred in subsequent years, particularly in 1985 and in 1986 due to the combined effects of an increase in rebates to employers and increased unemployment and business closures. An injection of some \$10 million from Government sources, the Consolidated Fund, in 1987 and 1988 was made to the Fund.

At December 31, 1990 the Fund had a cash balance of \$143 612.73 and liabilities of \$19 million, made up of a loan from the Consolidated Fund of \$10 million, interest on the loan of \$1.4 million and outstanding claims for rebates and direct payments of \$7.6 million.

Sir in 1985 concern was being expressed about the insolvency of the Fund and the duplication of benefits payable under the Unemployment Fund. Indeed, Sir, in that year I am talking about April 1985, the then Minister of Finance in his Financial Statement and Budgetary Proposals stated that he was always of the view that the Unemployment Benefit Scheme and the Severance Payment Scheme should be integrated and should be so administered that the rights of workers would be protected without the Scheme being a burden to employers. In other words that such Scheme should not deter employers from hiring additional labour. I believe, Sir, the Minister of Finance went on to say that there was evidence that the present schemes are not as integrated as they should be and that they were in need of reorganisation.

In 1985 also, the Barbados Workers Union made a proposal that Government should obtain the services of an International Labour Organisation expert to review the unemployment benefit and severance payment scheme. The review was against the background that the Scheme was insolvent and would remain so unless there was either a drastic reduction in redundancies or the cost of the scheme of redundancies. And against the background also that since 80 per cent of the persons receiving unemployment benefit also qualified for severance pay the level of severance payment benefits which was four weeks for each year of service when payable in conjunction with unemployment benefits of 60 per cent of earnings provide a considerable income for the first several months of unemployment and therefore might act as a disincentive for beneficiaries to seek alternative employment during the period. It was further argued that the generous benefits could significantly contribute to a negative attitude towards employment.

An expert, a Mr. Demetrius Pelikanos, the Director of the Social Insurance Scheme of Cyprus, presented a report in 1988 and in summary he recommended that there should be coordination between severance payments and unemployment benefit so as to avoid duplication of benefits. Every two weeks wage paid as severance payments being deemed as one week of paid employment. That was the first recommendation out of some nine recommendations that were made.

Secondly, that the amount of severance payments should be reduced and instead of assessing the severance payment at four weeks wages for each year of service it should be assessed as follows and there was a scheme set out for that proposal so that the proper format...

Aside.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: That will not get me flustered either. I recall once, Mr. Speaker, a former Prime Minister, not the Member for Christ Church South, but he was also introducing a matter and I did indicate then, I followed him very closely and he wanted to know, he became very flustered and said that I had his brief. That was Mr. Tom Adams, Sir. I told him that is the last thing I would have. I did not want his brief at all. It was the last thing I would have.

There were some arrangements proposed by Mr. Pelikanos, the ILO expert, on how the severance payments should be assessed, ranging from the first four years of service, two weeks basic pay for each year of service and it went through down to the twenty-third week, four weeks basic pay for each year of service. I will not go through the details, the Honourable Members are quite familiar with them.

He went on to indicate, Sir, that the unemployment benefit should be reduced from 60 per cent to 50 percent for the first thirteen weeks and to 40 per cent from the fourteenth week until the twenty-sixth week and there were a number of other recommendations made, such as that the amount of severance payment should be reduced by one twenty-fourth for each complete month, also concerning the age of the employee at the date of the dismissal, that is if the age of the employee at the date of dismissal exceeded 63 years, and there were a number of other recommendations. If Honourable Members wish them I would make them available or give the information. 4.40 p.m.

These recommendations were considered by the National Insurance Board which agreed to the following proposals:

- (1) That the Unemployment Scheme and the Severance Payments Benefits Scheme should both remain.

- (2) The prescribed time for claiming unemployment benefit should be reduced from six months to one week. The Cabinet subsequently settled on two weeks and this has been implemented.
- (3) There should be a modification of unemployment benefits from 60 per cent of average insurable earnings for the full 26 weeks to 60 per cent of average annual insurable earnings for the first 10 weeks and 40 per cent for the remaining 16 week, a reduction in benefit by 20.5 per cent.
- (4) The contribution to the Severance Fund payable by the employer alone should be increased from 0.25 per cent to one per cent of insurable earnings and this was implemented in the Budget of April 1991.
- (5) That an actuarial review of both schemes should be undertaken at an early date.
- (6) That in assessing severance payment only wages up to the amount of insurable earnings should be taken into account.
- (7) That severance payment should continue to be paid by the employer and the amount of rebate should remain at 25 per cent of the amount paid.
- (8) That suitable training and/or retraining should be provided for persons drawing unemployment benefits.
- (9) That severance payments should be based on average insurable earnings at the rate of:
 - (a) 2.5 weeks for each year of the first ten years of service.
 - (b) 3 weeks for each year of the next ten years of service.
 - (c) 3.5 weeks for each year of the remaining 13 years of service and the reduction achieved would range from 24 per cent for a person employed for 33 years to 37.9 per cent for a person employed for six years.

Sir, these matters have been considered from time to time and there have been various positions taken on these matters. I think the important point to grasp, Sir, is that it is necessary to make modifications in this particular scheme and I think that is what this Honourable Chamber has to consider and decide upon now.

In 1988, an actuarial review of the National Insurance Scheme was carried out and the actuary being asked to examine the Unemployment Benefit and Severance Payments Scheme and a summary of that Scheme is as follows. The actuary indicated that his analysis showed that the critical financial conditions of the scheme requires that urgent enactment of the amendments proposed by the Board be undertaken. Severe overruns over the last four years aggravated by the liquidation of several industrial concerns have depleted the fund with a minimum debt deficit of some \$3.6 million as of December 31, 1987.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: On a point of order, Sir. I missed that part where he was talking about closures of companies in the last three years. I did not know there were any under the Democratic Labour Party, Sir. I thought that only happened to the Barbados Labour Party. Just read it again, Sir, to make sure that the ear is hearing right.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Were you ruling, Sir? As the Member for St. Joseph would say, "play on". So we will play on and I will ignore that point made by the Member for St. Thomas.

Sir, recommendations have been made from time to time that the Severance Payments Scheme itself should be simplified. I am told that even the attorneys-at-law find it to be a very complex piece of legislation to follow and to unravel. There have been these representations from time to time that it should be simplified in order to facilitate its application and operation. In view of some of the difficulties being experienced, I have accepted that particular representation and we are certainly proposing that these recommendations of the National Insurance Board that the Severance Payments Scheme legislation should be amended have been agreed on, Sir. A comprehensive review of the Severance Payments legislation on the basis of discussions with the social partners will continue.

Sir, the position is that current established claims, that is those already approved for payment from the Severance Payments Scheme, amount to \$277,521.21. I said those that have already been approved for payment. But there will be others in the process of being considered. The balance in the Fund...
4.50 p.m.

Asides.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: There are three different categories. There are those which have been processed – the claims. These are the ones which have been approved. Let us say non-contentious, or that the staff are able to write. There are also the outstanding claims where no funds have been received from the employers and there are the claims on the fund. That would be the second category. I believe there is a third category as well.

The balance in the fund is approximately \$267,843.78, but at the 31st October 1991 claims totalling \$7.5 million in respect of rebates and employers' payments were in hand to be processed. So that gives the figure.

In addition to that, the Severance Payment Scheme is presently indebted to the Consolidated Fund for a loan of \$10 million and interest of \$1.8 million approximately, that is the loan which this Honourable Chamber approved. Repayment of that loan should have commenced in June 1989 after an initial grace period for fiscal years 1987/88 and 1988/89. No payment of the principal or interest has been made and a moratorium has been granted on the payment of the principal and interest for two years commencing April 1991.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the background to the measure that is before us. I believe I have set out quite clearly what the bill is all about and we are seeking to modify the basics on which the benefits will be calculated in terms of the principles of this Severance Payments Bill "for each complete year of employment the basics would be:

- (a) 2.5 weeks' basic pay for each such year up to 10 years,
- (b) 3 weeks' basic pay for each such year by which the employment exceeds 10 years but does not exceed 20 years, and
- (c) 3.5 weeks' basic pay for each such year by which the employment exceeds 20 years but does not exceed 33 years."

The other major modification, Sir, is that the definition of basic pay is the definition that is used in the National Insurance and Social Security (Collection of Contributions) Regulations, 1967.

Those are the main principles of the bill and the background to the bill and I am pleased to move the second reading of the Severance Payments (Amendment) Bill. I beg to move that this Bill be now read a second time.

Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN: I beg to second that.

Mr. G. W. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, we on this side are opposed to this particular bill in that in the main the timing of this particular measure is bad. It will be recalled that severance payments legislation first came into being in 1971 when the Act was passed at a time when the Government, which at that time was a Democratic Labour Party Government, was very concerned at the fact that workers were being displaced due to a series of fires on Broad Street and also at Whitepark Road. At that time, Fogarty was destroyed by fire. Fogarty at the time was one

of the leading stores in Barbados. Cave Shepherd was also one of the leading stores in Barbados at that time and still is. That is the old Cave Shepherd we are talking about.

At that time members of the Democratic Labour Party were talking about the need to make sure that workers from these various business places were not displaced without compensation. In fact there were some members on the board of directors of these companies who at the time did not even want to pay the workers a single cent and it was in keeping with the Barbados Labour Party manifesto in 1966 that the Government of the day, due to the urgent pressing cases before them of unemployment, were forced finally to pass that Severance Payments Act which is now Cap. 355 of the Laws of this country.

Mr. Speaker, we are faced with a similar situation except for the fact that the Act has already been passed. At this particular point in time when workers in this country are being displaced, when there are massive lay-offs in the public sector including the Statutory Boards and it is fairly obvious that it will soon spread to the private sector; at a time when more than any other time, which in some ways are reminiscent of the period in 1971 when the workers were affected and displaced without compensation as a result of the fires I alluded to, that Government could be so insensitive that they are bringing legislation of this nature to reduce benefits which they need at this particular point in time...

Mr. Speaker, we are saying that whatever might be the merits in the modification of these measures under the Severance Payments Act; whatever were the reasons which caused the recommendations as set out in the Pelikanos Report, times have changed and now is not the right time to introduce these measures.

Mr. Speaker, you may also recall that these measures were introduced at a time when there was a rapid depletion of the severance payments reserves and the unemployment benefits reserve had also declined significantly. The report also came at a time when, as set out by Mr. Pelikanos against a background also of people who were receiving unemployment benefits remaining on the breadline more or less for the maximum period of unemployment with receipt of the benefits without actually trying their best to get back into the job market.

Mr. Speaker, that position does not hold at this present time. That was at a time when you could leave school and there were about two or three jobs waiting for you. I remember well this was the period of time that...

Asides.

Mr. G. W. PAYNE: ... I myself was on the job market.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order, please.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: May I have some order please. I think Members understand very clearly how to proceed with a debate like this. Continue.
5.00 p.m.

Mr. G. W. PAYNE: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, this was a time when people had three or four jobs on leaving school and I would know about that time. At the present time we are looking at a job market where people are leaving the universities with Master Degrees and they cannot find a job. These measures are being invoked against this background. This is not the time to actually introduce measures like these.

Even at the time of the Pelikanos Report we were looking at an unemployment level of around 13%. At the present time the unemployment level is around 25% and it is climbing daily. We have in many areas as a result of the recent draconian measures instituted by the Honourable Minister of Finance cases where four and five people in one household are being laid off with no hope of anybody in that household finding a job. These people need to be adequately compensated according to existing legislation. It is therefore, as I said, very insensitive of this Government to bring these measures against this background.

Aside.

Mr. SPEAKER: I am sure it is unfair to the Member to be distracted like that. One cannot put forward one's thoughts and arguments in this kind of atmosphere. I wish that you would give the Honourable Member the opportunity to do so.

Mr. G. W. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, because of these draconian measures – as I have said before, I alluded to the fact that four and five people in one household due to the insensitivity of this Government and the fact that these measures were not properly thought out where people who have worked for over 17 years are being handed a letter a Friday afternoon and being told that their services are being terminated.

These people who are entitled to four weeks for each completed year of service up to the time of termination, it is people like these, because they will be others after today. All the people that are to be laid off have not been given their notices yet. These people, notwithstanding the fact that they would not know when they will get their next job, would be counting their dollars and telling themselves that notwithstanding the fact that they will no longer be employed at this particular corporation, Government or

otherwise, at least they could look forward to four weeks basic pay for every year that they have worked at the particular institution.

Now, in times like these, the Honourable Prime Minister notwithstanding his knowledge of the hardships his measures are causing to the populace of this country, notwithstanding the fact that the ordinary man out there is calling for his resignation, and I am not referring to the people in the private sector, is coming with measures to further impoverish the people of this country and to set back all the gains that the ordinary people in this country have been able to gain over the years.

I will give you a classic example, Mr. Speaker, of the draconian nature of these measures. Section 2(b) substitutes for basic pay. In actual fact it is saying that in assessing the severance payment the wages up to the amount of insurable earnings shall be taken into account. If let us look firstly at the person who is earning a reasonable living, someone who is working for \$5 000 a month who has been laid off as a result of these measures, previous to these measures, that particular individual was entitled, if he had worked for 20 years, to receive \$100 000. If these measures are allowed to take effect, it would mean that such a person for the first 10 years would get \$19 375 calculated at 2.5 weeks basic pay for 10 years. Then when you take the three weeks basic pay for each year for the next 10 years he would be entitled for that second 10 years to \$23 250 making a total of \$42 625. From \$100 000 because his maximum insurable earnings is the figure that will be taken into consideration and the insurable earnings of \$3 100 from my understanding of these measures would be taken into account rather than the four weeks basic pay under the old system of \$5 000. He would not be a \$5 000 a month man anymore. The maximum amount that would be taken into consideration would be his insurable earnings from my understanding of these measures, and they are very clear. We are saying that these measures will cause gross hardship on a person who has been severed in this fashion.

If you look at another example of the average worker who has been working for \$400 a week who has been severed in similar circumstances having worked for 20 years, he is entitled for the first 10 years at 2.5 weeks basic pay for each year \$10 000, for the next 10 years at 3 weeks for the next 10 years in accordance with these provisions \$12 000. That is a total of \$22 000 whereas under the old system he was entitled to \$32 000 a loss of \$10 000 in these times.

Mr. Speaker, our position is that whatever might be the merits in the modification of this system, even the Pelikanos Report took into consideration the job market and where our position is that such workers, as I alluded to

in the examples, would not be in a position in this present climate to find a job elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister in his presentation spoke of the other provisions of the Pelikanos Report. The Pelikanos Report had anticipated that both the provisions relating to unemployment benefit, in addition to the severance payment benefits would have taken place, the provisions would have been brought at the same time. One notices that the provisions with respect to unemployment benefits came into being on the 30th September, 1991 and at this particular point in time Government is now introducing these measures to come into effect on the 1st December, 1991 which is not in keeping with the same measure which they alluded to.

5.10 p.m.

When one looks at the recommendations of the National Insurance Board, the nine measures which the Right Honourable Prime Minister referred to, one notes that he did not state the position of Government taking into consideration the present economic situation, on the recommendation with respect to suitable training to be provided for persons who are unemployed.

We cannot see, Mr. Speaker, how Honourable Members who have been connected to the trade union movement who ostensibly should be taking the side of the workers would support measures which are aimed at eroding the gains which these same workers have built up over the years. In this respect it would be interesting to hear the position of the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central, the Honourable Member for St. Michael Central and the Honourable Member for St. Lucy on these particular measures, Mr. Speaker. This is against the background of statements made by the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central in another place where he is reported to be encouraging workers to allow the measures which the Right Honourable Prime Minister – I stand to be corrected – has made in his Letter of Intent to work.

Mr. Speaker our basic position on this matter is that whatever might be the merits of a review of the calculation of the severance payments benefits, in these rough times which have been brought on by not just the measures of the Right Honourable Minister of Finance but by the mismanagement and the incompetence of the Government in handling the economic affairs of this country, this is not a good time to invoke these measures and we on this side, on that basis, will not support this Bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM: Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very serious measure indeed and I join with my learned friend the Honourable Member for St. Andrew who just

spoke in indicating, at the very outset, that the Barbados Labour Party cannot support this measure. It is a severe and savage blow to the workers and it is coming at a time when they are at their weakest and most burdened. Besides, Sir, it is the first, perhaps, of many measures dictated by the IMF which will be brought before this House. This is a measure dictated by the International Monetary Fund. It does not respond to the conditions of workers in Barbados at this time. We in the Barbados Labour Party feel, as has been indicated, that the timing is all wrong and that we cannot support it.

Let me step back, Mr. Speaker, and say that the Severance Payments Act represents a major triumph for the workers of this country. It is a very important piece of social legislation and both the Barbados Labour Party and the Democratic Labour Party had a large hand in making sure that it was brought to the Statute Book of this country.

Aside.

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM: The Democratic Labour Party was in office at the time in 1971 when it was introduced into Parliament. The Barbados Labour Party way back had invited Stockham an expert to come into Barbados and to advise on both the National Insurance and the whole question of severance.

Asides.

Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM: My friends on the other side seem to have a different memory of the background to this matter. I am sure that I am on firm ground in saying that both sides have played their part in ensuring that this measure came to the Statute Book in 1971.

The point, Mr. Speaker, however is that in the 18 years since it has been on the Statute Book or rather has been under implementation because though it was on the Statute Book since 1971 it was never implemented until 1973, we have learnt quite a lot. I think it is fair to say that even though there are four categories of severance, broadly speaking, circumstances of classical redundancy being the first, that is to say, circumstances in which because a business, for example, is overtaken by technological advances it has to close and as a result the workers have to be paid out. That is a classic circumstance of redundancy. The second situation relates to natural disasters such as happened at the time when Fogarty and Cave Shepherd experienced their great fires. The third situation results from lay offs and short time in excess of, particularly with lay offs, of more than 13 weeks. Perhaps the most common circumstance of severance is made provision for by Section 45 of the Severance Payments Act where one has been unlawfully dismissed and the Tribunal so finding applies severance formula as the measure of damages.

I think the experience is that the Severance Payments Act has served as a major insurance for the workers of this country. It has tended to make the workplace more humane and more just. It has served as a kind of check and balance, a kind of restraint against arbitrary, hasty and oppressive behaviour on the part of employers. We must not fool ourselves, Mr. Speaker, that the workplace is still not, to a large extent, a jungle. Those of us who deal on a daily basis with cases involving unlawful dismissal will tell you of the many circumstances in which employers act in a very petty, in a very hasty, in a very aggressive way. It is a fact that the majority of the cases of severance result from unlawful dismissal.

In the past the workers had got a severance formula which called for one month for every year of completed service provided you have worked for more than two years, that is, a person who has worked for 22 months cannot get severance. And there was really no limit if you were getting \$1 200 a week and you had worked for 30 years you would get 4 weeks of \$1 200 by thirty. So that what is now proposed constitutes a major reduction in the severance benefits as we have known them for the last eighteen years in this country.
5.20 p.m.

Now we are not suggesting, Mr. Speaker, at all, that the Severance Payments Act as it was first introduced and has since had a few amendments was anything set in concrete. We take the point that these schemes have got to be reviewed and these pieces of social legislation in the light of the industrial relations climate in the country, in the light of the social economic factors and in the light of other factors that may be obtaining from time to time. It is fair to say that the Severance Payments Scheme has always had its critics. There were those who claimed that the Scheme was incomparably generous, that there was no scheme in the world, and I have heard it put as strong as that, that offered more generous benefit or even as generous benefits as our Severance Payments Scheme. Indeed I must say, Sir, in my own study I have found them, but I cannot claim that it might have been as exhaustive and as comprehensive a study as perhaps it could have been. I did not go around the world as it were, but I know of no scheme where the benefits are as generous as ours.

I have also heard the argument that it has served as a kind of disincentive to attracting overseas capital for investment here in so far as they have got to set up a contingency fund which can be pretty vast depending on the amount of workers that they have in the event of their closing their operations. That has certainly happened, I know, at the Hilton Hotel. At one point the contingency fund had in excess of \$1 million and they badly needed that money for refurbishing and other purposes and I had actually advised at the time when I had something to do with that fine hotel that the Fund be broken and

accountants came after me and said that perhaps I had misadvised and the recommendation is that the Fund be restored. The point is that there are not many companies that can afford to put aside large sums of money to take care of the day when they may have to close.

There is also the view expressed that because the provisions are as generous as they are it is tending to frustrate the free flow of employees from one work place to another. I make no comment Mr. Speaker, on the validity of these criticisms. I only indicate that they have been made from time to time.

My point, Mr. Speaker, which is the point that has been effectively made by the shadow spokesman, the Honourable Member for St. Andrew is that whatever may be the justification for Parliament revisiting this scheme and making amendments, this is certainly not the time at which the workers' benefits should be reduced. The workers more than ever, and in the last twenty-five to thirty years needed a safety net. They have been savaged by this Government within the last few months. Many of them, fifteen/twenty years of work, lost their employment through no fault of their own and in the most offensive way because when you see some of the letters coming from the Ministry of Transport and Works it tells a man who has worked for 20 years as a watchman, 'I have been directed to advise you that effective as from Friday your services will be terminated'. Imagine that. There is no more offensive way in which you can tell a man who has worked for you faithfully and devotedly for twenty years that you are terminating his services. These two-line letters have been standard in the Ministry of Transport and Works. I have seen them. I don't know about other Departments and Ministries. So that the Government did not even find it fit to terminate people in a dignified and humane way, but they terminated them in their thousands in the public sector – main-stream civil servants – and in Statutory Corporations. They are suffering layoffs, unemployment and dismissals resulting from the hard economic climate, day after day, in the private sector.

This is at a time too when the economy is being deregulated in all sorts of ways and there is no price control. We are seeing the prices explosion in the supermarket. Interest rates have gone through the roof. There has been a contraction of government services, particularly in the area of welfare. The workers are overwhelmed, they are overburdened, they are at their weakest. The workers' organisations have not even been told of some of these developments of the last weeks. How can we in the fairness of what is an insensitive and inhumane gesture lend support to this measure at this time? So it does not matter, Mr. Speaker, what may be the justification in normal times for the modification and the amendments but this is not a time to add to the burdens and to the woes of the workers of Barbados.

Now, following the Pelikanos recommendations the National Insurance Board had at least three meetings on this matter and it is important because on that Board, Government is represented, the workers' organisations are represented and also the employers are represented and apparently a certain consensus was arrived at and the workers' organisations apparently took the view that they were prepared to go along with the modifications such as have been brought here today provided that there were certain compensatory conditions that were met and they said, and it is all in the same document from which the Prime Minister read, there must be an Unfair Dismissal Act to be put on the statute book.

What I understand him to be saying is, look we do not want these measures to contribute or to add to the jungle like conditions at the work place where people are arbitrarily dismissed in Barbados routinely. So that we want an Act on the statute books that makes it in effect more difficult to dismiss employees or put differently to give employees more protection. So, if you want to reduce the benefits which have tended to act as a kind of check and balance to arbitrary and unjust employers, if you want to reduce it we feel you ought to give the workers more protection in the form of an unfair dismissal Act. The Government has not brought that legislation before Parliament nor have they indicated that it is on the way.

The second thing as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, they are saying is make sure that there are programmes out there administered by the Skills Training Board to make sure that when the workers lose their work they can be retooled and made fit for other forms of employment assuming that other forms of employment will be available. So that the workers in this measure have been further betrayed by this Democratic Labour Party Government because their employers have called for certain pre-conditions to be put in place to accompany the reduction of their benefits and those pre-conditions have not been put in place and that is why I can confidently submit, Mr. Speaker, that the workers have been further betrayed by this Democratic Labour Party Government in bringing about these drastic reductions in their benefits while not at the same time putting in place measures to give them some of the protection which they would have lost.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that this is one of the lessons of the last 18 years that this Act is the most complex and convoluted piece of social legislation. I believe it was copied lock, stock and barrel in many respects from the English Act which itself like the Exchange Control Act of 1947 ranks as one of the most difficult pieces of legislation on the English statute books to the extent that this legislation can affect workers. I thought that it always should be reduced to simplicity. There is only one layman to the best of my knowledge who mastered this Act. It is

really Mr. Humphrey Walcott who was used as a resource person by the lawyers themselves.

But there are some aspects of this legislation and the regulation especially in so far as it deals with pensions and the extent to which in circumstances where you are getting a pension from your employer and you are being severed you have to reduce your severance payments by some proportion of the pension that you are receiving since you cannot benefit twice.

The regulations dealing with a matter like that, and that is only illustrative, are very complicated indeed. So there is no doubt that a very strong case does exist for rewriting this Act and trying to ensure that an intelligent shop steward should be able to advise his fellow workers about a lot of the provisions. That does not now obtain. It is a very difficult and complicated Act.

Mr. Speaker, there is a case as I have said earlier for revisiting this legislation for modifying it. There is no doubt too, Mr. Speaker, we have always taken the view that at the end of the day the workers' interest can only be served if these schemes are financially viable. It was Prime Minister St. John at the time who addressed that matter and made the case for ensuring that they be brought in harmony one with another. But what we are talking about is that the timing of this measure is absolutely wrong, particularly when there has been no compensating provision brought in by Government for the losses and in the terms of the retraining scheme and the Unfair Dismissal Act, which means that the workers have been severely exposed at a time when they are least able to bear these blows.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also believe that this measure has been dictated by the International Monetary Fund and I would like the Honourable Prime Minister along with Dr. King of the Central Bank, without any assistance from the Members of his Cabinet or from anyone else who wrote that Letter of Intent, commonly referred to as the Letter of Discontent, to indicate why is it that these measures have such a prominent place in the Letter of Intent because he is exclusively devoted to these measures brought here today. If indeed the measures were not dictated by Washington, we would like to know why it is that they form such a large part of this Letter of Intent. Why is it that without any agreement with the workers at all on a lot of these measures relating to Unemployment Benefits and Severance Payments the Government was prepared to go ahead and commit themselves to a position in the Letter of Intent by a Government and a Prime Minister that calls himself a Prime Minister that rules by consensus? Why is it on this occasion there is no consensus? So that apart from the failure of the Government to provide the compensatory provisions for the workers in light of these severe reductions, we are convinced that these measures have been dictated by the International Monetary Fund in

Washington and the position which we take on this side is that the Barbados Labour Party Government cannot and must not be seen adding to the burden of the workers when they need more than ever a safety net. To that extent, Sir, we in the Barbados Labour Party will not support this measure.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, it seems that nobody on the Government side wishes to debate this measure.

Mr. SPEAKER: I do not think that is a fair comment because we are still in the debate.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: Mr. Speaker, they are not anxious to engage in debating on a measure such as this. The Prime Minister's speech was really a historical record of the development of the Severance Payments Scheme expressed in a very limited way, Sir, and he spent very little time in justifying the necessity for the changes which have come before this House. What merely he said on this was that Pelikanos had reported on the necessity to coordinate much better the Unemployment Benefits Scheme and the Severance Payments Scheme and that Pelikanos' report had gone before the National Insurance Board and had been modified by that Board, and that Government was now seeking to implement those modifications. He then read out basically what was being recommended at a meeting of the Board.

The first point which must be made and made very forcibly in this debate is that Pelikanos gave his interim report since 1987. His final report was on hand for consideration by the Barbados Workers Union, National Union of Public Workers and all other workers' organisations representing the workers who are affected by these changes. Likewise, the report was in hand for consideration by the Barbados Employers Confederation and by February 1988 – I think that I had a note somewhere here today. I believe the last meeting of the tripartite committee of the National Insurance Board in reviewing the Pelikanos Report was held sometime around February 29th which was a leap year. Was 1988 not a leap year? The Government has had the benefit of recommendations before it for over three years. It is almost four years that the Government has had the recommendations before it. The Prime Minister carries some responsibility for national insurance matters and when one makes the allegation against this Prime Minister that he has been dilatory and that it takes him years before he can get measures acted upon, measures which he now says are very necessary to bring down the cost of doing business, he says, "No, that's not true at all".
5.40 p.m.

Now explain to me why the social partners acting through the National Insurance Board had made the same

decision that is now before the House – and the legislation which is before this Chamber is not complicated legislation. It is very simple. It is only one page – why has it taken the Prime Minister 3½ years or more to bring it before the House? No matter how many psalms he may quote from time to time, the point is that this is another example of the delay of this Prime Minister in circumstances where he is then prepared to say to the House that it is necessary now. That is the point, Sir. If one has to prove a case against him this is one of the cases that is open and shut. He has brought nothing new on what the NIB has recommended since 1988. Why then it has taken Government three years and nine months before they can bring the relevant legislation, and why at this particular time, in these circumstances?

I want to say not only that, Sir, it is significant that the Government in bringing the legislation bring only the parts that are hardest on the workers and those other compensatory areas that were recommended as part of a package by Pelikanos and the social partners in the National Insurance Board. I use the "social partners" in quotations as they use it – the trade unions and the employers. Those compensatory provisions have not seen the light of day.

The second point that one must bear in mind is that in the meantime the Government has legislated increases in the levies which much support the Severance Payments Fund and also the Unemployment Benefits Scheme. So the cost to the employer as well as the employee under the two schemes, the Unemployment Benefits Scheme have increased whereas the benefits to the employees are being decreased.

The third point I must make is a very serious point. The bulk of the people affected by the changes, who are and will be affected by the changes, are people who are earning at a lower rung of the scale in this country. Seventy-nine per cent of all of the severance payments made under the scheme have been people getting severance payments under \$10,000. The most people being severed are under ten years. That is the first point you have to realise. Most of the people who have benefited from the Severance Payments Scheme are persons who are not at the higher insurable level or the higher earnings at all. They are really at the lower part of the scheme. Most of them are under the ceiling of \$598 or \$600 per week, whatever the ceiling that was placed in 1984. The position as shown by Pelikanos and by the NIB Review is that this particular bit of legislation will obviously be affecting the large number of people in the lower socio-economic rung of the ladder who benefit from severance payments. That's the reality we have to deal with, so that one would have expected the Government to have brought a total package before the House. I cannot understand why the total package is not being brought.

The Honourable Members who have spoken, including the Rt. Honourable Member made the point that the legislation is complicated. We accept that. There has been considerable talk about reviewing the legislation. We accept that. What we want to say is that in the very Pelikanos Report which the Prime Minister has, the draft legislation for amending the whole of the Act and modernising was submitted at the time of the report. So the Government has again had 3 years to look at the total package of changes and that draft could have been brought up to date even more to simplify the legislation.

I have heard no explanation for that omission on the part of the Government. Now Pelikanos must be taken in its entirety – as was said in here by one person – in a holistic manner. One of the strong recommendations that came from the workers organisation and was accepted by Pelikanos and accepted and emphasised very strongly in the review of the tripartite Board – NIS Board – was the need for suitable training to be provided for persons who are on unemployment benefit. That was a very important recommendation, Sir. I want to deal with it for a while. The existing training scheme normally provides training for apprentices and some other people coming into the work force. The point was made that people who are thrown out of employment and are on unemployment benefit and have received severance are very often not retrained and therefore their prospect of getting back in employment is often very little. The submissions made to Pelikanos by the unions in particular was that if you were going to modify the scheme and integrate these schemes in order to affect a cost of doing business that was reasonable, you had at the same time to make sure that part of the savings which were accruing would go to retrain the people whose resources were there to put them back into the workforce and to make them suitable for employment. The human resources aspect of adjustment whether occupational adjustment, or structural adjustment in any other form must never be ignored, Sir.

We cannot be satisfied with the Government's anxiety to implement that aspect of the scheme that we have to acknowledge carries disadvantages since it takes away an existing entitlement or privilege. The Government's anxiety to deal with only that and not to look at the counterbalancing aspect of the matter must be condemned by this House – certainly by the Opposition. I want to know what are the Government's proposals for suitable training being provided for those persons who are being displaced; who have been severed; who have been put on short time never to go back and who will not now be entitled to what they formerly would have been entitled after this legislation has come into being.

There are some other aspects of the severance payments legislation that we have to look at in the context of Barbados in a very serious manner. I don't completely

accept all of Pelikanos' suggestions and in the light of the working of the Act I sometimes query whether or not the excluded classes from this Act should remain as they are. Let me give you one example. If you employ someone in your household by way of domestic labour who turns out to be related to you by blood, no matter how distant, that person is not entitled to severance. We accepted that in 1971 or 1972. Is there really any justification for discriminating and continuing the discrimination in this manner? I cannot see the necessity for it, Sir.
5.50 p.m.

The second category of persons who were excluded and who have suffered grievously at the hands of this Government is the public sector people. I am going to deal with different categories of public sector works. There are those who are employed under the old contract of service, employed at the pleasure of the Crown. That is a concept that is time worn now. I rather believe that we should revise both jurisprudential basis and the historical reasons for that concept that anybody employed whether it be in the public sector or the private sector should be entitled to a certain security of tenure that is well known and recognised in law and this idea of being employed at the pleasure of the Crown and you are dismissable as the Crown thinks fit is a concept whose time has long since past. No modern jurisdiction now bothers about that.

The idea of constantly excluding public sector employees from the normal provisions of benefits such as these that are standard form should now be examined seriously. But the compensating provision which was there for the protection of the public sector employee although it was not legislated was the Cabinet decision taken in 1972 and re-emphasized in 1982 or 1985 that persons who were in the public sector, if they were severed, would be treated as favourably as those in the private sector. The Government has reneged on that undertaking. Under the present proposals that the Government is following for them they would not even get what we are being asked to legislate here today. That is not acceptable.

I want the Minister before he winds up his debate to let us know whether he is now only going to say that the IMF demands of him that he should for the next 18 months deny the public sector the protection of similar provisions which we had. I do not think it is good enough for the Government to say to its public sector employees as it was saying that they were only going to pay them a month even if they were there for 15, 17 or 35 years. It sends the wrong signals.

Secondly, I do not think it is good enough now for the Government to say they are going to pay them at the end of 18 months when it has on the statute books legislation that obligates everybody other than the Government to pay at the end of two and six months under

section 13 of this Act. The most you could hold off after that was four months otherwise interest accumulates. Is the Government going to say that it is going to pay interest to its public sector employees that it has thrown out of work over the last few months? That is what I want to know from the Minister. Sir, there is the category of public sector employee who is not on a contract at the pleasure of the Crown, but is employed. I am saying the Public Service, I am being specific. Under the Constitution the public sector who is employed by statutory boards who are commercial enterprises like the ICB and the Port Authority and that therefore, they really should not be disadvantaged in the manner in which the legislation or indeed the statutory boards are being treated.

Sir, I want as well to deal with the drastic change that is being brought about by a redefinition of the words "basic pay". Basic pay under existing legislation is defined to mean the rate of pay of an employee plus overtime payments, incentive or productivity payments and any other payments, allowances or additions to the pay of an employee that are made on a regular basis before any deductions are made but does not include intermittent bonuses that are not related directly to the productivity of the employee. Now that change was made in 1984 particularly to catch productivity and to encourage productivity and incentive agreements.

Basic pay under the proposals which the Right Honourable Member has not introduced in the House would mean the level of the insurable earnings so that the maximum has been raised to \$3 100. Whatever you pay on in your week that is basic pay. That is a very radical change. Let me say in some respects it is a short-sighted change. Because Pelikanos recommended it is no reason why we should follow it.

I will tell you why it is short-sighted, Sir. Whilst the Government may wish to pursue a national policy on wages, one of the things that the Government has to keep in mind is this very important point that if you are going to have a national policy on wages you must not at the same time blunt productivity. It has always been part and parcel of programmes addressing the issue of a national wages policy to tie that programme into the need to encourage productivity and to reward productivity. I make the charge, Sir, that the effect of the change is not to give any incentive or reward to productivity and that the Government is being short-sighted in so putting the definition as to rule out the areas particularly of productivity payments and incentives.
6.00 p.m.

I believe that if a man's earnings increase because he gets incentive and productivity payments and you can show that as a result the firm is progressing with him, that part of the equity in the job would relate to how the position

has improved. And that this overall change is certainly too drastic to contemplate at this time.

I want as well, Sir, to ask the Minister about some statements that he has recently made in the context of the Unemployment Benefit changes, Severance Payments Scheme and their relevance to the Letter of Intent.

The Minister, the other night, Sir, in a political broadcast laced with quotations from the Psalms *ad misericordiam*...

Asides.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: The Honourable Member would know, Sir. said that the Letter of Intent was being delayed by some provisions, some changes that he was making or proposing to make in the area of concessions to the manufacturers and in relation to the Unemployment and Severance Schemes. I believe that this House is entitled to be told the implications of those changes and what are the details, if it has reached that stage for the purposes of this debate. We do not want to hear later, Sir, as has happened in the mini Budget to be given only part of the position and see pain coming as happened.

You see after we came into this House on the 18th September for a mini Budget, the Prime Minister later laid changes which obviously antagonised the workers, legislation when the House was on holiday and obviously which was not disclosed as part of the discussion.

Aside.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: That is right, subsidiary legislation when the House was on holiday. That is the point I am making, Sir. So we cannot in these instances have any hidden and reserved matters that are not being disclosed to the House. That is one of the reasons why I am asking now and up front for the Minister to disclose to us what are the circumstances, how this will affect the Letter of Intent.

The other measure that I wish to advert to here is the limitation which is under the existing Act, on people reaching the age of 65 not being eligible for severance. The justification for that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that as you get older or towards retirement age you have less and less equity in the job. I have always contended that you do not have less and less equity in what you have contributed to the enterprise. In fact, Sir, we have found circumstances particularly in the sugar industry where workers have had, because of the shortage of labour in that type of industry, to continue beyond the age of 65 and have found themselves severed or made redundant through no fault of their own and then they will find that a person who is 65 less a day is able to take home his equity under the

Severance Payments Act but if you are 65 or 65 plus a day or if you have even carried on until 77 in order to help out the industry and to sustain it there is nothing there for you.

Mr. SPEAKER: I would allow the Honourable Member to conclude on this point.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: The Right Honourable Member and the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister from his seat say a cut off point. I would say this to the Minister, Sir, legislation in other areas do not have the cut off point. Not all legislation. There is some legislation without a cut off point that way but there is a much more global approach to these matters. Really I am strongly going to recommend — because social security is very important whether it is social security through NIS or social security for people, economic security in this way.

I am strongly going to suggest to the House that the time has come when we must seriously look at a proper set of labour legislation, including these aspects, that is clearer and that is fairer and that safeguards the total rights of the workers.

I recommend that we look at the legislation in Canada where you would get clear legislation, cost effective and at the same time more humane and considerate to the position of the workers, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister.

Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not proposing to be too long in this matter. The Bill before the House is intended to change the rate of calculation of the severance payment to workers in Barbados.

Let me start by saying, Mr. Speaker that nobody and certainly nobody on this side likes reducing the entitlement of workers in this country. The Opposition's main contention is that the measure is untimely, that now is not the correct time to bring it because of the large amount of unemployment and the safety net should be introduced and that this Government is uncaring and that it is a Government that does not have any interest in workers, *et cetera*.

The Leader of the Opposition in his speech went back to the fact that these proposals were available to us since 1987 and he then blamed and attacked the Prime Minister once again for his inability to do anything quickly. The main contention was, although it is untimely now that we should have introduced these measures since 1987.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: On a point of explanation, Sir. The Honourable Member really has not grasped my main contention but I will simplify it for him. My main contention is that there is a total package and that there

was enough time to implement the package as the compensatory aspect for the reduction, Sir. The Honourable Member must grasp the point.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Let us see if we can get on now.

Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition explained what he meant by the total package includes the reduction of the entitlement under severance payments. His contention was that the Prime Minister was incompetent and therefore he could not introduce anything which included the reduction of the severance payments since 1987. So we are being blamed for not having deprived workers of Barbados, over the last four years, of a reduced Severance Payments Act.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Just one moment. I am sure Honourable Members know I would not allow the kind of cross talk.

Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN: Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the Report was available since 1987. 6.10 p.m.

Any Government, Mr. Speaker, will do whatever possible to resist the implementation of any such report. We see that from the fact that the Government is interjecting \$10 million from the Consolidated Fund at a time when the Fund had collapsed in order to keep the Fund going at the present rate. But we come to the present situation as outlined by the Prime Minister where the Fund is now technically indebted to something like \$19 million.

The question I want to ask, earlier on they have been making a lot of row about a supplementary which they claim would be brought back in and there is general consensus that at this time the economic climate of Barbados would not allow us to interject any additional funds. Wherever possible we have to keep our expenditure down. The Fund is now \$19 million in debt. The question which we are facing is, are we going to now adopt the Report which would allow the expenditure on the Fund to be reduced somewhat and therefore save the Fund from collapse? Or, are we going to allow the Fund to collapse and the workers in Barbados have nothing at all?

That is the basic thing we are saying, Mr. Speaker. Nobody, Mr. Speaker, would like to bring this to Parliament but it is a Fund that is supported by the

subscription of the employers, and it is a Fund that is supposed to be revolving and should be capable of keeping itself afloat.

Experience has shown that the Fund cannot be kept afloat. Even in 1987 when the economic climate was kinder than it is now the Fund was under pressure, so therefore if the Fund was under pressure in 1987 when the economic climate was better than it is now, we could only draw the conclusion that the Fund will be under further pressure under the present situation. So one therefore has to ask the basic question, which is better at a time like this, reduce the entitlement under the Fund to allow it to be viable and therefore allow some kind of safety net to prevail under the present situation or to continue where it is and collapse the Fund. Since the contention is as they said that they are now no funds you would not be able to continue and put a further loan into the Fund as it is now.

The Government therefore, Mr. Speaker, faced with this situation, has decided that it is the lesser of the evils open to introduce the recommendation of the Pelikanos report at this time.

We are deeply conscious of all the things that have been said about the increased unemployment, the layoffs etc., but we all know that we are in a very difficult financial situation. It is no secret now, this has been said all over Barbados and therefore like anything else we have to look in order to keep the best things available.

Some of the other contentions argued earlier on have been made by the Member for St. Joseph, he said rightly that the Fund should be financially viable and that is the key word. It should be financially viable and if the Government at this time having, almost as was said by the Honourable Member for St. Peter, the \$10 million in our CMCF we cannot add another \$10 million at this time to the CMCF, so that is what we are faced with at this time.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that if there is one thing, a few in the opposition seem to allow us to research and sharpen our intellect. I heard the Leader of the Opposition saying some beautiful things about the scheme, all the changes that he would make, and this legislation was on the book when you all were in office for ten years.

Aside.

Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN: The Severance Payments Act. He is now suggesting all kinds of changes including the last about people at 65 years *et cetera, et cetera*. These are admirable things and these are things you take note of but now is just not the time for the Government to be able to implement.

Before that we looked at the retraining of persons for the job force. Mr. Speaker, this has not passed us by. In the

Ministry of Labour we are presently doing a job analysis of those persons who have been displaced and we are looking wherever possible at a re-training programme and to equip the National Training Board to train those persons who can be retrained and who are willing to be trained for any available job in the work force. Therefore the first thing we are doing is an analysis of the availability of existing jobs in the work force and therefore will adopt our requirements for the training in order for those persons who we can train to take up any slack in the work force. We are now working on that.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: There are voices I can hear other than the Honourable Member. I don't like to single out people but I am hearing other voices.

Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN: The other section, Mr. Speaker, which I agree with, has been the problem with some public sector workers. The Government has realised that there are difficulties in that and we have had intense discussions with the representative of those workers and I am certain that we would come to a solution that is acceptable to everybody in this respect. So it is not lost on us that there are some people who have been disadvantaged in this exercise.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, these are not normal times. Like I have said before that nobody in this Chamber, and I can speak with a certainty ...

Mr. SPEAKER: I shouldn't say no.

Hon. W.O. FRANKLIN: Certainly nobody on this side, Mr. Speaker, cherish the situation that we are now in, that has caused us to reduce in some cases, entitlement to workers of Barbados, that has caused some of them to be on the bread line. This is exactly why we have at this time to implement the kind of measures that will bring about the restoration of the economy and turn it around to once again allow those disadvantaged workers to take their rightful place.

Against this background, Mr. Speaker, I am going to support this Bill before us because there is a choice, either reduce the entitlement and allow those who now need it to have some entitlement or run the possibility of collapsing the Fund completely in the future and those people who would need it at that time would have absolutely nothing to resort to.

Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW: Mr. Speaker, I sat here and listened to Honourable Members making their contribution to this debate and it seemed to be too quiet. I think that this matter deserves some real heat put into it. This is no Sunday School business, this is a very, very,

serious matter and I am very surprised to look across on that side and see Members like they are afraid to get up. Or they seem to me, Mr. Speaker, to be. They would not get up. The workers' representatives are not in their seats.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member is on a point of order.

Hon. M. A. KING: On a point of order, the Honourable Member cannot accuse Members of this House of being afraid.

Asides.

Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW: Mr. Speaker, when I look across, this debate is about taking away money from the workers. That is what I am talking about, taking away people's money. Disadvantaging the poor workers, who contributed by their sweat and toiled to create this Barbados and now we are hearing those Honourable Members over there, especially the Honourable Member, the Minister of Labour, getting up with a cold pome speech and said not a thing in support of the poor workers. Three thousand, five hundred people have gone home and they can't get a cent and we are sitting in here. Do you expect me to sit down in here today and feel happy and talk about Pelikanos? I am not interested in Pelikanos, whoever he is, I am interested in the 3 500 Barbadians who have been sent home by the Government of the day, without any money at all. People who can't get food, people who can't send school their children. I am worried about that.
6.20 p.m.

I am concerned about that. When I hear the Honourable Prime Minister talking about he is a Christian or convey that impression by way of reading the Bible, the Bible always state to all to be kind hearted. People are going to be starving for Christmas, Mr. Prime Minister. They cannot eat anything not even a ham, turkey, or nothing so and we are quietly sitting down in here today on this matter. I am beginning to wonder. People have been coming to me and have been asking for \$20.00 to pay a bill or to feed their families. I have got to take my little meager salary and give to them. I know they do not want to ask me or any other Honourable Member but they cannot do any better. Because of this measure they are not able to have any money to look after themselves or to be independent.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that have got to be said and I am going to say them today. This is a very serious matter. We have been hearing people talking about the lack of faith and lack of confidence. I want the Right Honourable Prime Minister to listen to me on this occasion because some of his colleagues do not want to tell him. I am bold enough to let him know in this Honourable Chamber. The coalition of unions met with the Government

on this very matter before this Chamber. They met with the Leader of the House, Minister of Labour, as well as the Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance. They were to meet this very month to see if they could find an amicable solution. To the best of my knowledge, the Government put a proposal. The union members went back and were asked to study it and get back to the Government. Before they could report to the Government, the Government comes in here today to pass this legislation. Well, tell me where is their conscience, Mr. Speaker? That is acting in bad faith. Then you are going to talk about a Christian feeling. You talk about morality in Government. I want to know what are we talking about. How could the Minister of Labour get up here and say or suggest on the Floor of this House that there will be an agreement with the workers' representatives. The agreement is here. The decision has been made. They will have to fall in line. That is a departure from the concept of negotiating a settlement. This is very serious.

The unions are undermined and I want the Members who support the unions in this Honourable Chamber to get up and speak up. They owe it to the people and not wait for somebody to drive them out. Get up and talk after I have said what I have to say. You have got to come out. I am going to thrush them out today.

No wonder, Mr. Speaker, it is a very sad reflection of what is going on. Even workers are refusing to accept a representative from the union because they feel that they have been let down and have been sold out. That appears in one of our leading newspapers today. It is causing me some concern. What is going to be the future of a union which has marked its 50th year and which has been in the forefront of the workers cause in this country? Where are the voices now on the Floor of this Honourable Chamber? Is it left today for the Barbados Labour Party Opposition?

I recall, Sir in 1983 the late Tom Adams, as Minister of Finance, introduced in his Budgetary Proposals a proposal to tax Severance Payments and all members of the Democratic Labour Party Opposition then along with the Barbados Workers Union went wild. They almost ate us and the tax only applied to persons who were receiving \$25,000 or over. For instance, in cases where the tax applied where the person did not work for six months or even a year, they got back their money. I remember that very well. But the Democratic Labour Party Opposition came into this House and the Barbados Workers Union in particular said that we were depriving Barbadians and we were putting the hands of the clock back. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy was then the Secretary General of the Barbados Workers Union.

I recall in 1983 May Day at Mangrove when the same Honourable Member read the resolution. No wage restraints. Do not touch the workers' money. Now where is his voice today, Mr. Speaker? Now this is no time for

laughter. They have to stand up today and be counted. This debate will not end. Vote! You are frightened to vote now.

Mr. Speaker, I am hearing about this plea for the Severance Payments Fund that needs to be built up. I am hearing about this actuarial study. I am saying this. The recommendation should have been taken and carried out long ago to make sure that there were adequate funds. The way to make sure that the Funds are not broken is not by reducing the money of the workers who have been severed. There are other alternatives and the Government must look at other ways and means even if it means increasing the employer's contribution. Why is it that the workers who have worked so hard and toiled over the years have got to be the ones to pay the penalty? Now what am I really hearing?

I can recall the Leader of the Barbados Workers Union saying that the Government has got to be mad – he was using that sort of language – to be interfering with the money of the workers. He never allowed it to be forgotten. He always said that the Severance Payments Scheme was set up after the fires in Broad Street in order to compensate those workers who could not find work or who did not have any income. I remember his putting a case and saying that the money should not be taxed at all. What are you telling me? This is nothing but a tax. You are taking away the people's money. One time I heard the Prime Minister say that it should be four weeks. Now all of a sudden I am getting a copy of the measure saying that it is going to be on a graduated scale. I am going to say this is not fair to the workers of Barbados. It is not fair, Sir, and the Barbados Labour Party that has been in the forefront of representing the causes of the workers of this country will never agree to this measure.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say, Honourable Members had better take stock. I hear people are already saying – those who belong to the trade union movements – they are watching closely what happens. I will tell them what has happened because I have read ILO reports and I have seen even the *retired Leader* of the Barbados Workers' Union saying at the International Labour Conference in Geneva that you have to watch whenever workers are displaced that the trade union movement will be the first to lose. He made a speech to that effect before the conference.

If you don't understand what it means to the trade union movement I can help to inform. It would mean loss of revenue, loss of money to continue their programmes. Some of them will be on the breadline too. I hope that the Members who do not want to stand up for the workers and vote against this measure will find that they are no longer working at the same unions. I would go as far as to tell them, "don't pay a cent to employ those persons". You can put me on record. If you don't represent the workers,

therefore the workers have no money to contribute to the union to pay them a salary. They also should be getting severance payment.

This is serious. Let the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central get up and speak up. He can't sit down here any longer and take notes. He can't get over there and cast any asides. He has to listen. He can't abstain on this measure.

Mr. SPEAKER: I would just like to add a little bit because I don't want to get the impression that Members are under some kind of stress not to perform. As I understand what is written here:

"It is inconsistent with the dignity of the House, with the duty of a Member to his constituents and with the maintenance of the privilege of freedom of speech for any outside body controlling or limiting the Member's complete independence and freedom of that action in Parliament or stipulating that he shall act in any way as the representative of such outside body in regard to any measures to be transacted in Parliament."

What I get this to mean is a Member has interests, but his sole purpose is to his constituents, and therefore, I am just trying to suggest to the Honourable Member that the Member for Christ Church East as you mentioned has a duty to his constituents first.

Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW: Mr. Speaker, thank you, Sir. I am only reflecting the sentiments of the workers and the constituents that the Honourable Member represents. What distresses me most, Mr. Speaker, is to hear... In times like these you have to think in terms of well thought out programmes to act so as to cushion the impact that could be caused by these measures. Pelikanos did make a recommendation and it is in keeping with what I have been saying. I didn't have to listen or read Pelikanos. I am saying that the Government should have training programmes to retrain and to put to work the workers that have been laid off. What I have already studied is that the National Training Board might not be the best agency to carry out that because most of the workers who come... There have been about 600 who have been sent home from NCC another 1200 from the Ministry of Transport & Works – weeders and cleaners.

The National Training Board does not have any programmes that can train those persons. You are talking about 1800 persons alone from two government departments. What I am saying is that even if the Report or even the Board recommended rightly so that you should look at a training programme you have to look at the relevance of those training programmes and see that some of those people cannot be trained. They are untrainable as it were. The Government must take stock of what it is

doing. Reactivate the National Training Board! Let it do the job! It is times like these that the National Training Board should be given funds to carry out the necessary training programmes.

I am going to make one point which I hope Honourable Members will take. There are lots of people who are going to be affected by this legislation. They cannot find another job in their lives. They will never be able to find another job in their lives. What will you do with them? That is why I say you have to look at those persons even if you were speaking in terms of amending or adjusting the scheme you should give some consideration to those persons at that age when they will not be able to find another job in their lives. It might be all right for the younger people but you have to consider those persons who work in the sugar factories for instance. When those persons are laid off where are they going? What will they do? They can't be watchmen. They are in their late fifties and sixties. There is no place for them. People coming from universities with degrees can't even find jobs. Some lawyers can't even get work. Some doctors can't get work and some with Masters and Bachelors degrees.

Asides.

Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW: Mr. Speaker, I know that Honourable Members, especially the Ministers from that side, can't sleep comfortably at nights because these are worrying times. I understand how they feel. So, when the Opposition is speaking and putting forward points they must listen and take heed because I know the pressure begins when they get back out there. It is only when they come in here on Tuesdays that the pressure is off at some time or another.

Mr. Speaker, let us understand what this is all about. I am worried about this. What are we going to see? Do we understand what signals it is going to send, that we are in here today debating severance payments legislation when the unions are not in negotiation with the Government? It is untimely. The Prime Minister should reflect on that. I am not going to say like some other persons in this Honourable Chamber that the IMF is causing anything. The Government caused it. They brought it on themselves. The IMF didn't bring anything to Barbados. By running the country badly they went and invited the IMF here.

So, therefore, if you are writing a Letter of Intent – and this is in the Letter of Intent: It says that you promised. The IMF told them what to do in order to get the money. That's a simple form. There's no big thing about a Letter of Intent. They want money from the International Monetary Fund so they have to send a letter telling them what they propose to do in order to qualify for the money. This is what they have said.

Mr. Speaker, people are saying out there that they seem to be selling out Barbados. We have to think very seriously about what is being said about Barbados and all politicians now. We are feeling it on this side because the Government wouldn't take stock. They wouldn't listen. When they talked this talk about race... Who do you see in the newspaper buying? White people from abroad. All of those are things that matter here, you know. Those people are coming in and they are taking over jobs and giving orders to black Barbadians. I have heard about that. It means that they will eventually sever those Barbadians and those Barbadians will now suffer. Not at the hands of the Government this time, but of people to whom we have sold our assets who have now won a share in our country and are now our masters. We have to understand what is going on. I am concerned about the sale of transport. Those persons will be severed. What sort of money will they get for their labour? It makes no sense that we are going to sit down here and think that this is a very slight debate. It affects all of us. The private sector is waiting out there to do what ever it can. People are going home. I am worried that there are technical ways of dismissing workers.
6.40 p.m.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition has just called on Government to introduce Unfair Dismissal legislation to protect those persons who will yet feel the pinch of the economic crisis in this country. Why do you not introduce that? That Bill should have been introduced. Since July of this year I contacted the Clerk of the House and I handed him a copy of a draft of the Unfair Dismissal Bill but because it was coming from the Opposition as well as a private member the process takes some time.

I am calling on the Government and asking the Government to take up where the Opposition left off and introduce the Unfair Dismissal legislation. It is in there. It was approved in 1984. When we left office we were about to introduce it and it is time that you introduce that piece of legislation. It is in there for you. Whenever you bring it I am going to take credit for it because I have it in there as a private Member's Bill. That is what was recommended by the Board.

Aside.

Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member should not be concerned about the introduction of it. They should be concerned about what the people think about them, how the workers are saying out there that they got tricked. When I came to the House the people out there were saying, "how could they bring this piece of legislation and the Honourable Member for St. Michael North is telling us that he is nearing an agreement?" Now go and explain to the public why you have not reached an agreement but you are coming in here

with this. You are talking about consensus Government? I heard when you were reported. What consensus Government you are talking about? Forget the word. It is so pretty in the mouths of those people who use the word but people understand it. It does not have any meaning. My children find it very difficult to understand what is meant by consensus as explained by the Honourable Members on that side.

Mr. Speaker, I think we have to be very serious about this matter. This is no time to sit down and just gloss over these matters. They will cause social dislocation. I want them to understand the social consequences. You are talking about sport? You go out there and understand what is meant by it. The people do not have any money. I want you to understand what is going to happen. When Christmas comes we are going to see what is going on. As someone said last week to me "We are riding at the head of a tiger."

Mr. Speaker, I can only but send the warning to the Honourable Members on that side. The Honourable Prime Minister in introducing this legislation rightly said we had a copy of the extracts from the Report of Pelikanos and we saw the Board's recommendation. I want the point to be made quite clearly. It is not that we are saying that the matter should be introduced at any time but the timing is worse than that. We are talking about the circumstances, the economic time, not the three or four year. We are talking about in 1987 and 1988 things were bright. We had just given back people \$15 000. People were walking with the hands in their pockets with chests up. They cannot do that today. Their heads are down. That is why I said it does not matter when the report is made. Reports are made and submitted to Government but Government has to use its own common sense in knowing when to introduce it. That is important. Timing is of essence. The attorneys will tell you that.

The Honourable Members on that side must understand what we say and do not misunderstand or misrepresent the points that are made in this debate. We are saying yes, there is time but at the same time in 1987 the economic picture was much brighter. There were no signs on the horizon that things were bad. Therefore it was necessary to negotiate and adjust. But what has happened now? The Severance Payments Act that was put on the statute book to cushion the economic impact is now being tampered with and I am worried because those civil servants are not entitled to severance payments because the law has not been amended.

I am suggesting to the Right Honourable Prime Minister to introduce appropriate legislation to protect those public workers. This does not say that. It is incomplete because the *ex gratia* payment depends on the whims and fancies of every Cabinet. It is not in any hard written form. I detest that. Those public workers would have to wait for

ex gratia payments. I want the Right Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to assure me and this Honourable House today that *ex gratia* payments would reflect the same terms and conditions of the severance payments, whatever the amendments are until the Barbados Labour Party is able to rectify the situation. If you do not do that then you are going to have a disadvantaged category of workers.

I thank you.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to be very long on this particular debate. I have just heard my friend, the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East fulminating on changes to benefits for workers. In terms of principle, if we are talking principle about changes to benefits I find it very difficult to understand the Honourable Member's position.

The Honourable Member supported the severance payments benefits by the Barbados Labour Party administration in terms of the principle of changes. He could not be against that. He supported when the Honourable Member for Christ Church South, then the Prime Minister, made the change to Severance Payment legislation in terms of moving the period for claim for benefit from 4 weeks to 13 weeks. There was no difficulty with that. When the dreaded Emergency Powers Bill was introduced in this Parliament to destroy the Trade Union Movement and when in the second reading it was put to the vote, the Honourable Member, the Leader of the Opposition was absent that day, a sensible man, he did not come in. My friend the Honourable Member for Christ Church South stayed out of the House that day too. He did not come in because he could not vote for it. They did not abstain by coming in here but they did not come in. Listen to who voted for it, J. M. G. M. Adams, the man who introduced it, L. Craig, L. B. Brathwaite, B. A. Miller, D. G. Blackman, DeL. O. Bradshaw, R. E. Brathwaite, V. L. Johnson, A. Truss, L. Sisnett and J. B. Odle. Some of them had more sense than to come in that day and vote for that odious piece of legislation but you said "Yes" to it. The Honourable Member for St. Michael East said a "Yes" by changing the legislation by taxation.

6.50 p.m.

He said a yes to changing the period of eligibility from four weeks to 13. He said a yes to changing the Emergency Powers Bill to destroy the trade union movement and stands up in here now fulminating on another change in the benefits as though he is the sole defender and representatives for the workers. I say that, Mr. Speaker, because I believe that the level that we expect in our parliamentary representatives in 1991 and thereafter has to be one of bringing standards of decency and commonsense to the people outside, the people that we have to lead, especially in matters of this sort. You are

going to stand on the test not of words for today but in terms of what this will mean to the entire country, issues of this nature.

You should have followed the others before you. You should have sun danced like the others. You should sun dance like the Leader of the Opposition. You should have sun danced like the Honourable Member for St. Joseph. You should have followed the first sun dance of the Honourable Member for St. Andrew. They came out on some weak notion that they could not support these measures because of the timing. That is a bit of sophistry because clearly the Barbados Labour Party is copping out of this one. They know that they would support it. They know that they are supporting these measures. They have not discussed the tax. Politically they know they have to grandstand. But as man and the one lady in here who has not spoken yet who will speak, I am sure, they took what they considered the easy way out to talk about the timing. I would just discuss the timing a little bit, just to put them on the spot. Because if they say that the Prime Minister should have brought it earlier, let us say 3 years ago as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is saying, all it would have done is to make it harder for more people who would have gone out between then and now.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: Mr. Chairman, Sir, on a point of explanation. The Honourable Member obviously heard my speech and he really should not try to misrepresent the purport of my speech. My speech was absolutely clear that if you are taking away benefits you should also bring the compensation provisions for the persons whom you were depriving of benefits. That was absolutely clear.

Aside.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: Delay in asking the Minister why he has taken so long to deal with the matter.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition made the point that he just got up and repeated. I will come to that too. But the point he was making was a point of timing. He said the Prime Minister had this matter before him three or four years ago. He was following the point that was made by the Honourable Member for St. Andrew and the Honourable Member for St. Joseph. All I am saying is that if the Prime Minister had introduced these measures three years ago it would mean that more people would have lost benefits. That is all I am saying.

The people who are saying that these benefits are tough and going to disenfranchise, certain people from the right, are saying that it should have been put on more of them. There cannot be any logic in that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, if we are discussing the benefits from an economics point of view and we are

saying that the Fund is a bankrupt fund and we are saying that we should rationalize a fund that is a bankrupt fund, and if that is an economic argument that both sides will accept, the question of timing becomes important again. Do you make the change at a time when there is more pressure being put on the fund because of the lay offs, it would therefore even reduce the scheme as it is or do you not? Clearly the economics of it would be to rationalize it now when it is going to be under even more pressure.

Asides.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: Do you not understand what I am saying? I am saying the economics of it, if the Fund is already bankrupt and cannot be sustained, then are you going to leave it open at a time when it is going to be put under more pressure? That is the economics of the matter, nothing to do with the workers at this point in time. Do not get on out there as though you feel more about the workers than anybody else because you know you do not. Nonsense. Do not get into that. I am talking about the economics of the Fund. If a fund is already bankrupt, if a fund does not have the resources clearly there is going to be even more pressure when more workers are put on the breadline in terms of the economics of the fund. What kind of recommendations they could be putting? What kind of economists there would be on that side if they are telling you that you should not change it at a time when it is going to be under more pressure. It cannot make sense.

They could not be speaking as people with an economic sense, a sense of basic arithmetic or a basic sense of finance or anything else. I am only talking timing. Therefore I would have to extrapolate from that...

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Just one moment.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: They are saying that he should have introduced it a long time ago.

Asides.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: You said he waited too long to introduce this measure. That is what you said. So he should have introduced it before. If you are not saying that, you are saying that he should not introduce it now since the workers are under pressure. If you are not saying that, you are saying he should introduce it somewhere down the road then. You are saying he was dilatory by not introducing it and you should introduce it some time later. What kind of ignorance that would be? You are claiming that he took too long to introduce it, first of all that is the complaint, and now you are telling him that he should introduce it later. It is totally contradictory. The whole

question of timing is really a non starter. I understand the sophistry of introducing it because really you know you should support the debate but you do not want to.

Miss B. A. MILLER: Mr. Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. This is the second time that the Honourable Member has used the word sophistry. His remarks are generally disparaging. He also has said that we do not have any care for the workers. He cannot speak for this side. I am asking for that remark to be withdrawn. There is no sophistry in this. This is a trade union leader taking from the workers at a time when they need it most.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: Mr. Speaker, sophistry. That is what it is. Nothing more or less.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Just one minute. I think it is a little discouraging to myself to be repeatedly asking Members to give other Honourable Members the opportunity to make their speech. I have tried my best, at all times, to make sure that everybody is heard in reasonably good tones. I now ask Members to do the same for others.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: Mr. Speaker as far as I understand the measures that are being introduced today were agreed upon by the National Insurance Board which is a tripartite Board. I think the Honourable President of the Senate is a member of that Board. He is also the General Secretary of the Barbados Workers' Union. I think the General Secretary of the National Union of Public Workers is also on the Board. As far as I am aware the coalition is not in any argument, on these measures, unlike what the Member for St. Michael South East is saying. My understanding is that the coalition had difficulties about when Government might be paying severance but that in fact there is no question that the coalition has not raised a question that these measures would be introduced from the 1st December. Again I sat down and I heard the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East discussing something that he knows completely nothing about but he was going so well, in terms of his noise, in terms of Shakespeare full of sound and fury and signifying nothing. He was going very well so I could not stop him in his flow. As far as I know the coalition has not taken issue with this, not in the slightest.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, my only difficulty with these measures is that I would have preferred – because I supported the schemes, my Executive Council supported this change otherwise my General Secretary would not have ... I am sure Government has evidence that the NIS Board approved these particular measures.

My view is that changes of this nature in social legislation should really have been dealt with by the social

partners outside, I believe that within Parliament now there is need for committees where the two parties could sit down, look at these changes and then introduce them. I feel very strongly about that quite frankly. Changes in things like the Severance Payments and Unemployment Benefit, I would like to see two levels of agreement. One level of agreement is the social partners and the other level of agreement is inside here. That we should set up committees in here to look at these kinds of changes, get agreements and then come forward and get full support of the House of Assembly.

7.00 p.m.

I feel very strongly about that and other matters. Matters like salaries of Parliamentarians and so on, I believe we should have committees in here to look at these things, even going before the International Monetary Fund. I feel that we should get agreement in Parliament before we go forward in these things. These are things that I feel strongly about.

As I said, changes and benefits one way or another to me are matters that have to be looked at very, very broadly against a background of information and then decisions have to be taken. I am not going on any full dressed debate on the Severance Payments Act. I have several things to discuss on that issue and in time I will discuss them.

I just have two concerns here really. One is that according to the Letter of Intent these changes are to come into effect on December 1 and I believe this therefore is validating legislation to support that. For some persons this might be a theoretical matter but for me it is a very practical matter. Right now for instance there are several persons out there in groups, for instance, who have already been told by their employers that they will be severed.

We have the case of Barbados Bottling Company – Coca Cola, for instance. The Barbados Workers' Union have been in discussion with Coca Cola in terms of that company having to relocate from the City into Newton, Christ Church and discussions are already on the way about severance.

In the case of the Barbados Port Authority there has also been discussion between the relevant authorities and the Union that numbers of persons will be severed. I would certainly like to think, Sir, that because this new legislation is being put into place that those persons who have already been given notice of this severance, even though the actual severance may come after December 1, that these persons will not be affected by this legislation. I believe that this is important, vitally important and I would certainly want some kind of assurance from this side of the House in terms of that particular matter because it eases the particular difficulty where the agreement had already been made for severance before and these are matters which will

have to be looked at very, very carefully. I am talking here, not about individual severances that will come down the line, but I am talking about large groups of persons where these discussions have already taken place.

I would like too to mention a matter that we have some concern about that was raised with the Honourable Member for Christ Church South when he was at the time Prime Minister, the question of the extension from 4 to 13 weeks, and just to say that as we anticipated at that time that employers have been using that legislation very, very forcefully to frustrate workers who had been laid off for a very long time and called back on.

A case in point for instance is the Barbados Children's Wear, that is probably one of the best examples of workers who have been frustrated now to the point that they only do not benefit in terms of their unemployment benefits because now they have reached the point where they have used up their benefits and they have to put in 52 weeks of work now before they can qualify for further unemployment benefits. At the same time they have been frustrated from claiming severance at an earlier time.

I think that in many instances when we change legislation at a particular time to deal with one problem we find that other problems are created and we recognise the difficulty now in even trying to bring back that claim for 13 weeks support in light of the fact that the unemployment situation is as grave as it is and the pressure that is being placed on the Fund. Certainly we see that as a very significant difficulty and therefore I would just like to say in closing that we agree with many of those who have spoken before that in fact the Severance Payments Act itself has to be looked at comprehensively. There is need for change in several different areas. I do not take the point that was made that benefits will not change from time to time and we need to recognise that most of the people we are talking about are not only getting the severance pay benefits but they are entitled to both severance pay benefits and unemployment benefits.

Now, if you were talking about the generosity of the two benefits and you recognise that most people are entitled to both of them it is not a situation where somebody is entitled to severance benefits will not get unemployment benefit but will in fact be entitled to both of these benefits.

I think we can recognise why the change might be necessary from time to time. This is not an accusation but I would say it, that when the unemployment benefits was hastily introduced by Mr. Adams back in 1982/83 - it came into Parliament in 1982 - he did not give any thought about it. The Honourable Member for Christ Church South knows this is true, that the Prime Minister of the day did not give any thought to it.

Aside.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: I will follow from that. When the Honourable Member for Christ Church South in 1985 said that there was need to integrate the two things, he recognised that and we indicated to him that the best way was to go out and get an expert from the ILO. That is what the Barbados Workers' Union said, and he followed through. He recognised that in fact that was extremely necessary. He is the person who is responsible for Pelikanos coming here. He understood that there was a need to integrate the two benefits and to change the level of benefits from them. He understood that as I believe all of the others on the Barbados Labour Party side understand it. He is only grand-standing. They know they were the persons who put in train to get Pelikanos here. Pelikanos set up changes that would have been even more rigorous than the Board is introducing so let me say to the Barbados Labour Party this is the end result of your own procedures not just ours. So when you vote for it you are voting for something which you, yourself, instituted. You started the measures coming. You are the persons who introduced Mr. Pelikanos to Barbados. You are the persons who recommended that Mr. Pelikanos come and only because the electorate changed you, you are not dealing now with the same issue, but you have had to deal with it. So you can stand on high ground and support these measures because had you been the Government of the day you would have to deal with these things, so you do not have to take opportunistic positions on this one, this is one where you can lead in the nation. You can lead the people out there by setting the examples and sending the signals. In fact you can go by your consciences, you don't have to vote politics on this one. Go with you consciences, you know that these changes are necessary.

Aside.

Mr. R. L. MORRIS: I don't know. The Honourable Member for Christ Church South says that conscience don't reside over there. I don't know. He is having a hearty joke about the matter. Consciences don't reside on that side of the House. I can't make those kinds of judgements. This is one where the Honourable Members can in their minds know that they were responsible for the Pelikanos report which recommended most of these changes and we have modified the changes because we felt they were too harsh and therefore they can easily support the changes now. I thank you, Sir.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, I am about to move the suspension of the House but before I do so, Sir, there is a document to be laid and I am seeking your leave, Sir, to revert to that Head of the Orders so that this document can be laid.

Mr. SPEAKER: If there is no objection from Members I guess you can go ahead.

PAPERS

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Mr. Speaker, I am commanded to lay the National Insurance and Social Security Benefit (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1991.

SUSPENSION

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: I told the Honourable Members last week that it was coming. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move that this sitting be suspended until 8.15 this evening, Sir.

The question that the sitting be suspended until 8.15 p.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER suspended the sitting accordingly.
7.10 p.m.

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER: This sitting is resumed. The Honourable Member for St. George South caught my eye. Is he still willing?

Mr. L. R. TULL: I wanted to speak, Mr. Speaker, in the heat of the contribution of the Member for Christ Church East Central. But with the passage of time the heat has abated somewhat. I will speak for a few moments, Sir, because I feel very strongly about this legislation. The Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central sought to intellectualize suffering. That is what he was trying to do and it strikes me as remarkable that someone who is a representative of a union can take that position.

I myself, Sir, do not have any difficulty with the concept that from time to time changes have to be made in social security legislation and any argument that that is all that needs to be said at a time like this really is invalid. Speakers on this side have been accused of sophistry in relation to very strong held views of dismantling so to speak on Social Security Benefits for the workers of this country. I want to lend my voice with the strong sentiments expressed by the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East in putting the case for the workers of this country. It is not a question of who asked for a study to be done on the Social Security legislation of Barbados.

I can understand the Honourable Member for St. Michael East's discomfort in speaking on this measure because he is a man who is caught between a rock and a hard place. But what is required in these matters is a certain display of principle. A man has to believe in something and you cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. You have got to make up your mind where you are. I like the exhortation from the Honourable Member that people should use a little conscience in this whole

matter. The adjustments, or the modifications to use that word which has become fashionable, to the Severance Payments Benefit Scheme however useful they may be in ordinary times are not useful in these times. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that is at the crux of the debate today. The record must not show that the Honourable Members on this side are hostile to adjustments and modifications from time to time. If they were, they would not have invited the ILO expert to do his study. So we are not hostile to the principle of changes from time to time. What we are hostile against, Sir, is that at this particular period when the workers of this country are being asked to carry a heavy burden in 1991, that the Government should visit on them in the time of their misery a further penalty.

It is not for me, Mr. Speaker, to play Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance has to use the devices available to him to decide where the money will come from and whom he gets it from and so on. It is for me, Mr. Speaker, in putting the case for the workers to say to the Honourable Minister of Finance that he has to do better with his sense of priority.

Aside.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Do not mind. I am speaking for posterity not the reporters. I remember, Mr. Speaker, in the early 1950's when the shipment of bulk molasses started in Barbados and people who were working in that industry used to make puncheons and put the molasses in and they used to be shipped out to the ships because there was no Deep Water Harbour. You remember the lighter men moving the cases of bulk molasses out and so on, Sir? In that period, the shipment of bulk molasses started and a lot of workers working for places like Plantations Limited and others were laid off. There was a lot of grievous suffering among a number of those workers and obviously their families.

The Severance Payments legislation, indeed all of the Social Security legislation, was passed to counter that particular difficulty and all parties in the House are agreed that they are a very useful social purpose meant by the implementation of this legislation and it has worked to the benefit of people in this country. Even though a few wrinkles in it needed to be straightened out, one must seriously question whether this was the time to do it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was always 300 years of problems in the Caribbean of the struggle between the worth of labour and capital. It seems to me that whenever there is a problem that labour is the one that has to carry the can. I do not intend, Sir, to get into the ideological argument that has been expounded by social observers and social commentators in that field in this country and beyond for a long time, Sir. Suffice it to say that it is not right that every time sacrifices have to be made that one looks in the direction of the workers.

I was surprised to hear the Minister of Labour, for instance, the Honourable Member for St. Philip North and the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central make the kind of contributions which they made tonight. I think they had an overriding responsibility to put a case for the workers based on conscience as suggested by the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central. The test in this debate, Sir, when it comes to saying 'Aye' or 'No' is who are the people of conscience and who are not. It reminds me of a quotation from Cicero who said, Sir, to Marcus Antonius: "Consider those from whom you have sprung not those with whom you consort." It is important to say this, Mr. Speaker, because when the debate on these issues generally is getting cloudy one tends to forget that the Right Honourable Prime Minister said last year, Sir, that he has done more for the private sector in this country than any previous administration. That is what the Honourable Prime Minister said. I am not going to tell lies on him. When the leaders of the four private sector groups opened fire on the Prime Minister, and he knows how I feel about these things. The way they opened up on him, to me it is not partisan. Get that straight. His reply was most disappointing in those circumstances so I stepped away from him. But when they attack him, I stand up next to him. When his reply was that he had done more for the private sector than any other Government in Barbados, I stepped aside. It is that kind of blowing hot and cold by the present administration that confuses me and a lot of right thinking people in Barbados.

8.25 p.m.

You have to draw the lines. You have to know when your foot is in the crease or out because you have to draw a white line. You have to know when you are in the penalty area, or when you are out, by drawing lines. The trouble with the present administration is that they want to play the game without any lines so that they can move all over the place. They don't have to hold any position. They can be generous beyond measure and boast about it to one group at one time even if it is just words and on another occasion they go and give the other section – in this particular case the workers of this country – the can to carry.

The Democratic Labour Party in introducing this legislation is doing a vicious act on the people of Barbados. This is the strongest piece of anti-worker legislation that I have seen since I have been in this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, the attitude of Members of the Government Benches to this kind of legislation is to trivialise the whole thing. People are suffering because of the mismanagement of the country by the present administration. Instead of the present administration admitting that they have inflicted more pain that one man should be asked to carry, they are trivialising this whole thing. When the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister who introduced this resolution spoke at another time, in another place, he was asking people to try and understand,

to be sympathetic; to cooperate. When you put a case for the workers and you point out the iniquity of this piece of legislation at this particular time, there is no call for cooperation and fellow feeling from Members of the Government. It is this kind of thing that troubles me.

There has been a call from the Government side in this debate for decency and common sense to prevail and yet Members on this side are being criticised for doing the decent thing, for saying to the Government that in this period – because we hear repeated the question of timing, which is relevant. I lend my voice to those who are talking about timing because it must not be recorded and must not be forgotten that the position of the Barbados Labour Party in relation to this matter has nothing to do with occasional adjustment in the Social Security Scheme because we know that it must happen from time to time. Our position is one that this is a period of difficulty for the workers of Barbados. Those who have been severed, those who have been laid off, those who have been making their contributions over the years confident that they could trust the Government not to take away what belongs to them now find that after being so trusting at this particular juncture the Government is the one who is taking advantage of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I don't want to prolong it. I just want to get it clearly on record that I am unequivocally opposed to this piece of legislation. It offends all the social principles that I believe in. I believe, Sir, it offends the principles of a number of people on the other side. The difference is that I am going to get up and say it and vote in accordance with the dictates of my conscience and the principles that I try to espouse from time to time. Those on the other side – I can't say they are hypocritical, Sir. I think that appears in May's as unparliamentary, therefore I wouldn't say that – but it really shocks me to hear Members of the Government in private conference stating one position and in public they say something else. However, that has characterised most of the people on the other side. There has been a lot of talk about who is going to reveal what people were saying at one point. I am not getting into that. I am going to leave it to the consciences of those who say one thing behind the corner and those who say something out in the open.

I wish to make one other point on this matter before Parliament. As we have heard over and over again the Severance Payments Act does not bind the Crown. Over the years there have been loose arrangements made for the granting of benefits for those people who work for Government while laid off. My colleague, the Honourable Member for St. Andrew said earlier in the debate that the difference between the period earlier when the Severance Payments Act legislation came into force and now is that in those days jobs were easier to get. People were leaving school and picking jobs. This is why I want to make the

point. All during that period of the early seventies and beyond, the Democratic Labour Party went about talking about the cornucopia that they had established in Barbados – the horn of plenty; and that Barbados was a land flowing in milk and honey. That is the kind of impression they gave at the time. Now it doesn't suit them, they are backing off from that, but it is a fact that the situation was drastically different then from now.

As a matter of fact, as the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister knows, they couldn't find people to teach in the schools in Barbados. People who left school with four or five "O" Level Certificates could find jobs in the private sector in a way they never could have in the history of Barbados. There they had to use people who were not qualified in the terms of qualifications the Government set. They had to have people with one or two "O" Levels to teach in the schools of Barbados in those days. Those were very different days.

I mention this business about unqualified teachers in another context in this debate because when things began to change around 1973, 1974 and 1975 and there was then a surplus of people to teach in the schools the Government sought to unload the educational system of the unqualified people that it had been forced to take on earlier because jobs were plentiful. The Deputy Prime Minister knows that jobs were plentiful. At that time, Sir, the Barbados Labour Party Government took a decision when those unqualified were laid off to pay them compensation in the same terms as those obtaining under the Severance Payments Act. There are at least three occasions that can serve as precedents under both administrations. There were three separate occasions, when public officers who were being severed, decisions were taken to give those people benefits that were no less favourable than those persons in the private sector who were being severed.
8.35 p.m.

One of the things that stabilises a society is the confidence that things will happen the way they usually happen. That is part of the stabilisation in the society. That is why the whole idea of precedence, a concept that is heard all the time in law but it is also an integral part of the morals of our society in a social sense, not only law that concept of following precedence and leading people's expectations to know that if this is what happened at one time it will happen again, all that is tied up in what the Government is doing now in this particular piece of legislation.

It is wrong at this time when people are being laid off in large numbers for this to be brought in. Any sensible and sensitive Government in going through any programme of stabilisation, to use the current term, makes provision for a safety net for the most disadvantaged in the society. I do not see any signs of it here. I see no sign of it here at all.

The social services that would benefit the most disadvantaged are being cut. Even the welfare note is being cut. All the safety nets that should be there for the disadvantaged are being removed. In all that this additional burden comes in.

The Honourable Member for St. Michael South East makes reference to the advent of Christmas. Well, there is going to be a very black Christmas this year. Already the social problems being generated by the policies of an insensitive Government are causing more problems than the measures are trying to solve.

Aside.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Black means without light. You give people no hope, nothing. Mr. Speaker, when I talk about the social problems that are being engendered by these policies although this is the short-term and one can expect a worsening of the situation. Shoplifting is on the increase, snatching people's money and jewelry in Bridgetown is on the increase. It is not only in the increase, but there is a dramatic increase in that kind of petty pilferage and stealing all across Barbados.

I fear for Christmas, Sir, because the Police will tell you that there is a high incidence of break-ins in people's houses around that time than any other time of the year. I worry and I am not trying to dramatise this debate. This debate is about people and their suffering. Therefore, when I say these things I am not saying it to dramatise anything. They tell me and my own observation is that there is a higher incidence of break-ins at people's homes at Christmas time than any other time of the year.

All these things that are happening will contribute to an escalation of crime in this country. It is not only the lack of money. There are two elements to it. The money that is being taken from people is one thing. They will have less money to spend. That is causing a problem in itself. It is also the frustration and the anger that are being built up over the way in which the people are being treated that will be a major determinant in the social order in this society.

We have members of the unions, abandoning the position of their members. I do not care how many fine and fancy words are spoken by the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central. As I said at the beginning, he is trying to intellectualise suffering and has the nerve to get in here and talk about he is being pragmatic. Pragmatic what? To give a short history of Social Security legislation in Barbados and when adjustments were made then to ask a question that is weak in dialectics. If you ask for a commission then you are bound by the recommendations of that commission. It is an insult to the intelligence of people on this side. It may wash with the people on that side but it is an affront to the intelligence of people on this

side. The Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central would have done better to have said nothing. Sitting as he is next to the Honourable Member for Christ Church East, he might have given him some advice that he had the right to remain silent. He would have done better.

I have no quarrel with the membership of the unions in Barbados. What the people in the unions need is some leadership.

Mr. SPEAKER: One minute more.

Mr. L. R. TULL: They are being abandoned at their time of greatest need by a handful of self-serving, self-interested, petty and selfish people that they call leaders, not all of them but most of them, Sir. Those who are Members of this Honourable Chamber, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, Christ Church East Central, St. Michael Central and Christ Church West Central who for years have been the legal advisor in the Barbados Workers' Union got in here saying that he is a union man too and the Honourable Member for St. Michael South Central who is bobbing and weaving and dodging this Chamber as if there is some disease going in here. You cannot find him.

Mr. SPEAKER: Finish your point.

Mr. L. R. TULL: Their day of reckoning is now and what they do at the end of this debate will determine once and for all whether they can go out and tell the people of Barbados whether they consider themselves fit to be representatives of the people.

Thank you.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: Before you put it to the vote, Sir, I want a piece of the action. I have waited very patiently. I am a little disappointed with this debate, I must confess, Mr. Speaker. This matter is too serious and has too many implications for the working class of Barbados for it not to have been accorded the kind of input from Members from the Government side that it deserves.

The Government has an attitude that the present hard times will evoke responses of anger and frustration from the people but after a couple of months, all of that will subside and the people of Barbados will become adjusted to the austerity measures and all thereafter will fall into place. I want the Government to know that, as far as I am concerned, and I am speaking personally, for me that kind of psychological approach to the problem is not going to work because within the rules of this House and within the constitutionality of action by the Barbados Labour Party I am going to take every opportunity that is available to me to harass this Government on what it has wrought for Barbadians.

8.45 p.m.

This two-page document amending the Severance Payments Act is one of the most vicious pieces of legislation introduced in Barbados in contemporary times. It is totally anti worker and it is brought by a Government that speaks of itself as caring but by its actions reveal that it is in fact without a heart. In 1986 or 1987 the Democratic Labour Party Government introduced new levies and increased the rate of existing levies to burden the working class of this country with increased impositions in addition to the increased consumption taxes that they were asked to pay. No opposition came from the members of the Democratic Labour Party. Those who should have been taking up the case of the working class said that even though they were philosophically opposed they would support the measures temporarily. Temporary support has now become at least 4 years of solid support. Similarly in relation to the specific measures of severance pay. When in 1985, the Labour Party introduced certain amendments to the Severance Payments Act they were loudest in their condemnation of what we did. And what were we doing? All we were doing was to say that part of your severance pay award should be eligible for taxation as happens in every country that has severance pay. In England your severance pay is taxable. But the freeness mentality that the Democratic Labour Party wanted to cultivate allowed them to criticize vehemently the proposals to tax a part of your severance pay.

But what have they come with today? We did not interfere with the basis for an award of severance pay. An award of severance pay up until today is still based on a formula that once you have completed two years' service you qualify and you get – I am going to speak broadly – roughly 4 weeks wages in respect of each completed year of service. We did not interfere with that to reduce the quantum of what you were getting.

This Government today has come with a new formula which not only says that if you work up to 10 years you will only get two and a half weeks pay. But what they have done is to have changed the definition of basic pay because whereas up until today basic pay and I am reading from the First Schedule of the Severance Payments Act, Section 6 of the First Schedule. Basic pay as we amended it in 1984 gave the worker an enhanced area from which to compute the quantum that he was getting. This is what we did in 1984. 1984 Act No. 11.

" "basic pay" means the rate of pay of an employee, plus overtime payments, incentive or productivity payments and any other payments, allowances or additions to the pay of an employee that are made on a regular basis before any deductions are made; but does not include intermittent bonuses that are not related directly to the productivity of the employee;"

This Government that on Sunday night the Prime Minister said is caring – and I want to make it clear, Sir. I may be misquoting the Prime Minister because I never paid attention to what he was saying for more than seven minutes. What I am saying to you is what people have told me who watched the programme for more than seven minutes but not exceeding twelve. I have not come across one person in the whole of the last two days all through the courts and around where I have been knocking around who watched that programme for more than twelve minutes. The number of people who told me they dropped to sleep, could not be bothered to watch and so on.

Aside.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: No. I must confess I had two books that I bought in London in August and I had not got a chance to read of the best jokes of lawyers and I read them. Because when the Prime Minister started I said same old khaki pants again. But be that as it may, Sir, I am told that he said that his Government is caring and he is on the side of the working class. He is spun from the working class, had no silver spoon, gold spoon or whatever and does not want to covet one.

I cannot believe that he of his own volition could have introduced legislation like this. And what is remarkable, Sir, is that when he moved the Second Reading I do not believe that I heard him say that this legislation today has anything to do with the IMF programme that we are going into or with the Letter of Intent. He completely, as usual, gave you a story but left out half that was relevant. What he said was relevant. But the other half that was relevant that would make him look bad he chose not to tell it.

I think it is about time. This is the 25th Anniversary of Independence coming up Saturday and we are so poor we cannot even afford to give the people of Barbados a holiday for the 25th Anniversary. He cannot even declare Monday the holiday. No holiday for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary. You have your public meeting on Sunday night. When you have your public meeting on Sunday night you have to go and tell the people these things. I am calling on them to go and have a public meeting Sunday night even if the people pelt at you. Have the meeting. Show some courage.

Sir, the Prime Minister has it in here at paragraph 19 of the Letter of Intent. This is what the Letter of Intent says at paragraph 19:

"On April 1, 1991 the employers' contribution to the Severance Fund was raised from 0.25 percent to 1 percent of the payroll so that the Severance Fund could meet its liabilities under the Severance Pay Scheme and repay a loan to the Central Government."

When the Prime Minister winds up I want him to tell us how much he expects that what he is doing here and the raising of the contribution from 0.25% to 1% will contribute:

- (a) to the severance fund, and
- (b) how much it will contribute by way of repayment of the loan that was advanced in September 1987 by the Central Government towards the scheme.

8.55 p.m.

He then says, Sir, in addition the benefit payments under the Severance Pay Scheme will be lower as described in paragraph 18, effective December 1, 1991. What I am submitting to this House, Sir, is that this Bill is a direct consequence of what is in paragraph 19 of the Letter of Intent. He refers to the commencement date of December 1 and he said the benefit payments will be lower.

Now let us look at the two paragraphs. What he has done in this year alone. April 1, increased the employer's share of contribution from 0.25 to one per cent. Now in November he is reducing the level of benefits that the workers can get. He goes on to say a further study will be completed by the next two months, by January 1992 analysing the feasibility of an increase of the eligibility period for severance pay.

What does that mean? To move from two years to three or four years? That is what he plans for the workers in Barbados. It is there, I am not putting anything on him. A further study and it is to be completed by January 1992 analysing the feasibility of an increase in the eligibility period for severance pay and the calculation of severance pay on a net after tax basis. I want him to explain that to the House, what he had in mind. Those are his words. He signed one side and the mediator signed the other side. I want him to explain what he means because it seems to me that gradually he is proposing further to erode the rights of workers in fundamental ways because now you have to serve two years and he is obviously looking and saying well no, you can't get severance unless you serve, let us say for the sake of argument, something beyond 2, four or five or whatever. It is a serious thing, by a Government that says it is pro worker and caring.

Now, in this whole area the Prime Minister has said that in view of representations made to him by the coalition of unions he is looking at ways of modifying or amending this Letter of Intent. I really feel that Members of the House deserve to know, since this debate is on severance pay, since as recently as Sunday night, the Prime Minister is alleged to have said that the area of severance pay is one that he is looking at with a view to modifying the Letter

of Intent, tell the people's representatives in what way you are looking at a modification and what indeed, if you have anything in your head, what indeed you intend to propose to the IMF by way of modification of the severance pay aspect of this as set out in paragraph 19. We deserve to know.

If it is the Prime Minister's intention to modify paragraphs 18 and 19 of the Letter of Intent, why is it necessary to bring this legislation here now on November 26, if you intend to modify it, or is this another example of a bungling confused Government? It does not make any sense, Sir. He says he is going to propose modification in relation to severance, in relation to manufacturing and in relation to unemployment benefits. We are here now dealing with severance and we deserve to know if this is the modification that he is talking about that he is proposing to the IMF or if it is something different because this harmonises with paragraph 19, so it has got to be something different so you can't come after the fact and tell the public that you modified something different. We deserve to know up front, Sir. I think that the candour of which the Minister of Health spoke as being lacking in New York is showing itself up again. We call on the Prime Minister to give full disclosure of these proposed modifications, Sir.

The second point I wish to make in this debate, Sir, and I am challenging the Prime Minister also to give the facts, relates to this reduction of unemployment benefits from 60 per cent of average insurable earnings to 40 per cent. Almost as soon as the Prime Minister set off, after they had cleared the aircraft of bombs, the Prime Minister set off for Zimbabwe. Within two days, I believe, of his going it was announced in the press that the rate of unemployment benefit would be reduced from 60 per cent to 40 per cent.

Pursuant to information coming from the National Insurance Scheme itself and the implication was that the Chairman of the National Insurance Board knew of it. The Chairman of the National Insurance Board, a Senator in the other place, immediately as the Prime Minister was safely outside of Barbados issued a statement saying that he knew nothing about that. The appearance was given that either the Prime Minister was lying or the Chairman of the National Insurance Board was lying.

The Prime Minister read a document earlier this afternoon a copy of which I have in my hand and this is what it said. This is from the National Insurance Board:

"After its deliberations on the several recommendations made by the consultant (that is Pelikanos) in the report of the review of the unemployment and Severance Payment Schemes the Board..." I saw the Director here this evening, but he did not stay. Tell him I

said it. "...the Board concluded as follows. This is the National Insurance Board. Among other things, Sir,

"Item 3 - There should be a sliding scale for unemployment benefit that is 60 per cent of average insurable earnings for the first ten weeks and 40 per cent for the remaining 16 weeks, a reduction of 20.5 per cent."

How in the light of that, a document emanating from the National Insurance Department, the Chairman participated as a member of the Board or ought to have been aware as Chairman of the Board if he was not present at the meeting that there was going to be a reduction from 60 to 40 per cent and it is here recorded, but he says that he knows nothing about it? The Prime Minister made a statement before that gave the public the impression there was a little "argy-bargy" when you were away, Mr. Prime Minister. Your credibility for the umpteenth time was put at risk. I must say now between you and the Chairman of the National Insurance Board that I have to believe you on this part alone. There are others that you have not convinced me yet and the credibility is not what it should be, but on this one you have got him. I must tell him that I found it out too and I will sandpaper him in the public domain at the right time as soon as the weather improves. I never said anything about whether he is a lawyer or not. I will say that publicly but not in here. I cannot say it in here. The facts are not on his side. It is on the side of the Prime Minister for once. For once in a blue moon, the Prime Minister has the facts on his side on this very serious business because we cannot have high officials playing around with the truth and giving what now turns out to be false information to members of the public. That is all I will say on that.

9.05 p.m.

Sir, this calls for a major change in the Severance Payments legislation. I told you all that I am not going to attack the Prime Minister again. This is round one and I have given him some scores here tonight. This call for massive amendment to the Severance Payments legislation has been made for years by the private sector. I want to address that, Sir. As I see it, there is nothing fundamentally wrong in principle with a Social Security Scheme which provides, as the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East said, for a cushion for displaced workers.

There is nothing wrong in principle with that. Whether Barbados can afford it or not, we have got by very well since 1971 when the legislation was introduced. But the real problem with Severance Payments in Barbados, as I conceive of the problem, is that over the years we have omitted to make adequate provision overtime to take care. I am not exempting myself either as an employer in various capacities private and corporate.

So that overtime you build up a fund and when the employee goes you have in your ordinary accounting operations a lump sum from which severance can be paid. Accountants have ways of describing it. I may be wrong. I cannot remember whether it is reserved capital or capital reserve fund, but it is one of them. What it really means is that the contributions for severance that employers and employees should put it aside in some fund. It could be done by way of a pension scheme or whatever. There is a variety of ways but you hive off from your operating account an amount that overtime will increase in such a manner that when employee "X" comes to go or has to go because there is a down turn in business you have a fund out of which you can pay.

This has not been the general practice in Barbados. So that employers not having set aside a special fund to deal with these things have found themselves having to pay severance out of operating capital thereby reducing the liquidity in the fund itself and that is where we run into trouble. So they complain because all of a sudden they find that they have got to pay somebody \$80,000. I speak of severance and I think that we have failed as Governments since the introduction of this legislation to encourage employers to create these funds by way of incentives and otherwise. So that is the first problem that when the day of severance arrives most companies do not have a special fund available from which to pay that liability. So they complain because it looks like a lot of money and they get annoyed because it reduces their profit margins at the end of the day. That is all it is, Sir.

Secondly, Sir, there is a great confusion in Barbados repeated here this evening about the majority of cases on severance resulting from wrongful dismissal. Let me just say that is foolishness. It does not happen that way. The confusion that we and employers have and even some clients have arises from a failure to appreciate the difference in nature between wrongful dismissal and severance. They are separate things. When you are severed, it is because your company has closed down or there has been a down turn in the business that you no longer have use for the person or whatever so you are severed.

Aside.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: Thank you. As the Honourable Member for St. George South is prompting me, there is no element of being a culprit. It is the economic activity within the company not generating the same levels of earning capacity and for that reason you have to let go. But you are not letting go the person because he has done something wrong. Now in those circumstances the employee is entitled to make a claim against the severance to the tribunal for an award based on his years of service. The tribunal makes the award and the employee is paid but nobody has adverted to this yet in this debate. Do you

know why the Severance Fund is in trouble? Because when the employee has been paid by the tribunal, the tribunal has a right of recourse against the employer to collect back 75 per cent at least of what they had to pay out and put it in the Fund. They do not do it.

So that where we are having a problem with the viability of the Severance Fund – Have I gone half an hour? One minute.

Mr. SPEAKER: Extra minutes. I have given you some already.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: Oh! I did not know that, Sir. I am just going to finish. – is that I think within the National Insurance Department they are not following up or recouping from the employers against whom awards have been made the equivalent amount to replenish the Fund. I have to say that. That is the key. They do not collect. I want to finish, Sir.

I was given the difference between severance and wrongful dismissal. The other aspect of this business is the wrongful dismissal where you send me home without good cause or, as should be the law but presently is not, you do not give adequate notice. This does not impact on the Severance Payments Fund at all. All it says is that you must compensate me having wrongfully dismissed as though, not out of, I had been severed. In other words, once you find that I have been wrongfully dismissed and I have worked for more than two years you must then as damages, not severance pay award, compensate me with ten months salary and the employers in town who have been dismissing people wrongfully have found that the Courts are exercising their powers under Section 45 of the Severance Payments Act and making them pay their damages which are the equivalent of severance but not the same as, and they are having to pay that out of their operating profits and they are blaming it on severance. It is nothing to do with severance at all. I am sorry I don't have more time, but another time.

9.15 p.m.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: The Honourable Member will not mind a little qualification of what he just said in that the Law does not say – I think he knows this – that the persons wrongfully dismissed must be compensated at the same level as. "Losses not less than", which means that compensation for a person unlawfully dismissed can be higher than if that same person had been severed. That's just a small point, Sir.

Asides.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Those who have authority to make the awards should understand it.

Mr. Speaker, I rise here to say up front without any equivocation whatsoever that I am in support of this bill in every respect. I have nothing to be afraid of. There are some people when some measures...

Mr. SPEAKER: Order, please.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: ...appear to be unpopular they take measure, and therefore the easy way out is to go with what they think the people out there believe. I have no such difficulty, Mr. Speaker, and it is my intention, as I said just now, to support this measure whether it is unpopular or not. I have no difficulty with the people of St. Michael North. None whatsoever. So, if those persons who think they will have difficulty in their own constituency... Go the easy way and make sure that you do not have difficulties. I have no problem, Sir. I can always face the people of St. Michael North as I do every Sunday. It was unfortunate that for the past five or so Sundays, except yesterday, I have not been able to visit the constituency, the reason being I had been taken up with trying to deal with matters to which this relates in some respects.

On Sunday, I went there. The same warmth with which they always greeted me is still there. I told my branch on Sunday what we are going to do here in terms of the severance payments, and I told them where my support will be. Sir, that is my position. As a matter of fact, having said that, I can take my seat because I have made it clear to everyone that I have the courage to stand up and vote for the bill as it stands without any fear whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, when the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central was speaking, I turned to him *sotto voce* and whispered that he seemed to be making my speech in terms of the origins of this particular legislation, because it began in 1985, in some respects, with the Honourable Member for Christ Church South. The legislation we have before us, is a result of that. What we have here is a benefit scheme. A benefit scheme from time to time is always subject to review.

I hear the measures that we have before us today described as anti-worker. I take a completely different view. This is a pro-worker piece of legislation. Why I say this is that the purpose of the Severance Payments Act was to be a benefit scheme. It was intended to benefit the workers and at the time when the scheme was devised and the enactments were made, the benefits were set at a certain level, at that particular time. The result we have today is for various reasons, and it has nothing to do with what people are now calling the present economic crisis. The Severance Payment Fund has been in crisis for many years. In 1987, the Government had to lend the Severance Payments Scheme \$10 million. It didn't lend it because it didn't need the money. It lent it because it needed it in

1987, and before that, the Severance Payment scheme had been in difficulties.

What we have now is a bankrupt scheme, whether we like it or not. The fund is bankrupt. That is the position today. A bankrupt fund can benefit nobody. It is a dead fund. It has no resources. How can it benefit if it has no funds? How can we go ahead paying the same level of benefits as we were paying before and kill off the fund? How will the workers benefit? How can we continue to do that? Let them explain to the people that they intend to kill off the fund and let them tell those same workers how it will benefit those other workers who will be laid off from their jobs. These measures have nothing to do with anti-worker. How can it be?

I have had most to do with the introduction of this scheme, in terms of the enactment, not in terms of the conception. I must admit that. The scheme from conception is the result of private members resolution brought by the then junior member for St. Peter, Sir Frank Walcott. 9.25 p.m.

In the late 1960s, Sir, a committee was set up under the then Rev. Layne who I believe was the Rector of St. Matthias or maybe St. Mary's at the time, and was constituted of the Government, the workers' representatives and the employers' representatives. This was the genesis of the Severance Payments Scheme. When it was enacted in 1971 and I was made Minister of Labour, we could not introduce it in the form it was in. We had to bring massive amendments. It did not amend the benefits. We brought it into force on January 1, 1973, as far as my recollection goes. Subsequent to that we did not do anything to the detriment of the Scheme, its resources or anything.

On the other side, Sir, they have carried out some amendments to the Scheme. Workers who could claim after four weeks, after the amendments they had to wait for 13 weeks and because of the machinations of what I heard used in here today in some form or another in some respects, the employers were able to make sure to so manipulate things that those workers who would have been laid off under the legislation as we then introduced it, were probably never laid off or were laid off some time subsequently after their legislation. Many persons who could have benefited did not get benefits.

I assume that the amendments were made by them to maintain the integrity of the Fund. I am not assuming that here, Sir. I am stating positively that the legislation that we are introducing today is intended to make sure that the Fund does not completely die off. We want to make sure that there is something in the resources in the Fund that will be of benefit to those persons who not only got laid off now but who got laid off subsequently.

Let me also make this point, Sir. This legislation that we are asked to pass here today in no way affects those persons who have been laid off up to this point. It cannot. There must be a distinction made between those persons who are not an excluded class and those persons who are an excluded class. I hope you understand it clearly. Having used those terms I want to state here now, Sir, that in my negotiations with the Coalition of Trade Unions and Staff Associations, I have reaffirmed and Government has concurred in that position that the Government will pay those Government workers who have been laid off up until now whether they were eligible under the Severance Payments laws or not. The government intends to compensate them as if Government had been a private employer.

Aside.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: You have to respond to that, Mr. Prime Minister. It is being said that you do not have to change the Letter of Intent in order to do that. That is a problem for the Minister of Finance but that is what the Government intends to do.

Aside.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Yes. As represented by me and concurred in the Cabinet.

Aside.

Mr. SPEAKER: No shouting.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: I do not know, Sir, if I should answer a question as to the years agreed that Government should compensate the workers.

Mr. SPEAKER: That is only an aside anyhow.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Quite honestly, Sir, I do not think it deserves any response.

Mr. SPEAKER: It is not part of the record.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: That could be nothing more than a rhetorical question. Let me go back to something I said earlier. We are making some modifications to the legislation in the terms in which the National Insurance Board has approved supported by a letter from the Barbados Workers' Union since 1988 so there is no problem. I can read the notes I have here. It is addressed to the Cabinet Secretary who is the Permanent Secretary for the National Insurance. It says:-

"Dear Sir:

REVIEW OF THE SEVERANCE PAYMENTS SCHEME AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT SCHEME

This is further to your letters of March 25, 1988, No. 510/3 and May 9, 1988, No. 510/3 and ours of April 22, 1988.

I am directed by the Executive Council of the Barbados Workers' Union to inform you that the Council endorses the recommendations of the National Insurance Board submitted under cover of letter dated 25th March, 1988.

The Council is of the view that the measures recommended will go a long way towards preserving the integrity and the viability of the two Schemes while at the same time protecting the rights and providing a cushion of support to those who are unfortunate to suffer loss of employment through factors over which they have no control.

Yours faithfully,

Frank L. Walcott
General Secretary"

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: On a point of order, Sir. I am asking that the Minister make that a document of the House. When we read from files over here we make them documents of the House.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, this is something novel. In all my years of experience in the House, which is greater than yours, I have never yet heard that a file is to be made a document of the House.

Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS: Is this the letter. I never said the file.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Under the Rules of the Chamber it is quite permissible for me to read from my files or any other Government Member who has files.

Mr. SPEAKER: I do not have any problem with that.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: I can understand that, Sir. I said earlier and in reference to the Severance Payments Scheme that the resources of that Scheme were depleted. 9.35 p.m.

I now turn, Sir, to the Unemployment Benefit Scheme. There was an increase in 1985 in the rate of benefit payable and it was at that time, Sir, that that increase was put at 60%. Also there was a decrease in the

rate of contribution in 1986. At the same time, Sir, there was a decrease in the rate of contribution. That led to a reduction – the combined effect of those two measures led to a reduction – of the reserves of the Fund in one year, in 1986 from \$41 million to \$35.5 million at the end of 1986.

Also let me say this, Sir, because I heard it last night on a call-in programme. There was a young man on that programme and I heard him refer to the Fund as though it had a reserve of \$25 million which I think is the case. But what the same man did not say is that every succeeding year from 1985 there were more benefits paid out under the scheme than contributions coming into the scheme which means that the resources of the Unemployment Scheme are being run down. If we do not take steps now to make sure that the reserves of that Fund like the Severance Payments Fund does not run down and run out we have to make some modifications to that scheme and that is precisely what we are doing here on this particular occasion.

Before I take my seat let me say here, Sir, that there have been discussions with the Coalition. The Government's position is a modification of what I had said previously which had been a 60%/40%; 60% for ten weeks and 40% for 16 weeks which is what we are being asked to do here today.

What we have decided that we will do is that we will compensate the beneficiaries of the scheme as required by law for those who have been severed before the 30th September. In other words, Sir, that for the full 26 weeks of unemployment they will get their 60%. The law after that is 40%. That is the law after that. But despite that the Government has agreed that it would compensate those persons severed after the 30th September not at the 40% as the law states now but at 60% for the first 10 weeks and 40% for the succeeding 16 weeks. That is Government's position as it stands today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that we are acting in this regard in the best interest of the whole of Barbados. I have no difficulty in supporting this measure, Sir.

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member for St. Michael North gave a speech in which his loyalty to the Democratic Labour Party, if ever it was questioned in the past could certainly never be questioned again.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: On a point of order, Sir. The Honourable Member misunderstood my speech. My speech had nothing to do with any loyalty to the Democratic Labour Party. That was not my speech. He misunderstood me.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Are you on a point of order or....

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: I am explaining my speech, Sir. I am entitled to explain my speech.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER: Just one moment. I believe...

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: I am on a point of elucidation.

Mr. SPEAKER: Elucidation?

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: As I said, I am explaining my speech. It is clear to me that the Honourable Member has misunderstood my speech. He is saying that what I have said is a demonstration of my loyalty to the Democratic Labour Party. If that is what he interprets my speech to be then he misunderstands my speech. That was not my speech at all. My speech was not about any demonstration of loyalty. My speech was about loyalty to sound common sense.

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member was very careful now to say that a speech based on common sense is a speech that cannot be a speech based on loyalty to the Democratic Labour Party. I do not understand that logic either.

The Right Honourable Prime Minister was very careful in his presentation to avoid delving into some of the areas that the Member for St. Michael North has delved into.

The basic point about this debate has already in many respects been made by my colleague the Member for St. Thomas that what we are here having to deal with is an amendment to the Severance Payments Act which really arises out of Government's commitments to the International Monetary Fund as stated in its Letter of Intent dated the 25th October, 1991. That is what this House is doing. This House is, by way of legislation and by way of amendment to the Severance Payments Act trying to give effect precisely to paragraph 18 of commitments entered into by the Government of Barbados and signed by the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank. Paragraph 18 says very specifically that it is Government's intention to change the arrangement for the payment of severance to put in place a sliding scale and to change the basic definition of pay against which severance is calculated. That is all this is doing, Sir.

But the problem with the matter is that the Government would at one and the same time have us believe that it can accommodate the concerns of the unions raised in relation to the changes as proposed in the Letter of Intent, while at the same time have us believe that it can honour the commitments that were given in the Letter of

Intent itself. We are saying, Mr. Speaker, that if the Government is in fact – as we are now being told – intending to modify the commitments given in the Letter of Intent, there is no need for this legislation before the House. Because this legislation before the House, Mr. Speaker, is exactly as set out in Government's commitment in the Letter of Intent. Paragraph 18 says that very clearly.

But what is most interesting is that the Honourable Member for St. Michael North has just told the House that it is also Government's intention to pay all of those persons who were laid off from the public sector severance as if in fact they were persons employed in the private sector. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that that would be a wonderful thing, except that it would mean that in order for Government to do that, Government would have to change all of the targets and all of the tables that it has agreed to in this Letter of Intent signed by the Minister of Finance on the 25th October. This Letter of Intent at paragraphs 8 and 9 commits Government precisely to certain expenditure targets. Government's borrowing requirements are set as part of Table 1 of the Letter of Intent, then Government's deficit as part of Table 2 of the Letter of Intent, flowing from which, Sir, are quarterly ceilings on the Central Bank's net domestic assets as set at Table 3, Sir, so that the Government can't just say that it is going to pay the workers without taking the whole Letter of Intent and the entire document. I am asking the Minister of Finance, Sir, if flowing from the statement that has issued from the lips of the Member for St. Michael North whether in point of fact Government is not only just modifying that part of the IMF Programme dealing with severance but whether it is not therefore the case that Government is modifying the entire thing and what are the implications, Sir, of the Government having entered an arrangement with the IMF on October 25 and immediately after changing the entire thing, consequential upon a change proposed to the severance payments. That is the point which the Member for St. Michael North seems not to understand.

9.45 p.m.

I will put it as simple as this, Sir. The Government, Sir, has in fact severed people, some with 22 years service. Under the arrangement that existed before the Member for St. Michael North spoke, Government would have paid those persons one month for the 22 years. What the Minister is saying now, is that the Government is going to pay those persons some serving for 22 years, 22 months pay.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Government had 22 months pay to pay a worker it would make better sense for Government to employ a person for the 18 months of the IMF Programme and save money. It would clearly have to be beneficial to the Government to do that, Sir.

I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Minister comes lightly here and tells us that the Government is just

going to change this thing, Sir, but it has implications far beyond what the Minister is trying to tell the House. What is fundamental to this, Sir, is that the Government wants to hunt with the hounds and run with the hares. That it wants at one and the same time to cause the Trade Unions to believe that something is afoot to take a lot of sting out of the Trade Union's protest against the Government while at the same time it wants to satisfy the International Monetary Fund about its intents. It cannot, Sir, satisfy both.

I am saying, Sir, it cannot satisfy both and the Minister of Finance has now, a responsibility to tell us if we are to believe the Deputy Prime Minister. It has a responsibility whether he is withdrawing the entire Letter and will be re-negotiating the entire Programme in light of the consequence of the change of accepting a higher level of Government expenditure resulting from your obligation to pay those persons who have been severed. Or, if you are not going to renegotiate the entire Programme, tell us what changes in other areas of public expenditure you are going to make to accommodate the increased amounts that now have to be spent on the severance of public workers.

If, Sir, the payment of workers in the Public Service severance at the rate such as obtained in the past, Sir, is to be accommodated in the Programme under the existing limits then it would mean that Government would have to cut some other part of Government expenditure in some other area in order for that severance, Sir, to be accommodated within the contents of the Programme. So that the Government cannot pull any wool over anybody's eyes on this matter, Mr. Speaker.

This business about severance is fundamental to the Programme. I believe, Sir, that the Government really has played fast and loose with this particular matter. In fact I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that it is my judgement that the manner in which this matter has been gone about has really done nothing more than make Barbados look like the laughing stock in the eyes of the International Community, because in the very week that this Government had entered into an undertaking with an international institution, even before the Prime Minister's signature has dried on the document, the Prime Minister has been purported through his Deputy, not himself directly, but through his Deputy has purported to undertake negotiations with another party to bring about changes that could fundamentally affect the nature of the undertakings that have been entered into with international institutions.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have a little problem. This is the one problem I have. I know what the Bill is before me, but to what extent should we go into the debate of the Letter of Intent?

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is the bottom line, Sir, that if these amendments

before the House, in relation to the severance payments, Sir, are as stated at paragraphs 18 and 19 of Government's Letter of Intent to the International Monetary Fund ... This is a document of the House, Sir. At paragraphs 18 and 19, Sir, Government told the International Monetary Fund it is our intention to amend the Severance Payments...

Mr. SPEAKER: I understand that. What I am saying is that I hope that we are not developing a debate on the Letter of Intent itself.

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: Of course not. All I am saying, Sir, is if it is the Government's intention, as it says, to modify the undertaking it has given the International Monetary Fund then there is no need for the legislation which is before the House, and that the Government is putting this House to unnecessary travail in so far as it does not intend, so it would have us believe, to follow through with what it is saying in these amendments that are before the House, Sir. But we cannot have it both ways, Sir. The Government cannot tell the public, merely for the purpose of trying to ease public pressure off the Government that it proposes to amend these regulations but however, Sir, has it before this House today putting it into effect.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this whole matter goes back to 1988. In 1988 we had a debate in this House and coming out of that debate the Honourable Minister of Finance went on television the weekend immediately following, after a retreat by the Democratic Labour Party at Heywoods and brought to the Public's attention the fact that the Severance Payments Fund was in serious trouble and that the Government intended shortly, was the words he used, to take action to deal with the problem.

Indeed, Sir, as far back as August 1988 the Government had access to seek actuarial review of the National Insurance Scheme. Indeed, Sir, it was recommended that amendments to the benefits and financing bases are urgently required. This document, Sir, is already a document of the House. This was laid in the House by Government.

In 1988 it was brought to the Government's attention that amendments to the benefits of financing bases are urgently required, and the Minister of Finance went on public television and said that recognising that a serious situation confronted the Severance Payment Scheme that it was his intention to shortly rectify the problem.

Now, I am saying, Sir, that part of the draconian measures that are now being taken is precisely related to the fact that the bankruptcy of which the Member for St. Michael North speaks, Sir, the bankruptcy of the Severance Payment Scheme has set in precisely on account of the unwillingness of the Government of this country to govern.

That the Minister of Finance has an attitude that everything is to be guided by the precept that the Democratic Labour Party should never commit political suicide. And even though he has before him an actuarial review saying that urgent action is taken to the extent that in his judgement the measures might have been unpopular and he refused to deal with it. He let a situation that was bad then deteriorate to the point where we are now hearing about bankruptcy affecting the Severance Scheme, Sir.

So that when the Honourable Member for St. Michael North tells us about the national interest and how he can see a serious purpose in what the Government is doing, we must on this side tell him that he is speaking out of a sense of exaggerated loyalty to the Democratic Labour Party. That Mr. Speaker, is one of the fundamental reasons why the Severance Payments Fund is in the kind of dire straits that it is in today is precisely because the Minister of Finance refused between 1989 and 1991 to do anything that would in any respect by any iota cause the Democratic Labour Party, as he said, Sir, to commit political suicide. And now Sir, that the situation has got completely out of hand he is asking Members on all sides to suddenly begin to see the national interest.

I am saying that the Democratic Labour Party has in this matter as it is refusing to do in other respects, it has in this matter, to accept responsibility for having brought this situation to a stage where a Government can be talking about bankruptcy in circumstances where three years ago it was being told that urgent action is required and the Minister himself was agreeing that the action be taken shortly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point has been very well made that Government was advised that in relation to this particular matter it should not adopt a one policy approach that it should have had a package of measures brought to bear so that distress caused on one account could be offset by remedial action in another. And one of the charges that this Opposition, Sir, is levelling against the Government is that the circumstances have become so dire that in point of fact the Government now cannot even begin to contemplate of how it could give effect to those measures that would take the sting out of the things that are necessary in order to bring some relief and some rectification to this Scheme, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really want to say this: that we have to be serious about the preservation of the Severance Payment Scheme as well as all of the various schemes in the country that are designed to protect the interest of workers when the interest of workers are compromised either by unemployment, layoffs, or other forms of dismissals. Mr. Speaker, it is my judgment that the national interest of Barbados requires those modifications.
9.55 p.m.

Aside.

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: Mr. Speaker, I am really belabouring under some difficult circumstances.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have been trying my best all of the time. Surely, the Honourable Member will give you an opportunity to speak. Continue.

Mr. O. S. ARTHUR: Mr. Speaker, I want to see the national interest on this matter. But the Government must agree that it must govern. Our Prime Minister, Sir, if I may say so, falls short in that fundamental respect that, where tough decisions in the national interest are called for it appears to me that even if in the long run the results can speak favourably for him, Sir, and be beneficial for one and all to see, he wants to walk away from it. This is another clear instance, Mr. Speaker, where the bullet has to be bitten. Somebody has to bite it. The Government has been appointed, Sir, to govern and to lead and the Government is not prepared to govern.

The Minister of Finance, Sir, has not given in his introduction of this matter any rationale that will satisfy us, Sir, that the measures which he is taking and asking this House to take will put the Fund back into some form of viability. He has not yet given that assurance and perhaps the question that I need to ask him at the end of the day is what is in all of this for the workers of Barbados? Can he, given the assurance, Sir, that if he asked the workers of Barbados through these series of amendments to make a sacrifice in terms of accepting a lower settlement in severance that the viability of the Severance Payments Scheme can be assured and within a particular time period? Is the Minister in a position to tell us that? Is it not true that the alternative is the case that far from these measures ensuring the viability of the Severance Payments Scheme that there are additional measures that will come, which in all frankness the Minister should tell us about? The Government has to govern and, if the Government knows that there is a problem at hand and this measure will not suffice and that additional measures are also necessary, I believe that the Government has an obligation and it will make better sense as well if we are to restore order to this country for the Minister to level for once with the country and say: "These are the facts. This is what we must do. We must do this for this reason and I am asking for your support on this measure."

We cannot in any measure, Sir, have that kind of output from this Prime Minister and it disappoints me. I believe that fundamentally the people of Barbados do not want to see this country collapse. We on this side, Sir, have no interest or desire to see Barbados collapse either. We believe in the viability of a Severance Payments Scheme, but we cannot in all conscience identify with the way in which the Minister is dealing with these matters. He wants

to find some way of shielding himself from the responsibility that goes with decision-making. We are seeing it, Mr. Speaker, in his speeches where he will accept the credit for the good years when he was in charge and then in the bad years, Sir, it is somebody else's fault. It has to stop, Sir. It has to stop, Sir, in a matter like the severance which is fundamental to the welfare of so many people in Barbados. Mr. Prime Minister, tell us all that is involved. That is all we are asking you to do. Tell us all that is involved. Let it all hang out. Do not cause us to believe that you can have a Letter of Intent agreed to with the IMF saying one thing and then the next week you are negotiating with the unions to do something else. That is why I started my contribution in this form because what I am hearing from the Honourable Member for St. Michael North does not square with my reading of the Letter of Intent. It does not square, Sir. So that I want to see the national interest, Sir. But I must say to this House that the Prime Minister does not show me that national interest. 10.05 p.m.

He is not showing me that national interest, Sir, and the only basis on which I could possibly vote for this measure is if the national interest is explained to me. He has not given me nor any other Member of this House a basis on which to vote for this measure and I am asking him in winding up to do what he should have done in the introduction; to come to us as big people and level. Difficult decisions have to be taken but government is not a popularity or beauty contest. You have to stand up and govern this country and you are not governing and I am satisfied, Sir, that the nature of the Prime Minister's contribution today has been sadly lacking. We got more in my judgement – and I am not trying to divide and rule in the Democratic Labour Party. I am not interested in that foolishness – but we got more from the Deputy Prime Minister of this country in relation to the rationale and purpose than from the Prime Minister. It is part of the tragedy of Barbados' economic circumstances that not only the policy measures themselves but the way in which they are couched and put in context is as much the problem as the measures themselves.

I speak, Sir, with anger. I am angry at the way – almost the contemptuous way – in which the Prime Minister in this matter has treated this House and in all his other dealings has treated this country on measures that can so fundamentally affect the welfare of so many people for many years to come. In this matter, Sir, I believe he has the opportunity to do what he has not done in the four or five speeches that have occupied so much of the public's time; to let us know the real facts; decide to govern and in governing recognise that there are times when you are going to be unpopular but if you have to do something in the national interest, it has to be done.

I believe, Sir, and I want to make that point very clear that the numbers in relation to the Severance Fund do

in fact show that there is a fundamental problem with the Severance Payments Fund, and to that extent it has to be changed. We are all reasonable people, Sir, and we would therefore recognise that the interest of Barbados requires that if it has to be changed, it has to be changed, but the basis on which this House is to exercise that judgment has not been secured for it by the Minister of Finance. I am urging him to be candid with this House and to treat us with the respect that those of us who in this day and age should have been called upon to run a country's affairs demand that he should treat us.

I am obliged to you, Sir.

Hon. H. B. ST. JOHN: I will have to join the debate, Sir, because my name has been bandied about in this manner by a number of Honourable Members from the other side and as usual they have sought to misrepresent totally the position that I have taken on matters of this nature. The Barbados Labour Party is not, was not, never will be, a political party that is afraid to make up its mind on difficult matters, nor is it a political party that will seek to exploit for the maximum political advantage situation as has been done in this case.

All of the political benefit was extracted by the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in this matter. It is only now when the country's back is to the wall that action is being taken to deal with this matter. That's a fact. I have been in debates in here on more than one occasion in which the Severance Payments Fund came up for discussion and it has been pointed out repeatedly that there were defects. The Honourable Member for St. Michael North knows this because he on more than one occasion has had to accept that the original conception of the Fund was defective at least to the extent that it made provision for the payment of severance upon a wage scale the average of the last 104 weeks when the contributions were not based upon that level of income. We saw that and in 1984 an order was made to deal with the level of contributions and the level of benefits bringing some rationality to the scheme by saying if you contribute upon the basis of a portion of your income so too when it came to the distribution of benefits it should be to that portion of the income and not the portion of the income that is represented by our last 104 weeks of payment.

Now, Sir, on this question of the integration of the two schemes I was at pains, and this side was at pains, to point out over the political protests, and at that time like now, every effort was made to extract the maximum political benefit out of the legislation that was introduced dealing with the change in the Laws related to deemed severance. Many Honourable Members forget that in 1972 or 1973 when the Severance Payments Act came into operation there was no unemployment benefit. So that the concept of deemed severance which was enshrined in the

Severance Payments Act at that time as arising from a lay-off for a particular period of time could possibly be deemed to be reasonable and was deemed to be reasonable because there was no alternate fund available to workers to cushion the impact of a long lay-off period or a short lay-off period.

Now, Sir, I heard it said in here that because you are not allowed to lay off people since 1984 for 13 weeks in a 26-week period that it has been exploited. I heard the Honourable Member for St. Michael East Central say it. He completely and absolutely forgets that at the time when the legislation was introduced and at the time when Sir Frank Walcott and the Honourable Member for St. Michael Central came to the Prime Minister's Office that it was explained that the Government had put in provisions in the Act which would act as a deterrent to that occurring by employers because having laid them off for 13 weeks in a 26-week period when they were brought back on they had to be brought on for a 26-week period otherwise they would have the same benefits as they had previously when they were laid off and they could call for severance. Why would somebody forget that? Why do they consistently misrepresent the position that after you have laid off a person for 13 weeks in a 26-week period that once you take them back on that you have to employ them for a minimum of 26 weeks. If you don't take them back on you are still deemed to be severed, so therefore no benefits are lost in respect to the Severance Payments Fund. That was the Cabinet decision and if you look at the Cabinet papers you will see. If that was the Cabinet decision the legislation and the regulations were made with that. If the regulations were not made with that in your time, you should have decided in your mind that you are going to bring the regulations up to what was the decision.

The second point, Sir, was that at the meeting that we had with the union it was all agreed that as a matter of urgency that we would ask the ILO to send an expert. We were quite willing to appoint other experts in the same manner. We said, "Let us have a local committee". "No", Sir Frank Walcott said, he wanted somebody from the ILO. We said that if you have confidence in the ILO we will let the ILO nominate the persons and we got the UNDP to name them. That was the Pelikanos Report.

Look at the period of time! It is the political opportunism that has taken place in this case that has caused the whole of this debate to be coloured the way how it is done. It is the sheer, naked, political opportunism, because you sought to exploit to the hilt the political advantage that you thought you would have gotten by criticising the Government for integrating the two schemes and you had the opportunity then. That's what happens in things like these. These fundamental matters are treated as mere political matters that you can exploit all the time and that kind of political conduct will always be condemned.

We will go on record as not associating ourselves with it. We are perfectly prepared to accept the consequences of it.

Therefore, when you talk about the debate in this manner you must look at it in that context. If you treat a matter which is a national matter as a partisan political buzzer you must expect to get partisan political treatment of that matter. That is what has happened in these matters.

Now, Sir, it is obvious that a complete *volte face* has taken place on the other side in relation to this.
10.15 p.m.

I heard on more than one occasion in this House and on the television the Honourable Prime Minister say that with respect to the payment of severance pay to Government workers that it was an impossible situation that could never occur. Well, we know now that those words at the time when they were uttered were not the true position. As I understand it from the Honourable Member for St. Michael North in here today that all of those people who were public employees and who have received the most discourteous letter in unsympathetic and almost inhuman language...

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: On a point of order, Sir. The Honourable Member for Christ Church South is putting words into my mouth that I have never used. I have never used the words he has indicated that I was using. I have always said that if any changes are introduced into the Scheme that they would be very costly. I have never said that it could not be done.

Hon. H. B. St. JOHN: I heard the Honourable Prime Minister used words which to me, who has an ordinary reasonable understanding of the English Language, indicated very clearly that in the context of the Letter of Intent to the IMF in the context of Barbados' financial position that it was impossible for him to give the concession of paying severance along the lines of the Cabinet decision of 1972. I heard that on more than one occasion and I stand by that. The Honourable Member can object and say that I am putting words in his mouth but he cannot object to the impression that I have formed from the words that he used. That is the position. That is what the public out there understood. That is what the Coalition understood. That is what everybody out there understood. What has happened is that you backed back under the pressure that has been put. Do not run away from that. That is a fact. Some of the pressure came from this side, some came from outside and some came from your own side. That is a positive fact.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: I rose to object to the words that were used. It is clear that the Member is accepting the object that I made because what he came back and said was something different, that it was entirely an impression that he got.

Hon. H. B. St. JOHN: I am not particularly worrying about that. Everybody knows that the Prime Minister is a ditherer when it comes to decision-making. Everybody knows that he backs back when he gets pressure and he backed back on this occasion. That is playing true to form. What are you worrying about? There is no difficulty in that. I want to put the record exceedingly straight because I have been accused in here of being the author of this...

Mr. SPEAKER: I just want to be clear. What was the objection you were making? The words backed back?

Aside.

Mr. SPEAKER: I remember some years ago, I think it was Lloyd Smith who used to use that word so I thought it was a parliamentary word itself.

Hon. H. B. St. JOHN: I agree, Sir, the objection was so unfounded in accordance to the Rules that Your Honour had a little difficulty in recognising it.

The position is, Sir, as many Honourable Members on this side have pointed out, that one must look at this now in its political context. I have mentioned some of the political aspects of this. I also have to mention the fact that the Honourable Member for St. Michael North ought to be well familiar with the assumptions and the problems associated with the Severance Payments Scheme because if my memory serves me correct, it was he who had to introduce at an early stage in the Severance Payments Scheme a resolution in here asking for a loan either from the Treasury or the National Insurance Fund long before the Unemployment Scheme.

The Severance Payment Scheme from an early date had a history of difficulty. As a matter of fact, the amount of reimbursement that employers got when the Scheme first started was 50%. Then because of the experience of the factual operations of the fund that had to be reduced to 10%. I remember that all of this was discussed in the context of meetings between the Union and the Minister of Finance at that time when I was Minister of Finance. We pointed out that while we were doing one thing we were also trying to ensure that we were bringing equity to the two Schemes.

Aside.

Hon. H. B. St. JOHN: Yes. I know that but we increased it to 25% when we increased the obligation. The question of periodic review is not in dispute. I must go back to see because that document that was so patently clear, the Actuarial Report showed that something had to be done.

I want to deal with something else because there is a young man who periodically talks on call-in programmes who seems to think that he alone has a memory in relation to this National Insurance Scheme. In 1985 when the question of the change in the unemployment benefits came up it was said that no actuarial report or views were sought. At that date a Mr. H. Perez Montales was actually in Barbados. His views were sought because, as a layman, I could not understand how you could have an unemployment insurance scheme and you had a situation where you were building up reserves at a fast rate. There were two questions that came to my mind. One was, whether there was a given level of reserves that were regarded as optimum and secondly, whether we, in fact, have reached that level of reserves in Barbados. 10.25 p.m.

On both points it was understood that there was such a concept as an optimum reserve and secondly that our reserves in the unemployment scheme at that time had surpassed what was regarded as the optimum level. And therefore the scheme could have borne the increased benefits. I took the view at that time that an unemployment insurance scheme as introduced in Barbados was not charity by any Government because it was a contributory scheme by both employer and employee and it was a social security scheme that was self supporting and that both parties had contributed to it and therefore the Government should not seek to rake off any especial benefit out of it. That is the position. The Unemployment Scheme is a fundamentally different scheme from the Severance Payments Scheme because the Severance Payments Scheme has no element of neutral insurance whereas the Unemployment Scheme has that. And that is our quarrel with this. It is true that we are not technically dealing with the unemployment reduction of benefits here. But the point is that when we are dealing with the severance pay it cannot be dealt with in isolation from these other matters because they are two separate and distinct schemes.

I want to get the record straight that the views of Mr. Perez Montales and I believe he is the same actuary that has been doing the actuarial report on the Severance Payments Scheme in Barbados certainly over a number of cycles and I believe that he is the author of the 1988 Report. The OAS usually pays for him.

Aside.

Hon. H. B. St. JOHN: You check that out for me. We have to get that straight. I am not surprised that the young man is not given to speaking the truth. He will not learn better from his associates. He will not be corrected by his associates. He is only acting in accordance with how his associates act consistently.

There is an obvious connection between this matter as the Honourable Member for St. Peter has said and the

Letter of Intent. I want it to be clearly understood that until we approach these matters in the context of a non-partisan approach that political kudos, if it is sought to be derived from inaction when action is taken that the political brick-bats must be accepted too.

I am obliged to you, Sir.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Mr. Speaker, I rise to reply to this debate and I will do it as briefly as I can. But let me, at the outset, say that I have never in a debate in this Honourable Chamber seen Members of the Opposition so opportunistically seeking to square what they know is the right action being taken with the political convenience of trying to oppose the measure.

It has been highlighted particularly by the speech of the Member for St. Joseph who I believe was very typical. He recognizes the need for change in the particular scheme and he indicated why the changes should be introduced but did it in such an indirect way as though he was merely mentioning these things that he had heard about. Note how it was put, Sir, some people have said that this should be the case and others have said and a further group have indicated, and all along he is giving the arguments and the reasons for the changes. Then he leaves the realm of reference and as though he were before some court, turns to playing upon the motions and feelings of those who may be called upon to make the decisions. So he leaves the realm of argument and goes into the realm of playing upon the emotions. Those are the tactics of the rhetorician, Sir. Those are the tactics that we find in these matters. That has been the general tenor because everyone recognizes including the Member for Christ Church South that there are changes to be made or which should be made and he himself admitted that those changes are required from time to time to the Schemes. And yet when it comes down to the actual precise changes that are to be made, when the House is called upon to come to a decision on the changes which everyone recognizes should be made all kinds of subsidiary reasons are found not to support the measure that is before us.

That again is and has been the position of the Member for St. Peter. In his heart of heart he recognizes that the changes are required but then there are all kinds of subsidiary points put forward why support cannot be given to them. Sir, if that is not opportunism, I wonder what is. They can say everything about me. My shoulders are broad and the water will run off if they use water, Sir, whatever they use, Sir.

I will certainly take the steps that need to be taken. This is what governance is about. We have come here with a specific proposal arising out of decisions that have been taken before any discussions with the International

Monetary Fund. I had indicated that these steps had to be taken. And now they are saying they are going to oppose it because, according to them, there is some delay. The delay...

Aside.

Mr. SPEAKER: Just one minute. I am sure the Honourable Member understands my position on the matter.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Sir, this is the first occasion on which I am being made to understand because something was not done in one month or one year or three years that that is a reason for voting against it when the reasons for the change are patently there.

I set out the situation in respect of the Scheme. I demonstrated that there were more commitments against the Scheme than there were resources in the Scheme. I can give the additional information to underline that once again. But they all recognized that when I was speaking, Sir. The Member for St. Peter was asking what about the \$10 million that was loaned from the Consolidated Fund to the Scheme. Recognizing that the Scheme was in difficulty we have come with a proposal to modify the benefits under the scheme ...because the scheme has to be modified in the interest, as the Member for St. Michael North, quite correctly, said, of preserving the Scheme and seeking to put that Scheme back on to a more viable basis. That is what we are here to do, Sir. And that is the step that this House is being called upon to take. I am not going to allow any kind of criticism, suggestion, or innuendo coming from the Opposition to prevent us from taking the steps that have to be taken.

10.35 p.m.

Now a number queries have been raised during this debate. I recall, Sir, that it was asked what were the three changes to be made to the Scheme. A modification is being made. There are three areas of modification to be made. One relates to the payment of severance for public officers and that is part of the programme with the International Monetary Fund. It isn't this particular aspect that we are talking about. This is the implementation of proposals that were agreed upon by the National Insurance Board and incorporated into the programme with the International Monetary Fund. The three changes that were referred to related to severance in respect of public officers, the second area related to a change in the unemployment benefits and the third area related to the retention of concessions for the manufacturers for a longer period, up to the end of December and from the 1st of January, reduction by some 50 percent. Those are the three areas of changes.

It is obvious Mr. Speaker –

- (a) that these particular changes have to be funded, and
- (b) we have to make modifications in the programme in discussion with the International Monetary Fund.

There is no point trying to be as intense and trying to make one believe that this cannot be done or that cannot be done without changing the entire programme. We are attempting to do that just as we have attempted to get a programme that is a very special programme which we have been able to negotiate with the Fund staff. That is what we are putting forward and what we are going through with but we are proposing to make certain modifications and we are in discussion with the Fund on those three issues.

Now, Sir, there was a question raised about the definition of basic pay and the point about basic pay is that we are making this particular amending piece of legislation seek to make basic pay as far as the definition is concerned conform with the definition under the National Insurance legislation.

The difference is that under the Severance Payment legislation as I understand it and as I am advised there are certain allowances which are included in the total emoluments for purposes of calculating the severance benefit. But no contributions, – contributions are not calculated, and no contributions are paid in respect of those allowances and therefore we cannot have a viable scheme by including those allowances when there are no contributions being made to fund the higher thing. That at least is the rationale for the approach.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: I think the Honourable Member is mistaken. What the change is seeking to achieve is to tie the definition of basic pay to the maximum contribution that a person severed may be paying. The point we were making in the debate is that under basic pay at the moment the amount of severance you get includes your normal earnings, your overtime, your allowances, the benefits that accrue including a productivity and incentive allowance.

We are saying that if you are having a national wages policy which would encourage higher productivity there is no reason why you should penalise basic pay. It has never been the position that basic pay is merely tied to the amount you are paying your contribution on. It has always been tied to your total wages.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Mr. Speaker, I am giving the explanations because I am looking at the viability of the scheme and if there is a proposal that the contribution should be higher to take into account these other allowances, maybe that is a possibility, I don't know.

That is something that would have to be discussed but I am simply explaining. A question was asked about basic pay and I am explaining that particular area as I understand it.

Sir, it is very difficult to find anything else to reply to in this particular debate. There was a lot of emotional phrases being used about anti-worker and all of that. That is the rhetoric. I think, Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Peter has a long-standing problem with someone, I am not sure with whom, but he is not going to draw me into that on the Floor of the House. I will not deal with the Member for St. George South ...

Certain remarks made by the Honourable Member for St. Thomas were ordered to be expunged from the record by Mr. SPEAKER.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Sir, we have heard of Thales. We have heard of Cicero, I believe, if we had listened a little longer we might have heard about Democritus and Athens and things like that and we could have gone through and probably heard of Diogenes and things like that. I think, Sir, there is an understanding between myself and the Chairman of that outfit. I think we share certain things in common but let us leave that for another occasion.

10.45 p.m.

Sir, before I sit down, let me refer once again to this question of basic pay and indicate that under the National Insurance and Social Security (Collection of Contributions) Regulations, the Bill itself that we are looking at, makes reference to these. The item that should be included for the purposes of determining the *earning* of an insured person of gross wages and other remuneration received in cash and in kind by the insured person including:

- (a) overtime payments;
- (b) cost of living bonus;
- (c) family allowances;
- (d) supplements or rewards for long service, industry, or efficiency;
- (e) commission on sales or profit on sales;
- (f) gratuities paid out by the employer;
- (g) danger or dirt money;
- (h) payments on account of night or shift work;
- (i) production bonuses;
- (j) payments in kind;

(k) arrears of salary;

- (l) holiday pay, an amount set aside out of the insured person's remuneration throughout the year or part of the year to be paid out to the insured person periodically.

Sir, we take these particular matters into account. I believe, Sir, that when we really examine the matter that there is a clear need for the amending Bill that is before us and we are proposing, Sir, and asking this Honourable Chamber to approve this amending legislation. Therefore, once again I beg to move that this Bill be now read a second time.

The question that the Bill be read a second time was put and resolved in the affirmative, the House dividing as follows:

Ayes: Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD, Hon. P. M. GREAVES, Hon. B. M. TAITT, Hon. M. A. KING, Hon. E. E. GREAVES, Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN, Hon. W. W. HALL, Hon. C. V. WALKER, Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON, Mr. L. L. BRATHWAITE, and His Hon. T. C. ESTWICK – 11.

Noes: Mr. H. deB. FORDE, Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS, Mr. O. S. ARTHUR, Hon. H. B. St. JOHN, Mr. L. R. TULL, Miss B. A. MILLER, Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW, Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM, Mr. G. W. PAYNE, and Mr. R. C. EASTMOND – 10.

On the motion of Hon. P. M. GREAVES, seconded by Hon. B. M. TAITT, Mr. SPEAKER left the Chair and the House went into Committee on the Bill, Mr. L. L. BRATHWAITE in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The House is in Committee.

Clause 1 was called and passed.

Clause 2 was called.

Mr. H. deB. FORDE: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I want again to revert again in Committee to the issue and once and for all to get absolutely clear what is the intent of this legislation. I said that the overall effect of the amendment of the definition of basic pay is to limit the amount on which the severance payment is finally calculated by a quantum amount as well. When you look at the National Insurance and Social Security (Collection of Contributions) Regulations, Section 14 under Part 2, it allows you to look at the wages received for a series of things. It allows you to look at the wages received for a series of things but when you calculate it subject to the schedule to these

Regulations they are limited to a certain percentage in which the minimum earnings on which contributions are payable are \$5 per week and the maximum on which contribution is payable is \$5.98 per week. That's changed now, I think. \$2 600 has been changed to \$3 100 so that a worker can now only get a calculation based on the maximum of \$3 100. The point is that one must get it clear. The Government must not come in here and give anybody the impression that they are widening anything. Let us get it absolutely clear. The Government is reducing the benefits that people got on existing legislation. When I consider this, Sir, it is clear as a pikestaff what the Government is doing. When I intervened and spoke on the matter in the debate there was no explanation from the Government's side. The Government is taking workers' benefits and it must not hide behind any set of words.
10.55 p.m.

DIVISION

The question that Clause 2 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative the House dividing as follows:-

Ayes: Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD, Hon. P. M. GREAVES, Hon. B. M. TAITT, Hon. M. A. KING, Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN, Hon. E. E. GREAVES, Hon. W. O. FRANKLIN, Hon. W. W. HALL, Hon. C. V. WALKER, Hon. D. J. H. THOMPSON, His Honour T. C. ESTWICK and Mr. L. L. BRATHWAITE - 12.

Noes: Hon. H. B. St. JOHN, Mr. H. deB. FORDE, Mr. D. A. C. SIMMONS, Mr. O. S. ARTHUR, Mr. L. R. TULL, Mr. DeL. O. BRADSHAW, Mr. G. W. PAYNE, Mr. R. C. EASTMOND, Dr. R. L. CHELTENHAM and Miss B. A. MILLER - 10.

Clause 3 was called.

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD: Mr. Chairman, I move that Clause 3 stand part.

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question was put and agreed in the affirmative without division.

On motion of Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD seconded by Hon. P. M. GREAVES, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported the passing of the Bill in Committee and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On separate motions of Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD seconded by Hon. P. M. GREAVES the Bill was read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. P. M. GREAVES: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn. Before the adjournment, Sir, I want to thank all those members of staff and reporting staff and constabulary and all workers for their consideration in assisting us to reach this point in the evening.

I move that the House do now adjourn until Tuesday, December 3, 1991 at 12.00 noon.

Hon. B. M. TAITT: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question was put and resolved in the affirmative without division, and Mr. SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.

11.05 p.m.

CONTENTS

MINUTES

Confirmation of Minutes of the Meeting of
Tuesday, 19th November, 1991 1143

Hon. P. M. GREAVES..... 1143

PAPERS

Rt. Hon. L. E. SANDIFORD..... 1143

Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of
the Insurance Corporation of Barbados for the
year 1990.

The National Insurance and Social Security
Benefit (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations,
1991.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' NOTICES

Mr. H. deB. FORDE 1144

Resolution to annul the National Insurance and
Social Security (Benefit) (Amendment)
Regulations.

Resolution to permit the live broadcast of all
major debates.

NOTICES OF QUESTIONS

Miss B. A. MILLER..... 1144

Question re Government's overdraft balances
with the Central Bank of Barbados at close of
business, November 22nd, 1991.

FIRST READING OF BILLS

Hon. P. M. GREAVES..... 1144

1. Bill to amend the International Monetary
Fund Act, Cap. 18A.
2. Bill to revise the law governing the
International Business Companies.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Hon. P. M. GREAVES..... 1144

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1991-92 NO. 1 –
HEAD 36 – MINISTRY OF HEALTH –
\$41 785 428..... 1145

Hon. B. M. Taitt, 1145, 1146, 1147, 1153, 1154,
1155, 1159, 1160, 1161, 1165, 1168, 1169;
Miss B. A. Miller, 1147, 1148, 1149, 1158,
1159; Dr. R. L. Cheltenham, 1150, 1166; Mr. O.
S. Arthur, 1152; Mr. D. A. C. Simmons, 1156;
Mr. L. R. Tull, 1162, 1163, 1167.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS (AMENDMENT)
BILL, 1991 1169

Rt. Hon. L. E. Sandiford, 1169, 1170, 1171,
1204, 1205, 1206; Mr. D. A. C. Simmons,
1192, 1193, 1194; Mr. G. W. Payne, 1172,
1173; Dr. R. L. Cheltenham, 1174; Mr. H. deB.
Forde, 1177, 1179, 1187, 1188, 1206; Hon. W.
O. Franklin, 1180, 1181; Mr. DeL. O.
Bradshaw, 1181, 1182, 1183, 1184; Mr. R. L.
Morris, 1185, 1186; Hon. P. M. Greaves, 1196,
1197; Mr. L. R. Tull, 1189, 1191; Mr. O. S.
Arthur, 1198, 1200, 1201; Hon. H. B. St. John,
1202, 1203, 1204.

SUSPENSIONS 1157, 1189

Hon. P. M. Greaves, 1157, 1189.

ADJOURNMENT..... 1207

Hon. P. M. Greaves, 1207.

SPEAKERS IN THIS ISSUE

ARTHUR, Mr. O. S. (St. Peter)
BRADSHAW, Mr. DeL. O. (St. Michael South East)
CHELTENHAM, Dr. R. L. (St. Joseph)
FORDE, Mr. H. deB. (Christ Church West)
FRANKLIN, Hon. W. O. (St. Philip South)
GREAVES, Hon. P. M. (St. Michael North)
MILLER, Miss B. A. (City of Bridgetown)
MORRIS, Mr. R. L. (Christ Church East Central)
PAYNE, Mr. G. W. (St. Andrew)
SANDIFORD, Rt. Hon. L. E. (St. Michael South)
SIMMONS, Mr. D. A. C. (St. Thomas)
ST. JOHN, Hon. H. B. (Christ Church South)
TAITT, Hon. B. M. (St. Michael West)
TULL, Mr. L. R. (St. George South)