

THE House of Assembly Debates

(OFFICIAL REPORT)

SECOND SESSION 1999 - 2004

Thursday, August 09, 2001

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER:

This Honourable House is resumed.

The Honourable Member for St. John. May I remind this House that the Honourable Member for St. John has equal television time which would be from 4:00 p.m. to 700 p.m. but he has unlimited time with his Reply.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Mr. Speaker, it would be ungracious of me, and all Barbadians, were I to start this evening's presentation without thanking the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter for visiting Barbados and for spending enough time in our lovely island to be able to present a Budget yesterday and to be here with us this evening.

The powerful lure of foreign travel has mercifully so spared him on this occasion, which I am told, represents the longest period for which he will have his feet on the ground in Barbados in the past three years.

I certainly would wish to invite the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to take time from his busy schedule while here to drive around the country and observe development, both positive and negative. Perhaps he may even find time to take in a sea bath because, after all, this is the type of experience we offer visitors to our shores.

Were I to have welcomed the Prime Minister back to Barbados from Jamaica on Monday, July 30, 2001, the task would have been mine to remind him that there is a long list of business started and unfinished, not yet attempted and not even contemplated, which requires his attention.

Despite new definitions of leadership which are so contrived as to insulate the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter from all responsibility for all the acts and omissions of his Government, I believe that the people of Barbados collectively might take another view.

At the last elections, the people of Barbados made it abundantly clear that they were 'going with Owen'. The trouble with their leader, however, is that Owen keeps going and is never around to listen and attend to their needs because he was out of the island 113 days in the last year.

I know the job of Prime Minister is a lonely one and it must be particularly lonesome for the Honourable Prime Minister but that does not justify his absents himself from the day-to-day management of the affairs of this country. He asked for this job and the people of Barbados gave it to him.

He presides over the weakest Cabinet in Barbados in recent memory and it is not acceptable that the real talent of Government sits on the backbench while a group of ministers, some still toting around with training wheels are left, without directions, to fend for themselves.

This Government was elected with 26 members, of those 26 members, 13 served in the Cabinet. This is the largest Cabinet in our history and the largest number of Members of Parliament ever in a Cabinet, that leaves 12 members on the Back Bench excluding Your Honour and one of the members of the Back Bench is a parliamentary secretary.

The Prime Minister was not content to have the largest and most expensive Cabinet in our history, he also decided to integrate members of the Back Bench into the process at a cost to taxpayers. Many of them are paid chairmen and members of statutory boards, apart from their parliamentary responsibilities and their parliamentary pay. One of them is a paid consultant to the Government on a full salary, apart from his parliamentary salary and his allowances. One is on contract to a statutory corporation, apart from his parliamentary salary and his allowances. Many of them provide legal services and advisory services to the Government and also to persons doing business with Government. Many of them function at the rank of ambassador, representing Barbados at various international negotiations. Mr. Speaker, at another level, many of them lead organisations, with millions of dollars of taxpayers money given to them to do what you might want to call, "community work" and undertake social development.

This means in very simple terms, that every one of the members of the Government shares a responsibility for the governance of Barbados and none of them can deny any responsibility for the state of our country or our economy.

Mr. Speaker, of course, we also know that many of them pretend that they are the hardest-working, selfless Barbadians who have ever lived in our country and that every benefit they receive is well-earned but this House is entitled, thank goodness, to scrutinise that for what it is worth.

Outside of this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, is what you might call the former parliamentarians' club. This club comprises persons who failed as managers while in public office, presiding over and executing the programmes of multimillion dollar enterprises in the year 2000. Having failed, they are now executing multimillion dollar enterprises in the year 2001, who is not managing Government's money is receiving it under dubious circumstances, and spending it wildly.

In no other country in the world is the qualification for being a builder that of hosting a call-in programme. No where else in the world could you find a former minister who has failed in every portfolio that was given to him, managing a multi-million dollar enterprise on a daily basis and being accountable to a minister, who is far less skilled and competent than even he was when he was a minister of Government. Another person, who as a minister was not a good ambassador for honesty, is now an ambassador of our country.

Therefore, none of the top brass of this Government ...

Hon. Miss B. A. Miller:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I believe the Honourable Member has stepped over the border in respect to the Standing Order which requires him not to speak so disparagingly of persons holding public office and certainly not of persons who were members of this Honourable Chamber.

Mr. SPEAKER:

May I remind the Honourable Member for St. John of Standing Order 28(7) which deals with imputing improper motives and also Standing Order 28(9) which refers to the conduct of Ministers and Members of Parliament. Please tone your speech to suit.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, I am grateful for your reminder. Mr. Speaker, none of the top brass of this Government can be excused from the responsibility for what has befallen us today and yesterday.

We had the sorry spectacle yesterday of a Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, totally out of touch with what is going on in Barbados, speaking for hours and saying absolutely nothing about the issues that really concern the people of this country but that is to be expected because the timing of this Budget has more to do with preparing Barbados for what is about to happen electorally, than with righting the many wrongs created as a result of the flawed policies of his Government.

This occasion has nothing to do with the economy of Barbados. Mr. Speaker, less than ten months ago we had a Budget.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

It was less than, a year then since the last Budget was delivered. Call it what you will, Economic Statement/Budget, you can have fun with all the words in the dictionary and the economic jargon known to man. I remember the day after, that Budget was hailed as the most forward-looking ever in the history of this country. Can you imagine we need another one ten months later? We heard it hailed by the private sector as containing a well-thought-out package of revolutionary economic measures by a brilliant economist who would take this country boldly into the future but ten months later you needed to have another one.

Despite all the praise that was heaped on the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter, not by the private sector alone but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, after the speech every one of the members on that side who spoke, as if given a prepared script, got up and extolled the virtues of this great man who has done so much and made such a great sacrifice but who they hardly see on Tuesday when they come to the House of Assembly and that is why they had to be given a written script to read.

One newspaper described the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter as the 'Smooth Operator' whose political brilliance was impervious to the slings and arrows of mortal men.

4:10 p.m.

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Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Mr. Speaker, if all of that was so, why ten months later would we need to have another Budget? Is there a crisis? Were not the reforms that were announced in the last Budget supposed to be the very reforms that would propel this country into the next century and take up to the level, where by the year 2005 we would be a developing country?

I heard all of that in the last Budget. All of a sudden those reforms, except for the ones that were repeated yesterday, do not seem to be working the magic that the smooth operator intended for them to work. There are not as visionary as we all thought they were because the slightest hiccup in the world economy caused the Honourable Member for St. Peter, a trained Economist, to return to this House to revise some of those same policies, particularly those in relation to telecommunication, and to make further adjustments.

The last set of changes was supposed to be made against a background of the potential for the world economy to deteriorate. We heard that the US economy might go into recession. Honourable Members on that side were obviously not informed enough to take the view that it might not happen to Europe, which they were looking at but they were not sure yet. What therefore could have prompted, within ten months of that brilliant Budget, the holding of another Budget in Barbados?

It is not necessary, Mr. Speaker, to remind Barbadians of that. The Opposition outlined to the country that the Budget was cheap talk and illusions. It meant nothing in terms of restructuring this economy. We listed, on that occasion, the number of times that the Honourable Member for St. Peter announced exactly same packages of measures in this Chamber, during Budget debates, during Estimates and in every speech that he delivered to the private sector. Yet, none of those proposals that he announced have come to fruition in Barbados by the year 2001, which then caused him to put us through the agony of three hours of repetition of almost the same thing that he has been saying for the past three years.

Sir, even as I speak, many of the initiatives announced in the last Budget are still unborn. How many people have the Agricultural Development Fund lent money to? You can go through them - the telecommunication sector.

If I were to read last year's Budget, the Green Paper on Telecommunication and then this year's Budget, you will be hearing the exact language, monotonous, repetitive amounting to zero in terms of the development of this country.

The Honourable Member for St. Peter is not interested in being accountable to anybody in that regard. He cannot return to this Chamber in any Budget and tell us one initiative from the last Budget that he had introduced that has produced results.

Sir, the gap has continued to widen between those at the top and the bottom in our country. The social partnership has been failing the workers of Barbados; the sugar industry is collapsing; the international business and manufacturing sectors are in decline and new investment in tourism, outside of the narrow area of luxury accommodation is vitally needed. All of this was supposed to be happening two years

ago, not last week.

We have been hearing about the Pier Head Project for two years; we have been hearing about Busy Park, not in such glorious terms but in terms of criticism of the Opposition, in every Budget reply, and we have been hearing about all of these developments which are supposed to propel Barbados to new fiscal and economic achievements since 1998.

Sir, some of them were part of the Government's platform for election and they have amounted to nought. These examples provide an insight into the leadership of the Honourable Member for St. Peter. Yesterday's Budget was a political exercise. It had nothing to do with our economy. It had to be held now for a number of reasons, the first of which relates to what I said in the beginning. Sir, this will be the longest period that the Honourable Prime Minister will be on the ground in Barbado - our platinum frequent flyer, with more air miles than an international pilot, who has places to go and people to see, at the increased cost to taxpayers in this country.

The second point is, that nothing said yesterday represents a clear path for the future. It is more of what we will get rather than where I will take you. I assumed that leadership was about telling people, bringing them along and building the consensus about where you are going to take them, Sir, not to tell them what they are going to get on the March 12, 2003, this will happen, that he signed an agreement last week or these are the things in the schedule. At the end of the day the people matter, how they feel about the development process and whether it involves them.

The third reason why the Budget is held at this time, is because the Honourable Prime Minister is more interested in the next election, whether at a national level or otherwise, than in the long-term future of Barbados. You could describe it as a Kadooment Budget.

The 'Ka', Knight of St. Andrew, is a very popular designation which is given to somebody when you are elevating them. Somebody will be elevated from this Chamber and will earn such an award. That, therefore, will carry public relation. The 'doo' means that you better do for yourself because this Government is not going to do anything for you and will do nothing to save you, your land, your safety, your future or your health. The 'ment' simply means that the Honourable Prime Minister meant nothing that he said and said nothing that he meant.

You and I would be foolish to accept that unemployment is still down in Barbados, when more than 1 000 workers went home between the beginning of the year and April. All of us know that. Therefore, to come with the feeble excuse that he is waiting on the figures to let you know what is happening on unemployment ... A Minister of Finance who is on the ground, would pick up the telephone and seek to find out what is happening in the economy.

Sir, I am certain that if he was even meeting with the people who were advising him, and have been advising him since 1994, they would tell him that he cannot hide the facts, that Barbadians have been sent home, it was in the newspapers. Business people who benefitted under the protocol since 1992, at the first sign of trouble in this country, sent home workers. They did not say, look these workers have helped us keep these enterprises, exercise wage restraint and help built these enterprises. The first thing that they did was to engage in practices which led to the sending home of hundreds of workers in this country.

4:20 p.m.

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Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

The Honourable Member for St. Peter was not around, so no one can blame him for not telling them what they were doing was wrong, in the context of the economic development of Barbados, that having made successful years under the protocol, the workers of Barbados cannot and must not be treated like that, if we are to build a national consensus on the way forward for our country.

Therefore, yesterday in this Budget, what one heard was that the Prime Minister obviously did not have anything to tell the private sector about their practices. He did not speak on behalf of the workers. What he was telling them was that he was going to impose a tax upon them so that if they merge, it will be more difficult for them. Since when will that stop mergers from taking place in Barbados? How many mergers can take place in Barbados without relevance to a transfer of the beneficial ownership of the shares? There are many configurations in which companies can merge and work together, without the beneficial ownership in shares being transferred, but that measure was never intended to benefit the workers of Barbados.

When the unemployment issues came up, the Prime Minister returned to Barbados, went to a function and told the people of this country not to worry about the 250 persons who were laid off from Cable and Wireless, because Cable and Wireless was going to create more jobs. He has not been able to identify those jobs in this Budget, and I do not think that anybody from Cable and Wireless would be able to identify the jobs to replace the 250 that were lost. So this is the kind of scenario that has been occurring in Barbados since 1999.

In fact, let me go on from that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Prime Minister, in relation to saying nothing he meant and meaning nothing he said, will believe that we are foolish enough to accept the statement that the foreign reserves are healthy because of tourism and sugar when every Barbadian knows that the Honourable Member for St. Peter went on a borrowing spree and borrowed the largest amount of money in the history of Barbados in the space of one year, \$350 million which, in itself, boosted the foreign reserves of this country and yet we would be foolish enough to believe that tourism, the sugar industry and the international business sectors have performed so well and that the Barbados economy is growing on the basis of the growth of our productive sectors.

The Prime Minister would, obviously, want people who shop in the supermarkets on a weekly basis for meats and a range of products, including baby items, to believe that the cost of living has come down. The cost of living has not gone up so much that when he measures it, and gives a pensioner \$7, that is enough to offset the price increase since 1998. Who would believe that nonsense, Mr. Speaker, Sir, except someone who was not in Barbados but persons who live here and have to be here 24/7, 365 days, know what it is like having to go into a supermarket in Barbados. And when one is dealing with

pensioners who, themselves, have health problems and need to buy certain items because of diabetes or hypertension, we know that \$7 is not going to make a significant difference. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said, this Kadooment Budget has a purpose, which has nothing to do with the future of the people of this country. It has a lot to do with one man's future, his political survival strategy and getting away with what I call political scandal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was speechless for a moment last night when, on reaching home, an elderly lady from Inch Marlow ...

Aside.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Do you know where that is? I am glad to hear. She called me ... well, she could not have called the Prime Minister, because he is never here for her to call or, alternatively, she cannot get through to him, so therefore, she called me and asked a simple but incisive question. She said "David, I know that you will explain all of this to me in powerful language tomorrow, but tell me in simple terms now. What did he say? What is really in this Budget for poor people in Barbados?"

But Mr. Speaker, Sir, do not let me just talk about the people who called me. On Voice of Barbados last night, a lady called in and she was very concerned for the Prime Minister. She said to the moderator: "Tell me something, did the Prime Minister write that Budget, or do you think he was reading something that was written by someone else?" She then went on to list a wrath of things that she felt that any Prime Minister of Barbados, in the year 2001, should be dealing with and issues which she felt were relevant Barbados Transport Board, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, taxation, the VAT. None of that would impress the Honourable Members on that side, because they think that I am having a fantasy when people call me, but I will explain why they call me. I will also explain why they call the Honourable Member for St. Lucy shortly and why they cannot call any of the Members on that side.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, those questions would have caused me to discard most of the notes that I would have made during the Honourable Member's presentation and even in preparation over the past few days of my contribution to this Debate. The old lady's intervention set me thinking and I had to ask myself, what is the relevance of this exercise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, neither you nor I can change a word of this Budget. It is done, completed. Not one of the men and women on that side will challenge anything said by the Honourable Member for St. Peter. They will all spend tonight and tomorrow attacking my response, and the DLP, but nothing is going to change on this Debate for the average Barbadian.

Every year, or perhaps I should say whenever the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance feels like it, he comes to this Chamber, camouflages a few words, designed principally to pull wool over the eyes of the majority of the citizens of this country ...

Mr. SPEAKER:

Honourable Member, you should know that that is not acceptable to this Honourable House. You cannot describe the actions of the Prime Minister as camouflaging and pulling wool over the eyes of the Members, please. So therefore, will you withdraw those words.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, if you want me to withdraw them, then I will, but I think that the public knows what is happening ...

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I am not qualifying anything. I wrote what I want to say here. There are rules by which these Debates are governed and I am going to follow those rules.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Please, the Honourable Member, will you withdraw those remarks?

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I have already withdrawn them, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, concealing from the public the true intent of the policies, leaving the population in a daze for weeks or until such time as people emerge from the illusion to discover the truth and the facts that nothing of any significance has happened.

I recall, Mr. Speaker, and I know that I may be written about or become the subject of a calypso written next year when I am saying this, that last year's Pic-O-De-Crop Finals, the eventual winner, the Mighty Gabby,

introduced a song on the night that set Barbadians in a tizzy. There was a complete buzz and order could not be restored for the next performer and to get the show moving. The Mighty Gabby danced and gyrated, belching forth that calypso in very powerful lyrics but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by the very next day, after a few hour's rest, Barbadians could not tell what the song was about and I have met no one who could have told me what the lyrics were, not one word. No winning tune in the history of calypso in Barbados has ever been so short lived or received as little air play. If I were to invite any Member in this Chamber to stand and repeat at least the first two lines of the chorus of last year's winning selection, they could not do it.

4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Mr. Speaker, what is important is that the few minutes that mattered was the performance before the judges and, therefore, the song served its purpose. Therefore, the same can be said for the Honourable Members for St. Peter, with those sporadic presentations of the Minister of Finance. Without even reading in detail what any or all of his cohorts in the private sector and the academic world might have said, I can imagine the rave reviews this morning and they will continue for about another two or three

weeks, before - once again - Barbadians come to grips with reality, the smoke screen, the politics of illusion.

I have to choose my words very carefully, Sir, in view of the rules, new or otherwise, which guide political discussion in this country.

In two weeks' time, Barbadians will be asking, what really did the Prime Minister come with this time around. When back-to-school blues begin and people realise that they have no money in their pockets and that the strain of finding that money for back-to-school has not been lifted, then they would appreciate once again, that the master of illusions has acted.

The Minister of Finance has now mastered the art of saying nothing, doing nothing, giving nothing but being congratulated for all of it. Here we are to believe that so much has been offered. Glad tidings of great joy have been bestowed upon us, the loyal subjects of prince charming. Every sector has been touched. Indeed, a few more funds have been created, even though none of those started during the past seven years is easily accessible to Barbadians.

Every year, X amount of money is put into a fund for some noble purpose, but still ordinary Barbadians cannot access a cent in concessionary financing to pursue any of their life's dreams or ambition. All of these great and noble initiatives and still in the year 2001, we are asking young Barbadians to put up land and the roof over their heads as collateral for loans as small as \$1 500. That is still happening in Barbados today.

Still, we engage in this great theatrical presentation each year, in which we all say how well perceived the Budget was and how visionary and far-reaching it would be.

Of course, there are certain sections in the community that would be rejoicing, for after all, they got what they wanted. Yes, they got what they wanted.

The people gave the Government twenty-six seats but what did they get in return? They did not get to sit around the table at Government Headquarters, the official conference table; they did not get to say exactly what they wanted; they were not able to speak forcefully in their living rooms and at cocktail parties to members of parliament and to the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter to tell him what they wanted. But all of those other persons who sit at the table were able to get relief and all that they demanded had been given to them.

Who I might ask, spoke on behalf of the same poor lady from Inch Marlow? Who, Minister of Finance spoke on behalf of the thousands of people who have applied to the agencies of the Ministry of Social Transformation for relief and have not even been recognised with a letter of acknowledgment of receipt of their correspondence? And now the Minister is asking them to say thanks for his help.

The consumers of Barbados gave the Government twenty-six seats. What did they get? Who, Mr. Speaker, spoke on behalf of Barbadian consumers, yesterday especially those housewives, who shop in the supermarkets every week, and cannot cope with the spiralling prices? The Prime Minister tells us that inflation is not a problem. Inflation is not a problem? If I was shopping for myself, inflation probably would not be a problem either, but like many of them, I shop for six persons. When I reach

that counter and start to unpile those goods I never know from month to month what horrendous bill is going to be facing me and there are many other Barbadians who face exactly the same problems.

Do you know what they do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when they get to the counter and recognise that the bill has gone over? They take some of the goods and put them back in the trolley or put them underneath, if they have one of those trolleys with a carryall. They cannot afford it and every week they are buying less and less for the same dollar. Those are the people who shop for an extended family as well because they know that. What can a grandmother buy on a non-contributory pension? And if she is a diabetic, hypertensive, has some other kind of problem, what can she afford to buy, as well as maintain her house and do all of the other basic things she needs to do to survive in Barbados.

The factory workers gave this Government twenty-six seats and what did they get? Mr. Speaker, Sir, who spoke on behalf of the workers on industrial estates who are still earning less than \$100 a week? Do you know that when some of them go to the toilet, they have to go to a supervisor to pull a toilet roll out of a desk drawer to give them and to clock in when they go to the toilet and come back? That happens in Barbados but only the people who live here and hear the complaints and the concerns of the citizens of this country would know about that. That still happening in this day and age. If you want to go to the toilet, you have to ask the supervisor for a roll of toilet paper.

Asides.

Mr. D.J.H. THOMPSON:

You can laugh at it because you are so detached from that now, travelling the international fora with marble floor toilets, probably personalised toilet paper ...

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, what factory workers have to endure in Barbados would be of no concern to the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter, of no concern whatsoever and that is an example of precisely the problem we are facing in this country today.

Small businessmen gave this Government twenty-six seats. What did they get? Read the comments of the President of the Small Business Association today. There was nobody at that consultative table that spoke on their behalf. Nobody who spoke for those small contractors whose businesses are going under, cannot get their VAT returns, all kinds of problems because all assembled at the table saw nothing fundamentally wrong with former Cabinet ministers who can hardly differentiate between a hammer and a chisel, getting multimillion dollar contracts to build school, public centres and to execute Government contracts.

Asides.

You should ask him that. Do not ask the Honourable Member for the City why a man should not live in Barbados. In 1978 he said the Dems should not live.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Could you continue to address the Chair, please?

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Yes, Sir.

Asides.

There are some small contractors in this country and others who also believe that they should benefit from some of the opportunities made available by their taxpayers money and Government contracts, to earn a living and support their families too.

Those who have the ear of the Prime Minister, whether formally or informally, would not have reminded him of the plight of those persons who cannot afford to go to Bayview or FMH in the dead of night. Those who languish for hours and hours on end at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) in the Accident and Emergency Department staring death in the face, simply because nothing is being done at the policy level to improve the conditions at the Hospital.

Eight years of talk, Minister after Minister, manager after manager, at one point, the Cabinet was managing the QEH, getting monthly management reports for the QEH and still nothing has improved, but, as I said, the Prime Minister can be forgiven for not knowing, Mr. Speaker, because he no longer lives here.

4:40 p.m.

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Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

One would have expected at least that the other 25 elected Members of Parliament on the Government side would point out to the Minister of Finance, on his monthly two and three-day visits to the country, exactly what is happening in Barbados.

I cannot believe that the Honourable Member for St. Lucy and I are the only two elected Parliamentarians to whom Barbadians from all walks of life complain on a daily basis. Am I to believe that the diabetics who stop me on the street or drop by my office to complain about the spiralling cost of food and their inability to eat what their doctors are recommending, share their concerns only with the Honourable Member for St. Lucy and I, as elected Parliamentarians? If that is not the case, and I have no reason to believe it is not, then why did not some Honourable Member on that side impress upon the Prime Minister the need to at least make some token reference to the cost of living in Barbados and the skyrocketing price of basic food items in our supermarkets? Why did not one of them at least bring it to the Honourable Member's attention?

Why did not somebody on the other side of this Chamber explained to the Prime Minister that the \$7 that he gave to old-aged pensioners is sometimes merely enough to buy a pound of butter-beans or half of a pound of tomatoes and yet they are required to eat those items on a daily basis, very often as part of

their diet?

The Prime Minister does not live here, if not, he would know and would have been aware that Barbadians were listening to hear of his plans for the overhaul of the health care service in this country, and it is an agreement with all of Barbados that the current minister has been a disaster and should be removed.

I know the Prime Minister will say that this is an Economic Statement, but how does that help the patients of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, some of whom are not receiving a hot cup of tea some days until early afternoon and on some occasions, not at all?

People visiting sick friends at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in recent times have had to pack bags as if they were going to camp with flasks, flashlights, tea, milk, sugar, spoons, cups, forks, towels, soap, drinking water, Phensic, candle grease, Vicks, Shilling Oil, Limocol, tissues, napkins and toilet paper. Yes, that is a fact. People called you from the hospital and asked you to bring those items for them. It looks like you are going out to camp when you are heading down to the hospital to visit people. It is funny, is it not?

It is very, very funny for Honourable Members on that side. That is nothing new. This happened for eight years and it is still funny. I wish, Sir, that the cameras of the House could show the joy on the faces of the Honourable Members on that side but I know that you would not allow that by virtue of the rules, if not I think the public would be happy to know that our Members of Parliament are very comfortable and happy in hearing what I am saying today.

Oranges and apples in the hospital have now been reduced and replaced with all sorts of basic items that a third rate health institution should have. This is not funny, Mr. Speaker, even though some people would think it is funny, for it said a lot about the economic health of this country.

This is real life in Barbados and our non-resident Prime Minister has rode into town like a godfather yesterday, handed out a few sweeties to his chosen friends and is set to fly out again, without having addressed any of the fundamental issues, the worries and the concerns that affect the citizens of Barbados.

Government agencies in this country are turning people into puppets or poppets on a daily basis by sending them from office to office where they sit down for hours waiting to see people in search of basic relief from the pressures of life in this country.

The much celebrated Ministry of Social Transformation has been established and there are thousands of persons languishing in Barbados below the poverty line waiting for months and years for their concerns to be even heard, far less acted upon.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Well, you know what it is around here. If you say that, when the debate is finished someone will come and say 'man, why you did not tell me'. So that if the person did not raise it with me nobody

would ever know. That is the way we function in Barbados. I did not know that you were having a problem with that. Well, give me the name on a piece of paper and I will deal with it tomorrow. So that the person who does not come through me or the Honourable Member for Christ Church East Central, the Honourable Member for Christ Church West or the Honourable Member for St. Michael North West with a recommendation or whatever has to stand at the back of the line. They are the ones getting pushed and pulled around in this country. It is happening on a daily basis and it is getting worse, Mr. Speaker. Time was, when the Minister of Social Transformation had time to ride around on the back of a pickup to see what is going on in Barbados, today, I am not sure if he can be bothered to do that anymore.

Social transformation, two very important words, as far as this Government is concerned, and the Minister has not turned my impression of this yet, it is concentrated around securing sizeable grants for non-governmental organisations over which the Government has political and personal influence. You have an advisor and a consultant who are also concerned with these grants of free money for similar organisations over which Members of Parliament on that side and individuals have personal and political influence.

There are a chosen few who benefit in that way, strategically chosen. The politics of inclusion is a strategy. It may sound nice. The Prime Minister tells you, you want to go to heaven but you do not want to die but his concept of heaven is different from mine and, therefore, his concept of inclusion is different from mine. It is strategic and all of these little groups emerged and the Prime Minister by special dispensation, allows these Funds to grant money to them and every Budget Debate, people get up in here and speak in sonorous terms after attacking the Democratic Labour Party in Opposition. We do not benefit from any of that. Because they cannot get things done, they look back to 1989 and 1991 and go all over the world. Time is running out, Mr. Speaker, not for me, but for them.

There are thousands of Barbadians below the poverty line whose houses are leaking in the rainy season. There are still thousands who do not have an adequate meal for their children or for themselves. There are thousands of Barbadians who are going to find it tough to send their children to school in September or to maintain running water in their homes. People send you water bills all the time, \$700, \$800 and \$900. If they were unreasonable yes, you could say they are really playing the fool.

But when you look at the kinds of things that individuals have to do to survive in Barbados when they done pay the credit union for the little loan they had and bus fare and all of those other items and then every month the fear of their water being cut off ... and some people water has been cut off but they are too shame to tell people, so they get up at three o'clock in the morning in areas that still have stand pipes, and you can see people bathing at stand pipes because their running water has been turned off. That is a fact in Barbados.

Honourable Members on that side will pretend that is not so, that the people are 'wussless', they would not pay their water bills and they deserve the water being cut off. Even if you have a problem with the parents... but when they have children or elderly people living in those houses, it is disgusting. But that exist in Barbados despite all of the talk yesterday about the eight years of economic growth.

Many of those persons are left to languish on the periphery of society as second and third class citizens of this country and you have a Minister of Finance coming into this country in this grave guava crop and

not even mentioning by accident the plight of so many crest-fallen and hopeless Barbadians.

4:50 p.m.

Tuesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

The Budget, as presented yesterday, was high on lyrics, but low on relevance. It had good melody, average rendition but no originality. It does not even attempt to address the worries and concerns of Barbadians because there is no one around the Minister of Finance to advise him correctly on what is happening in Barbados. So it is only those who have access to him at that level who are going to find their cares and concerns being addressed.

There was a time when the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter could be found apparently on BET pasture, coincidentally with newspaper cameras around, taking in a game of cricket and interacting with ordinary Barbadians. What has become of this country's barefoot Prime Minister watching cricket and enjoying a drink with the boys? What has become of the son of a St. Peter shopkeeper who was supposed to be in touch and in tune with the pulse of this nation more than anybody else, not just on this side, but more than any of you, because never ever forget that the difference between you winning your seat and not winning was the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter. Never forget that! He pulled all of you over the hump with those special skills that he possesses, which we are trying to find and pull out at this time in our economic development.

I do not accept that the pressures of office render such interaction impossible. I was a Minister of Finance and I found the time to do it. The late Prime Ministers of Barbados, Errol Barrow and Tom Adams were both leaders of Government and Ministers of Finance and they found the time, whether it was in Baxter's Road, one at night, the other in the morning.

All of a sudden, you have a Minister of Finance who swings by the island, in-transit to some faraway land, and presents a Budget that has absolutely no relevance to the masses of people in this country. Nothing that was spoken about on Spring Garden on Saturday, or was sung about on Friday night at the Finals would have been addressed, which makes irrelevant all of the Barbadians who came out and expressed their views to Members of Parliament who were present. Nothing that ordinary Barbadians are calling in on the call-in programmes on a daily basis to complain about has been addressed in this Budget. Nothing that would take our young men off 'the block' other than a lot of glib, sonorous tones, attacking certain kinds of deviant behaviour, long after the horse has bolted from the stable. Nothing to turn young school-leavers away from the depression and frustration that they are going to have after the results come in. None of that was addressed in this Budget.

This is, therefore, not the product of a caring Government. This is the handiwork of a group of spin doctors who believe that they have the measure of Barbadians, they can read the mood of Barbadians and that they can continue with these back-arm, Houdini practices of here today and gone tomorrow,

presenting a glorious Budget today, but then withholding all the promised benefits tomorrow.

But what the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has sought to do in this Budget is to quell the rising tide of discontent with his Government and the frustration that his spin doctors would have informed him is fermenting in this country. A few dollars given to old aged pensioners is meant to detract and deflect them from the harsh realities of life and the cost of living in this country.

I ask them seriously this evening, with all the pressures that have mounted and are continuing to mount in relation to their ability to make ends meet in this country, with respect to their ability to pay bills and to eat healthy, which are as basic as you can get, how can seven additional dollars ease the strain?

I ask any housewife in Barbados today - I am not going to ask DLP members, I will ask members of the Barbados Labour Party, I will ask people who do not belong to any political party - how could that have an impact on easing the strain that pensioners would have felt since 1998 in Barbados, what really can seven additional dollars do in this guava crop?

The Prime Minister has not advanced any analysis of the plight of our senior folk and the need for Government to provide them with a comfortable existence in their golden years. He has been away for too long and having been away for so long somebody needs to tell the Prime that \$7 is not what it used to be, a lot has happened in relation to the value of money in this country since the Prime Minister assumed office in 1994 and he needs to wake up and smell the coffee with VAT on it!

After the last two Budgets by the Minister of Finance and all that they offered, we waited yesterday with bated breath when the Prime Minister touched on the subject of the value added tax. Honestly, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps I was foolishly believing so, I really expected that the Prime Minister was going to give a little relief when he got to that part of the VAT. I really expected that there would have been some relief.

Had the Prime Minister been on the ground in Barbados, he would have known that Barbadians were expecting a little relief. Some hoped for a possible five per cent reduction. That would be large, but they would have settled for a slide down to 12 per cent or a reduction in the range of items affected by the VAT. That was their expectation. You cannot meet every expectation, but you mean nothing at all?

After seven years, the Prime Minister came here to tell us not what he was going to do to relieve the pain but to tell us about the problems he was having in collecting the VAT. That is what yesterday was about, telling us how much trouble he was having collecting the VAT and he was not interested in making the citizens of Barbados more comfortable. His focus was making the collectors of the VAT more comfortable because he said he was trying to change their office arrangements to make it more comfortable for them to continue to collect the VAT.

I am very happy about that. I have no problem about that at all because I believe that public workers should be given good conditions of work; but while they were being made comfortable, you mean not a pensioner, not another citizen of Barbados could be made in any way comfortable? And worse still, there are businesses in Barbados that have not had VAT refunds for over 15 months that have sent home workers, that are about to be closed down in this country, and the Right Honourable Member for

St. Peter promised some time in the future to make sure that they would get back their VAT returns in three months. Meanwhile, some of them are on the brink of collapse.

All the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter can do is say, "Well, after six months you will get a little interest on the money we owe you." Some of those small businesses in Barbados have shut down because of the VAT, you know - failure of Government to pay those VAT returns, to pay back the VAT refunds. That is a fact.

5:00 p.m.

Thursday, August 9, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

The Prime Minister came here after seven years to tell us of his problems in collecting and managing the VAT, how office space is growing small and how he has to find alternative accommodation for the VAT collectors. Meanwhile the people of Barbados, happy as they are for the people in the VAT Office, will be waiting on the Minister of Finance to properly manage the economy that they can pay back the VAT in time to those persons who are owed those VAT refunds.

As far as the VAT is concerned, all the poor people of Barbados wanted was a slight ease, which could and would have been considered by a Prime Minister who cared and a Prime Minister in touch and in tune with what is happening in this country.

There are businesses that have not had VAT refunds for 15 months and while the VAT Office is expanding those businesses are contracting. Mr. Speaker, Sir, what a nasty situation! Nobody seems to have brought it to the attention of the Minister of Finance in Barbados.

What about EduTech? Certainly, the Prime Minister knew we were all listening after millions of our hard-earned dollars have gone down the drain or behind the screen as it were and nothing significant yet. Not a single word on this initiative that was supposed to save the world. All sorts of bogus initiatives were outlined here in yesterday's Budget.

The resuscitation of cotton and help for persons putting a hectare of land into cotton production. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has allowed so much land to be sold off in this country to persons, some of whom have never stepped foot in this country, and now a Prime Minister is coming in 2001, after the 'For Sale' sign was placed on our country to tell us we must invest in organic food crops and that he will insist that the hospital and other Government institutions buy local food.

We have been trying since 1994 to encourage this Government to go into a programme of major empowerment of small businesses in this country. We even pledged in a manifesto that we would give a fixed percentage of Government's contracts to small businesses and every time we raised it, members on that side said they were already doing that.

The Honourable Member for St. Thomas got up, I think, in the last Budget debate, and listed a whole

set of companies that were receiving contracts from the Government and he said, therefore, all of this talk from the Opposition was empty talk because the Government was already doing all of this. So what is new in this initiative?

The Right Honourable Member for St. Peter was not in the island as usual so he would not know about this. We had a debate in here a couple of weeks ago and the Honourable Member for St. Lucy criticised the Government relative to the purchase of foreign products for the School Meals Services. At that time we were talking about chicken but the argument can be extended to other items, and yet we were told in here that our arguments were nonsensical, that the School Meals Department already had a plan in place to purchase all of the items that were available in Barbados from Barbadians. We also heard that the School Meals Department met with the farmers and all of these Barbadian groups and source all of this produce.

The Right Honourable Member for St. Peter probably would not have know that all of that was said to this Parliament because if he had known, I would like to know how he could have come into this Chamber and give the impression that it is a new initiative to ask the School Meals Department to buy 60 per cent of the items like milk and so on from local producers when we were told that the School Meals Department buys all that are available on the market as long as the prices are competitive and all the other qualifiers that were introduced.

I do not know what was new about that initiative. I would say it is an example of somebody not being frank with the House. Sir Winston Churchill used to call them terminological inexactitudes to get around the rules but in this particular case I am all confused on this particular issue. Mr. Speaker, either the one I heard yesterday was a terminological inexactitude or three months ago what we heard was a terminological inexactitude. We heard that the School Meals Service goes out there and purchases all the local produce it needs and we should have no fear on this side, and yet yesterday we heard it is a new initiative.

I know the Honourable Member for St. Michael North East will have to say something about that because I am extremely embarrassed because we believed the Honourable Member for St. Michael North East. I want to say up front that I believe it but I have not yet consulted with the Honourable Member for St. Lucy on it. I honestly believed it and, therefore, I did not get in the debate at all but having heard yesterday that this is a new policy and that, in fact, the School Meals Department was not buying these items from local suppliers, I had to reach into Winston Churchill's vocabulary.

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Leader of the Opposition is deliberately misleading this Honourable Chamber. I have never indicated to this Chamber that the School Meals Department buys all of it produce from local sources. Last Budget, the Leader of the Opposition purported to announce in here that chicken was spoilt and that chicken which had been imported for the School Meals Department had spoilt. Both myself and the Honourable Minister of Agriculture indicated to this Chamber that the Schools Meals Department met with the Agricultural Society and with the intervention of the Minister of Agriculture we overturned a recommendation to import chicken so that we were sourcing all of the chicken from local sources.

If the Leader of the Opposition's ears are so filled with wax that he now hears all produce when we

said chicken then I believe that he too has been affected by the Crop Over activities that he spend so much of his speech referring to last Friday night.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

No doubt, much to your credit as the Minister of Culture. I wish I had a chance to promote them before hand so that you would have got more people to attend the event.

Mr. Speaker, I think we really need to understand what is happening here and I am glad the Honourable Member did get in the debate because perhaps it demonstrates just the point we were making, that the Government has no programme in existence which gives priority to Barbadian producers of agricultural produce. It seems as though it is now only limited to chicken and milk and, therefore, I assume that all of the other produce, Mr. Speaker, Sir, until they say otherwise, does not form part of this so-called new initiative to purchase all of these items locally which the Honourable Members on that side have spoken about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it gets worse than this because when farmers were complaining that certain 'big-ups' in the Government were swamping the market with imported produce and rendering their farms unprofitable, they were abused. It is only now that competition is coming and traditional suppliers of foodstuff know that they will not be able to compete at current prices, that the Prime Minister is turning back to local suppliers and that conceals, Sir, the true intent of policy and every farmer in Barbados knows it.

5:10 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Mr. Speaker, all sorts of small businesses have been allowed to go under and persons, not with navel strings buried here, controlling key sectors formerly reserved for indigenous people, the Honourable Prime Minister now says that he would grant the same concessions as are granted to hotels.

Sir, for eight years, all the pledges in the world have been flowing from this Government, about concessions to other operators in the tourism sector. All of a sudden we are hearing a different story. Mr. Speaker, this is mere padding. I say that this is a script of a spin doctor and not a caring politician. Sir, every few months the Honourable Prime Minister comes with a new vision for Barbados, a new approach to preparing Barbados and Barbadians for the challenges that lie ahead, a new set of 'globaloni' that means absolutely nothing in real terms to Barbadians.

Seven years ago, we were told to prepare ourselves for the opportunities that globalisation will bring, today or Wednesday we were told that we have to 'button down' and put up the shutters against the ravishes of globalisation.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on this occasion, will the real Minister of Finance please stand up? The mixed signals are confusing the society. There is a popular song that youngsters listen to. I do not recommend

it myself. It is by an artist called Eminem, who is very controversial, relevant to politicians - "Will the Real Slim Shady, Please Stand Up?"

Sir, these examples provide an insight into the leadership by the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter. He said the right things at the right time. He know how to raise and low expectations. He knows how and what to promise: 30 000 jobs; to rustle crime to the ground; a new republic; to make poverty a thing of the past; to put flooding behind us forever and to become a developed country by the year 2005. I have heard all of that and more but the reality is different.

In the year 2005, we might still be in economic trouble. In 2001, it looks as though we are going to be in trouble. The Honourable Prime Minister who did not have much to say about the farmers in previous Budgets, suddenly calls on the farming community and showers them with concessions.

Last night a man on the radio said that it is too late and that he is not able with farming anymore. He said that he had been battling with a farm for a long time, lack of water and all kinds of problems. After all this time they are calling on the farmers to help save Barbados.

Two years ago the manufacturers produced a document which outlined the key concerns that they had. No action was taken by the Government relative to that document. The Water Sports operators in Barbados are crying out because of the impact of the all-inclusive tourism, crying out because of the problems that they have in terms of access to places where tourists are and the cost of their machinery and equipment. It is only now that those kinds of operators may be reflected upon, now that we are facing some economic problems.

Taxi drivers, no doubt, now that we are facing problems, the people who the Minister said were not suitable for the Board but you can call on them now to help. The vendors, you call on them to market the agricultural produce and to produce more. Sir, for eight years these vendors were squeezed, shunt around and ignored. Now that things are getting tough they are calling on them and showering them with gifts and praise.

Sir, they are calling on the restaurant owners who sometimes have two guests . We redefined you because things are tough. We need you now but when things were growing and doing well we did not hear about all of these individuals.

Mr. Speaker, what are the specific points of the inconsistency? Where are the holes in the arguments of the Honourable Member for St. Peter? First of all the Honourable Prime Minister seems to believe that the measures introduced yesterday would have an immediate impact and can show growth of three per cent during this year, rather than one per cent.

I do not expect so, Sir, based on my own experience. I believe, based on all of the other measures that were put in place previously, I cannot say that it would be a miracle because one never knows what will happen in the international economic environment but still one has to reflect.

Sir, for example, when you hear the Honourable Prime Minister announced as a major initiative, the airlift out of the United States of America and Britain, does the Honourable Member for St. Peter see some relevance of the recession or the potential recessionary conditions in those countries to the

question airlift? Sir, you put on the seats but can you fill them in this economic environment. I am going to get to the question of the \$20 millions shortly.

Mr. Speaker, when tourism was bubbling and doing well you could not get the airlift, now that things are getting tight and US Airway and British Airways know that things are getting tight. Sir, you can only describe that as an empty rhetorical statement by the Honourable Member for St. Peter.

Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of 2001, the Democratic Labour Party met with the private sector and warned them of what was going to happen in the Barbados economy, produced a document entitled: "Barbados In the Year 2001, What Next?" The evidence was there both at the national and international levels.

Sir, this Government has taken too long to act therefore, what is happening now is too little, too late. Despite the very good things that occurred after 1993 and the levels of growth that was enjoyed in this economy. Those reforms could not sustain the Barbados economy into the next decade. The cyclical changes and the counter-cyclical changes that economists talk about, should have been anticipated by the Honourable Member for St. Peter.

Instead of that, all we had was old talk about the economy growing. He is the greatest economist living, and therefore, we should all be happy and pleased that he is such a great man. He has been so busy and that he has the world on his shoulders, forgive him. All of that nonsense you have been hearing for the past two years or so.

Sir, every indication was there that we were going to have economic problems. A speech delivered in here by the Honourable Member for Christ Church South two years ago, I will credit him for that, in which he talked about problems of institutional inertia in Barbados. He went through the gamut of problems that were affecting investment in our country and these were hailed by the media as relevant issues that the Government needed to look at. Sir, two years later, we are now putting in place initiatives which are to ensure that the economy does not only grow by one per cent but by three per cent.

Sir, this Government has no credibility in terms of getting its policies implemented and that is a stark fact. Look at all the initiatives that this Government has announced in the past three years and do a check-off to see how many of them have come to fruition. Do not look at the ones that the Ministers have announced. Do not get excited about the pledge by the Honourable Member for St. George North to build all of those houses that he was going to build. Do not get too excited by the fact that the Fair Trade legislation and all the companion pieces of legislation were supposed to be in place two years ago. Do not get excited by the pledges by the telecommunications reform that we heard about.

5:20 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Do not get excited about the crime reduction plan. I am not dealing with any of those Ministers to date,

but I am dealing with the Honourable Minister of St. Peter because he would have pulled out the initiatives that he is putting his leadership behind. Can you believe that those are the very initiatives that are going nowhere?

Imagine who in their right mind, nearly four years ago, would have knocked down the Hilton Hotel that was providing good jobs for people of Barbados. And it is still rubble. What kind of good management and leadership could that be? Can one trust the judgment of a Government that would do this? Of course, the Hilton was a proud symbol of the DLP's Administration sound economic policies in the 1960s, therefore, I am not surprised.

What I am surprised about, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it brings dishonour on your House, is that a Parliamentary Question was asked a few weeks ago and the Honourable Member for St. Michael South, in answering that question, said that construction was going to commence on the Hilton Hotel on July 1st, 2001. This is now August and we are hearing, by the end of the year. And what worries me is that when the Honourable Member made that statement, Sir, the Chairman of Needhams Point Development, the Honourable Member for Christ Church South, was sitting next to him and was not bestirred to touch him and tell him that, as usual, he has put his foot in his mouth. Perhaps, the Honourable Member was not sure what he would have said next, because one knows how it is with him and, therefore, he did not worry to stop him.

So we were a few weeks away from July 1st, and I said to myself, "you mean you should not mobilize so early?" Not one piece of steel down at the Hilton, not an excavator, nothing and the Minister is telling us that the construction of the Hilton Hotel will be starting in a week's time, when everybody knows that it is tied up in major problems, some of them resulting from the Mobil Oil Refinery and from the designs and drawings.

The Honourable Member of St. Peter gets up in here, following 'Mr. Foot in Mouth' and said that by the end of 2001 ... sorry, Sir, I withdraw that, undertaking a foot and mouth maneuver for which other members are renown and said that the Hilton will commence by the end of 2001. So that if anyone passes there now all that one would see is rubble. Barbadians who had 20 years of service in the hotel: the vendors, shop keepers, bank personnel, the waiters, barmen; all of them sent home and the building demolished.

It was also prime tourism land, a beautiful area for development and now, years later, Government is still talking about the Hilton hotel and telling us that it will start next week, then week after next, then by the end of the year. That is not an example of good management, that is leading from behind, or not leading at all. That is incompetent, Mr. Speaker, and I worry for this Chamber. If the response to a legitimate question asked by a Member, does not square with the facts, what recourse can be have? This is something that needs investigating.

When we look at the abattoir, is this another example of good management by the financial wizardry of the Honourable Member for St. Peter? The Government's abattoir is closed down, \$200 000 is taken up from the proceeds of the sale of the Arawak Cement Plant and the Heywoods Hotel, Public Enterprise Investment Fund - you check it and see that \$200 000 came out of that Fund for Southern Meats Abattoir. Then another \$2 to \$3 million are taken up and put into the abattoir, and this is the taxpayers' money. You let them blow every cent of it. You have a Board in place with another financial

wizard as Chairman.

The Prime Minister has said nothing to this House and suddenly, it becomes one big scandal: Southern Meats runs out of money. The butchers said that it was a bad investment. Almost everybody said that it was ludicrous for the Government to take up money in that kind of ownership configuration and put it into Southern Meats Abattoir.

It was ludicrous for the Government's financial advisors, wizards and the chief wizard himself, the Honourable Member for St. Peter to take that money and blow it on the abattoir. How, therefore, can one trust the Government's judgement when it comes to these larger projects that they are supposed to be implementing?

The Greenland Landfill: from the outset the Honourable Member for St. Andrew said that it was environmental madness and he obviously has some financial skills because ... Perhaps it is those financial skills that ended up putting him where he is. We must never believe that the Minister of Tourism is Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, Sir, when Greenland was identified as the site, the Honourable Member for St. Andrew, to his credit - he is not like the rest who refused to say anything - had the courage to come out and say, environmental madness. Regrettably, that is all he said. Who could be serious about siting a landfill at Greenland and then pumping nearly \$30 million into it, both directly and indirectly, then let it lie idle for nearly three years. I cannot say idle because it does provide a lot of water for the birds and the other flora and fauna in the area.

There were confirmed design flaws in the project and we went and saw them ourselves. The Minister confirmed that the tank that was leaking was the one which was carrying all of the most dangerous substances, yet they then went out to tender to get that project finished. What kind of political judgement informs these decisions? At least we know, based on information coming to me today, that one cow in the area of Greenland will benefit significantly from the decision to go ahead with that project.

What about the GEMS of Barbados project. Now, Sir, this is one that is just unbelievable in the context of what could have been done for Barbados. Let us take the whole story. The Government has guaranteed what would amount to nearly all of the figures and elements to the project, nearly \$200 million. When you look at the whole design of the project ...

5:30 p.m.

Wednesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

... it just guaranteed another \$15 million. If you read the report of the Accountant General, the most recent report in relation to the Public Enterprise Investment Funds, money was taken from that Fund and put in an account to guarantee the repayment of a \$15 million loan or overdraft. That is in the past couple of months.

The Government permitted the entire roof of Eastry House to disappear. The entire roof has disappeared or was stolen and that is one of the hotels bought by the Government. After all of that and all of what I am going to say next, can you imagine yesterday that the Prime Minister said there is going to be a Phase 2 to the GEMS Project. How can this be good management or judgment? Let us think about it.

Sir, let us look at where the Gems Project stands. The company took over two hotels which were owned by well known politically connected families but which were failures. We all acknowledge that. It then purchased one equally well-connected property in ruins in St. Peter, the Prime Minister's constituency, for \$3 million.

It was handed a small hotel which was severely indebted to the then, Barbados Development Bank. Today, one of the two original hotels has been declared to be unsuitable and lies rotting away hoping for a buyer. The one in ruins is in a worse state of condition, than when it was purchased by the Government.

Another property which housed the Dover Convention Centre was also handed over by the Government and promptly demolished. Taxpayers' property was demolished. The rubble from that hotel is hidden behind, I think they call it a boarding, on one of Barbados finest beaches - another waste, squandermania, bad planning, poor judgment. You know, against that background, the Government then went and bought two successful hotels for \$25 million.

Asides.

Mr. D.J.H. THOMPSON:

All I have just told you, the hotel they knocked down, the rubble, the derelict property, the ruins, all of that, when they could not get anything out of them, they then went and bought two successful hotels for \$25 million. One of the owners was actually surprised at the price he got for the hotel.

Aside.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

That is a fact. It made the rounds in business circles. He could not believe he got that price for the hotel, so generous were the taxpayers of Barbados.

The Prime Minister is now boasting about the Savannah Hotel. It is a very attractive hotel and everyone knows who were the beneficiaries of the establishment of the original company. But who were the beneficiaries of the development of the Savannah Hotel? The hotel has been restored but at a cost double the original estimate which ensures that this Savannah Hotel, owned by the people of Barbados through the Government, will never make a profit even if it exists for another thousand years.

The main reason for the additional expenditure was the establishment of a company in Florida through which everything purchased by GEMS was channelled.

I am glad the Prime Minister is making notes because I hope he will investigate as he did the EduTech

and all the other things I raised last year, although nothing ever happens from the investigations. Nothing ever happens.

That company would buy an item for \$100 and then sell it to Gems for between \$150 and \$200. Who do you suppose owns that company, let this Parliament see the audited financial statements for Hotel and Resorts Limited, come and lay them in the House, let the Public Accounts Committee have access to them, or individual Members.

I do not have a majority on the Public Accounts Committee so I cannot do what the Members do not want. The Government has a majority, so I can only investigate what they want investigated or what the majority want investigated. Bring the documents, let us look at what has been happening in relation to that investment.

Now, after all that I have said this Government, under the financial, economic, wizardry of the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter, has to untangle itself from this burden of debt and the nonsense that has gone on in relation to the Gems Project, is now trying to sell a controlling interest in the company to a foreign firm.

What possible sense could it make for a Government to buy two run-down properties from well-connected families, plus one \$3 million ruin from the same source, then purchase two Barbadian-owned profitable businesses for \$25 million, spend untold sums of money fixing them up rendering them economically unenviable and then at the end of the day, sell the controlling interest in the company to non-nationals. Could that be an example of good financial and economic management? Who pays the cost at the end of the day?

Yet, that is what the Prime Minister is boasting about. It is to be hoped that the directors of this company have familiarised themselves with the fiduciary responsibility of the directors under the Companies Act. A word to the wise is enough.

Sir, I turn now to the St. Leonard's School. The Government did not go back out to tender for St. Leonard's School, so that a former Barbados Labour Party Cabinet minister could get a contract for \$14 million. Now, even if there was nothing wrong with that, let us assume that was all glorious, an example of probity, an example of the right thing a government should do. Let us assume that was the case. The same company that they gave the contract to was cited by the Auditor General for infelicities just like three years ago. That same company received money from the Ministry of Agriculture before the work was completed and the gentleman was hounding down public officers to be paid money before the work was completed.

You went from giving him a \$28 000 contract, three or four years ago, to a \$14 million contract in the year 2001. The Prime minister might say that he has to live. The same former Cabinet Minister and contractor is involved in even more infelicities - including horrendous cost over-runs and structural problems with the building in the Valley in St. George. The same building that we told the Honourable Member for St. George North had problems, he came in here for an additional \$900 000 to complete that project.

Ask anybody who watched that project being built what happened, the level of incompetence by that

same contractor relative to that project.

Mr. Speaker, the Barbados Labour Party will still get their gift in due season, although it might not be from the Chinese and there, Sir, it all leads ...

Aside.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I only speak English, unlike you.

Aside.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

You can interpret as you wish. I do not have to speak for your benefit. Ask somebody on your side to interpret it.

Hon. D. A. C. SIMMONS:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The Honourable Member has just implied that the Barbados Labour Party which includes Members on this side will reap some indirect gift, benefit, or bribe for infelicities in relation to a contract with the St. George Public Centre.

I would mention that is very improper and I beg to move that the Honourable Member for St. John is ordered to withdraw that, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER:

The Honourable Member for St. John, I think that you did hear what was said and I am asking you to withdraw.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker, the former Cabinet minister is a member of the BLP, a known worker and financial contributor to the BLP, a man who defends the BLP to the hilt. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I see it, at the end of the Budget speech the Prime Minister said that, I would not like to use his language, for all the work that was done, there were some people who would get their gift in due season or something so. I am saying that the BLP would get its gift in due season. That is all I am saying. Perhaps that has cleared it up for you.

5:40 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

There is a lot of money involved in these projects and the players always seem to be the same, the same faces turn up every time and their access to the Government is legendary.

Let us move on to gambling because this is another kind of example. The Honourable Member for St. Peter came to office in 1994 and found about 400 gaming machines. In his first Budget, he could not wait, he increased them to 940. That is when the country came from zero to 400, and in one fell swoop the Prime Minister almost doubled the number of slot machines in this country.

He found one lottery with two weekly draws. We now have two lotteries, and one more promised, with 44 draws a week in Barbados. Of course, the Prime Minister was not here long enough to realise this, so he now wants to rationalise a gambling mess which he created since 1994. This is a sad, sad story because it has created a handful of millionaires and a lot of pain for some pensioners and poor people in Barbados who may be addicted to gambling. We now have more slot machines in Barbados than hospital beds. We have more arcades than polyclinics. That is a testimony to the brilliant leadership of the Honourable Member for St. Peter. That is the kind of society over which he presides and to which he contributed since 1994, when he was elected.

Road works: This Government cannot even effectively phase road works in Barbados. Traffic congestion is getting worse every day. When the schools reopened in September Barbadians can imagine what mayhem will be occurring on the streets in Barbados. So the Prime Minister's solution to that is to reduce gas prices so that since people will probably be in their cars longer than they would be in their offices it will not be costly to them at the end of the day. What kind of judgement informs such incompetence, Sir?

On the issue of foreign borrowing, a lady asked on VOB one night, as I said before, whether the Prime Minister wrote the Budget or whether someone else wrote it and gave it to him. Perhaps she, like me, was looking at page 21 - it might be the same page 21 as in the previous Budget because you know it is the same thing - where the Prime Minister said and I quote:

"Neither will we seek to stimulate the economy by incurring massive deficits, financed by the printing of money nor will we seek to borrow our way forward."

Those are the words of the Honourable Member for St. Peter.

Now, who could have written that? Not the Honourable Member for St. Peter. It could not be, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Member for St. Peter went on the international market and committed Barbadians to a loan of \$200 million and put it in an account to stave off the future effects of globalisation. He is not borrowing forward.

I have said before and I repeat that if the only ingenuity the Honourable Member for St. Peter brings to public life is that when faced with an economic crisis he borrows money to put it aside, then you could as well close down the Economic Department of the University of the West Indies. I assume that the taxpayers of Barbados would have expected more creativity from the Honourable Member for St. Peter. If you are going to borrow, at least have a strategy so that your borrowing is supported by sound reforms so as to get your productive sectors going again so that you could meet those cyclical and counter-

cyclical changes. If the best we can get is that you might get a crisis so let us borrow some money and put it one side, it tells you the kind of economic scenario that we are facing in Barbados.

So the Prime Minister said he would not borrow forward but less than a year after, he borrowed forward. This Minister of Finance is the only Minister of Finance in the history of Barbados who would have borrowed forward in that way and stated that is what he was doing. As usual, the Honourable Member for St. Peter denies his own strategy but at the end of the day that that is where the high level of international reserves should come from. It would not come from any major earnings from the foreign exchange earning sectors.

The Honourable Member borrowed significant sums of money and said he was going to put it aside. He did not borrow it for specific projects, He borrowed to stave off the effects of globalisation and that would have been the highest level of foreign borrowing in one year in the history of Barbados, which then brings you to the issue of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

This House was regaled with the story about how the Prime Minister was going to an Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) meeting to fight the graduation of Barbados and some people took him seriously and did some investigating. At the point at which the Honourable Member was going to that IADB meeting, Barbados had one of the worse records in the Caribbean in relation to IADB loans.

Incompetence here in Barbados meant that millions of dollars that should have been available to this country to execute certain projects were left languishing. The Government was paying more in commitment fees to the IADB than it was getting. Eight years later, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas said we inherited that.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I am not talking about 1995, I am talking about when the Honourable Member for St. Peter went to the IADB meeting and gave the impression that he was going to fight this big issue of Barbados' graduation. When you read the statement of the director from the United States of America, the basic position that was being taken is that all of this money is being made available to countries like Barbados and basically through incompetence these loans are not being drawn down. The internal records of the IADB, the country reports and so on would support that scenario. Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago were paying more in commitment fees than they were benefiting at the time from IADB loans and the facts are there.

In relation to the Transport Board ...

Rt Hon. O. S. ARTHUR:

On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, I really regret to interrupt the Honourable Member when he is in such a fine flow but the records of the IADB would show that there was a meeting with the American directorate where he said that they opposed lending to Barbados because Barbados is seeking to put computers in every school and the United States cannot and they do not believe that Barbados should continue to borrow from the IADB to do what the United States of America cannot do. That is the record.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I thought, Sir, that the Honourable Member for St. Peter got up to tell us that the loans, in fact, were all on the way and that they were all in perfect order and that his economic expertise and ingenuity were used to ensure that we would be getting more money from the IADB.

5:50 p.m.

Tuesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

But he is worrying about what the USA is saying. We are not talking about future loans. I was talking about loans that have been approved and are supposed to be on the way but have been messed up through incompetence here in Barbados, not new loans. The Right Honourable Member for St. Peter, the knight in shining armour, had to go to Chile, or wherever the meeting was. He said in public that he had to go and fight to ensure that the USA does not do this, and anybody you ask in the IADB tells you, "We did not even know this was an agenda issue."

Look at the Transport Board, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A scandal emerged some months ago relative to the grant of a contract to supply insurance services to the Transport Board at an additional cost of a half million dollars rising to \$900 000. The relevant authority - Little Caesar, they like to call him - has refused to say anything about it. He does not owe anyone an explanation for anything he does in his Ministry.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Honourable Member, please! Are you referring to a Minister of this Honourable House?

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

If I were ...

Mr. SPEAKER:

I take it from how your sentence ended that you are referring to a Minister and I would suggest that you cannot use such terms as "Little Caesar" to refer to a Minister.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Little Caesar? I thought Caesar was a great Roman Emperor. I always thought so, Sir. If he was a little Caesar that would be good, but since you say so, I withdraw it completely and I hope you would strike it from the records, Sir. I suppose worse could be said.

The Transport Board, Sir, was not meeting its normal obligations to workers, and yet the Minister was splurging money in insurance contracts. UCAL, a company that the Government hailed as part of its economic empowerment programme, was not being paid and yet the Minister was splurging the Board's

money. Now we are hearing, not that the Minister is going to be fired, because Ministers on that side have been fired for less than that. If you insult the Leader of the Opposition you are likely to get fired. So you had better be careful! I am only warning the Honourable Member for the City, Sir. I would not warn the others because ...

For less than that, people are fired but the Honourable Member for St. Michael West Central... You cannot hear a word about that contract. When we raised it in here, the Honourable Member said: "We are going to have a full debate on Transport." Six months later, no debate. Every statement is on the front page of the newspaper. It is on television every night and it seems as though people are afraid to find out about that insurance contract and the taxpayers' money in this country. Yet the Transport Board is insolvent, has no money, has to borrow, has to refinance. At the end of the day, now, the taxpayers are hearing that in spite of all this incompetence, they might have to pay more money to travel on the bus, bus fares might go up.

In the face of all this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of crime, the Economic Report for 2000, page 77 states and I quote:

"The general level of crime rose by seven per cent from 10 199 offences in 1999 to 10 908 offences in 2000. During the year, Barbados experienced a higher incidence of crime, especially in the categories of firearm offences and drugs, including persons charged with drug-related offences."

So there has been a seven per cent increase in crime in Barbados. But someone was telling us during the course of this year, on every occasion that he could do it, that crime is on the decrease.

Hon. D. A. C. SIMMONS:

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member must speak accurately about what I say.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I said "someone".

Hon. D. A. C. SIMMONS:

I am not a fool. I have been in here 25 years so I know when you are talking about me, man.

On December 20, last year, at the opening of Port St. Charles, I gave those figures that the overall rate of crime had decreased by 7.2 per cent as a direct result of three special operations that were done in relation to drugs and I named the operations. When you excise the figures in relation to drugs from the overall figures there was a decrease of 2.5 per cent. Seven per cent was attributed largely to special operations by the Police in interdicting drugs and that has been published. It may probably be on the Government's Bench.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if I should wait for a ruling from you on that. I am not sure if it is correction, if it is an explanation, an excuse, an apologia or some sort of politico ...

Mr. SPEAKER:

The Chair understands that it is an explanation of the seven per cent and the seven per cent which you

have stated should really be two per cent.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Oh, that is your understanding, Sir? Well, I give you credit. You have now developed a level of understanding that surpasses all human beings, including me, and I credit you for it.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Please! There is no need for that.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I am not being offensive. I am saying that you have lent me a level of understanding. I never heard those words from the Honourable Member for St. Thomas so if you interpreted it that way, then something has to be wrong with me. I will sit down if the Honourable Member wants to clarify that.

Mr. SPEAKER:

The explanation given the Honourable Member ...

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, do you wish to speak and let me sit down?

Mr. SPEAKER:

No. I do not wish to speak.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

It seems so. The Honourable Member explained himself. I do not need any further explanation, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Proceed, please!

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Thank you. I quoted an Economic Report in here. I did not quote from the top of my head, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let me make that abundantly clear. I quoted a report and if there was supposed to be more information, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas had a duty to ensure that that information was in there. If not, he could say that the wicked person who wrote this report and approved it, whoever he is, has tarnished his unblemished record - if he wanted to say that, but I know he would not - as Attorney-General of this country.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Honourable Member, the Honourable Member in his explanation did explain to the House why it was seven per cent.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, I have not finished my speech. If you wish to speak instead of me, I will take my seat. I am not finished, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER:

The Chair is just trying to ...

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

That is not necessary. I understand everything. I am on my feet. He has not challenged me on what I said. He merely explained it. I need no further explanations from any quarter unless you wish me to take my seat, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Proceed, please!

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Let us understand what is happening here. I quoted from a report which says

“The general level of crime ...

[It is not talking about any interdiction of anything. I quoted from a report.]

“... rose by seven per cent, from 10 199 offences in 1999 to 10 908 offences in 2000.”

The report goes on.

“During the year Barbados experienced a higher incidence of crime especially in the categories of firearm offences and drugs, including persons charged in drug-related offences.”

Aside.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I am quoting from the Barbados Economic and Social Report 2000, chapter 5, Social Sector Development, page 77. I have had about nine interruptions in trying to deliver a Reply to a Budget. Unprecedented! And quoting from Government documents! Let me read on for clarity, not for mine, Sir.

I am very clear in my mind what we are saying on this side. Nobody is going to laugh at us and fool us about crime again. You will not be hearing any ads in the next election: “Crime is on the decrease! Crime is on the decrease!” Oh, no. That will not be the slogan of the Barbados Labour Party, not on current trends.

6:00 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Everything that we do in this society could be destroyed if this issue is not given the kind of leadership and seriousness that it needs. Imagine the kind of reports that are going to be circulated outside of

Barbados about what happened regrettably on Kadooment Day. Imagine the thousands of people in this country frighten and afraid to go about their normal, legitimate and lawful activities because of the increasing and galloping level of crime.

The Honourable Attorney-General is quite adept at explaining his version of the events. All I said was, and I repeat for the records. Someone was telling us during the year that crime is on the decrease and that prompted the Honourable Member for St. Thomas to interrupt. I did not say he was the someone but if the cap fits there is nothing I can do about that. In fact, it fits very snugly, I did not know it would fit him so well and I did not know the Honourable Member for St. Thomas would look so good in it until he explained himself to the Chamber and his explanation was taken on with such flourish by some of the Honourable Members.

It would, therefore, not surprise me if the new television advertisement for the next BLP campaign shows another convicted criminal saying "Crime is down. Crime is down!" Who is it that was telling lies and trying to fool the public?

Sir, with those statistics in mind and a 150 per cent increase in firearm offences and a 100 per cent increase in drug offences, would you believe, Sir, that against that background that brand new police vehicles, just bought the other day are waiting for brake pads and all kinds of small repairs? These vehicles were just bought recently for the Defence Force and the Police and yet they are waiting for simple and incidental repairs.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

No, the Attorney-General does not have to put on the brakes pads. Mr. Speaker, when I was Minister of Finance if somebody stubbed their toe in Barbados the blame was put on the Democratic Labour Party and the Minister and all of a sudden now, ministers are not responsible. They say that they do not fix brake pads and it is not their job. I say it is a management issue and if this is the big issue in the country that needs leadership, you give it leadership by your statements, by your actions, by your conduct, by your work, by the people who you employ and by the re-organisation of the structures to ensure that the service is effectively delivered, that is what leadership and management is about, Sir.

Can you imagine that this country borrowed millions of dollars in foreign exchange from overseas to purchase police vehicles and several of them are now languishing in a yard, resting after two or three months duty? Do you really expect me to believe all of that mock rage I heard in here yesterday about the society and all the things we need to stamp out with aggression, which means nothing?

I have heard this all before, about wrestling crime to the ground and dealing with the deviant yet, Mr. Speaker, Sir, crime is just growing like that. Barbadians feel greater fear than they ever felt in their lives about the nature of crime in this country.

Sir, there are houses being broken into every night, people being killed by stray bullets from drive-by shooting, drugs available everywhere in this country and violence marring a number of major activities. Where does the Prime Minister live? Sir, I ask again where does he live?

Look at the Barbados National Bank and the Insurance Corporation of Barbados, all of these are things we heard about in the Budget. Nothing that was said was really relevant to what is happening in this country. The Government offered shares to the public in Barbados National Bank and the Insurance of Corporation last year.

The offering has certain complications that made it less attractive to credit unions and other institutional investors despite the fact that the chairman of the Barbados National Bank Board was not only warned, but should have had the good sense, as a financial and corporate wizard, to so design that restructuring as to ensure that a fair distribution of the seats on the board would be reflected in the new configuration.

I always found that rather strange but let me go a bit further. This BNB/ICB share offer, despite the glowing praise heaped on it by the same financial expert that ran Southern Meats into the ground, has been an unmitigated failure. Sir, you can only judge whether something has failed or succeeded by the objectives that you set.

Sir, the Government put a certain number of shares on the market and only sold a fraction of those shares against a background that the Prime Minister of Barbados left no stone unturned. He visited all of the major places where Barbadians live and personally assisted in marketing those shares. He marketed to financial institutions both in Barbados and overseas, the board itself marketed it, we had a resolution in here and the Opposition did not oppose it and yet only a fraction of the shares were sold. Sir, I always felt that the sale of those shares had nothing to do with economic empowerment.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Yes, despite all that the Government was saying it had nothing to do with economic empowerment. Ultimately, the Government wanted to raise capital quickly and it was not interested in broadening the base of share ownership in Barbados.

Since the sale to Barbadians did not work, I am now predicting, and all the evidence is there in this Budget, that the Government is looking for an international strategic partner, not a Barbadian, to sell the BNB and ICB shares. In that context, Sir, it would mean this is another political and economic hoax.

Sir, another matter raised in this Budget was the town planning issue but to show you that the Prime Minister does not often live in Barbados or understand what is hurting and harming Barbadians most of all, he skirted around the issue. The Prime Minister said that he is going to make the Town Planning Department reports, appeals, applications and so on available here periodically. I can only describe all of that as empty rhetoric from a government that would not give you audited financials for Hotels and Resorts Limited, a government that will not give you audited financials for Needham's Point Development, a Government that would not give you audited financials for all of those other private companies that it owns - A whole set were formed in this country since 1994 and we cannot get any financial information on them.

The Prime Minister said: "Oh, the statements are audited so they are more rigorously analysed than even statutory corporations." Sir, that is nonsense because there is no requirement in the Laws of

Barbados for a private company to have its financial statements audited.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Yes, that is so for the publicly listed companies but I am talking about private companies. Mr. Speaker, the Government owns these companies and the Government is the sole owner of most of them. There are no financial requirements under the Companies Act that make them have audited statements. If they borrow money from the bank, they may need to have audited statements but there is no such requirement, yet we in this Parliament cannot see any of those audited financials and we are hearing about transparency and accountability and that the Town Planning Department is going to file in Parliament or wherever, a list of the applications and the approvals and that kind of thing. Sir, I know what that is all about, that is all after the horse has bolted.

I challenge the Prime Minister, if he is so interested in transparency and accountability to give us all the Town Planning applications, approvals, appeals, permissions and so on for the past five years. Provide us with the information on how you could move land from Zone 1 to Zone 2 in Holders Hill, St. James. Open up the records of the Land Valuation Department so that we can see how they could value land overlooking the west coast at West Terrace at \$2 a square foot. If you want transparency, do all of that and let me see who bought the land too.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

It is nonsense to give the impression in sonorous and altruistic terms that there is transparency. Then he comes in here presenting all of this information long after a 'For Sale' sign has been placed on our country, long after a lot of our best land has been sold and alienated forever, long after decisions were taken relative to land use in this country that need greater scrutiny, we are now hearing that these reports will be laid in this Parliament by the Ministry of Finance and the Town and Country Planning Department.

6:10 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, the Prime Minister always covers for himself. He did not include any of the other agencies; he did not say that he is going to include the Social Investment Fund; he did not say that he was going to include any of the other Ministries where there are discretions - the Immigration Department et cetera; only the Ministry of Finance and Town and Country Planning.

Sir, when the Auditor-General made his Report he had certain criticisms of the Prime Minister's

Ministry. He said that he has mandated all of the Ministers to respond to them and not one of them has responded. The Honourable Prime Minister is the only knight in shining armour who has responded. Again, he made sure that he covered himself, so that if there are any criticisms, other Members on that side would not be attracted to those criticisms.

Hon. D. A. C. SIMMONS:

On a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is only partially correct, that one has delayed responding. The Ministry of Education has responded and the Ministry of the Attorney-General's office also has a response before Cabinet, Sir.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, that is not a correction. I am interested in transparency and accountability. They have not been laid, I do know that they will ever be laid. Therefore, that is not a correction. I think that you should keep these nonsensical interventions to a minimum when I am replying as it is my lawful responsibility.

Asides.

Mr. SPEAKER:

The Honourable Member is entitled to rise on a point of order, please.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, he can only rise on a point of order if he is saying that I am misleading the House, Sir. To rise on a point of order to say that a document is there but it has not come yet cannot be a point of order, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER:

Please, please.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

I am talking about documents that need to be laid in Parliament. The Honourable Member for St. Thomas got up to say that there are some documents floating around that we have not yet seen. That cannot be a point of order because it is not correcting anything that I said. I said that the Prime Minister covered himself by making sure that his Ministry reported. He has not demonstrated that he has the ability to get the other Ministers to report.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, if you write to the Ministry of Finance to ask why you appeal against a decision was denied, they will send the file to the Attorney-General's office and tell the Attorney-General to draft the reason for them so that they do not end up coming afoul of the Administrative Justice Act.

I remember some years ago, the Honourable Member for St. Thomas and I were talking about a request made by someone for reasons for a decision. The Ministry had reasons for its decision and that application had to go the Attorney-General to frame the response. If a Ministry has made a decision that can stand up to scrutiny, there is no legal way to write that decision. If the person is not entitled and you have a discretion to grant it or not to grant it and you have a reason, state the reason. If the person is not

a national say so. If the person does not qualify because he is not a farmer say so. If the person is not a hotelier say so. Sir, what we have in Barbados is a culture of secrecy. This is not going to solve it.

Mr. Speaker, if they do not respond under the provisions of the law, which says that they must respond or you can take it to court, why does the Honourable Member for St. Peter believe that a simple declaration made in this Parliament, that the Town and Country Planning Department and the Ministry of Finance will provide such information to Parliament, is going to make for greater transparency and accountability. I do not think it will. I think that in that context, it is again one of those examples of someone being out of touch with what is happening in our country.

The worst part of it is the requirement for Town and Country Planning to lay such a report. There are Barbadians who will tell you that they have applications and appeals for development projects outstanding with the Town and Country Planning Department for long periods of time. Sir, while their applications stay there, they can hear about other appeals and applications have been fast-tracked by the Ministry, particularly those which have a foreign exchange component.

Sir, a Barbadian who has a piece of land and wants to develop it, he might have to wait for a long time because he is not bringing in any foreign exchange. There are fast-tracked investments in Barbados in which the Town and Country Planning Department has been mandated to get those applications expedited and all of the stumbling blocks in the way of certain investments have been removed.

Sir, I say it is because of foreign exchange. This Government of ours has pushed a strategy in which they have placed that 'For Sale' sign on Barbados but Barbadians cannot see it because it is not for sale to Barbadians. They need foreign exchange, that is the over-riding priority. This Government will fast-track any kind of land investment and development that brings in foreign exchange because we are obviously not earning adequate levels of foreign exchange from our productive sectors.

Of course, if the Honourable Prime Minister tells you that growth is anticipated to be one per cent and will come mainly from the non-trading sectors, you can rest assured that he will be over zealous, more so than the Deputy Prime Minister who called us paranoiac, schizophrenic and hypocritical on these issues, to ensure that Barbadians will die, whether we get to heaven or not.

Mr. Speaker, do you know how many Barbadians would have been disrespected by foreign investors and also by our Government in the past few years in matters like this? The developer at Mullins said on national television, in front of viewers, that he had the Prime Minister's blessing for that investment and for what he was undertaking there.

The developers at Sandy Lane started to build a desalination plant next to the homes of Barbadians who have been living at Sandy Lane for years. Is the Minister aware that the property owners at Sandy Lane, many of whom are Barbadian, had to put the matter in court? Is the Minister aware that the property owners were told that the reason the desalination plant was going up so fast, is that it was fast-track investment? Some of the property owners cannot get approval for renovations of their homes for many years. They as Barbadians are being disrespected by these kinds of decisions.

Mr. Speaker, how much more of our country is going to be carved up and given away in this way in this country? What sense does it make to tell Barbadians and to declare that the beaches are theirs but

the entrances to them are private and blocked or surrounded by cliffs?

6:20 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Is that what the Honourable Member for St. Peter calls heaven?

On the matter of Town and Country Planning, we would have been astonished to hear the Prime Minister state that a property known as Ocean View will be developed into a 115-room hotel, when everyone knows that by the time the required set-back from the highwater mark and the required set-back from the road is finished, there will be very little land left on which to build that 115-room hotel. Therefore, the Prime Minister needs to tell this House whether the Chief Town Planner has given permission for such a development. Has he agreed that these requirements can be disregarded, as they were in Paynes Bay, where it has been overruled by the Minister responsible, being the Prime Minister, himself? I want those questions answered. It is well known that there are family connections in this matter.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

You can ask the Honourable Member closest to you. She will reveal who are the family members.

In addition, it would not have escaped the Honourable Members and the public, that the company owned by one of the other persons involved has been facilitated in this way by Government on a previous occasion. Who recalled the permission which was granted to build right on the beach at Holetown? Additionally, this Government assisted the same company, by installing a natural gas main from the Highway at Salters, all the way up to Charles Rowe Bridge.

I presume the Honourable Members for both St. George North and South must have been begging for natural gas for years. There were vendors selling in Charles Rowe Bridge and in Ellerton, by the playing field, with no natural gas for them. They will only get natural gas when that kind of development takes place.

I, therefore, want to know what is happening. This Government could not afford to install natural gas mains for the residents in these highly developed areas, but could dig up a road and run it into that particular enterprise.

The Prime Minister has an obligation to inform this House, just frankly what permissions have been granted, or are expected to be granted, for the proposed development of the site at Ocean View Hotel. The public needs to know.

Let us also look at the sugar industry, because it also relates to this Budget and not from the

perspective of the Honourable Member for St. Peter, because you could safely ignore most of what the Honourable Member for St. Peter said, relative to the agricultural sector.

First of all, the Prime Minister started with the absurd assertion that one can design an agricultural policy in Barbados on the basis of 31,000 hectares of land being available for agriculture, which demonstrates that he does not live in Barbados, Sir. If we were to look at the last census that was undertaken, not more than 40,000 acres of land could have been found for agricultural purposes in Barbados. The last census gave us 21,000 hectares for agriculture, so where is this land? Does the Prime Minister intend to borrow that as well? Do you think that the owners of sugar land in Barbados, Sir, will plant sugar in an environment of ad hoc and open-ended planning permission being given to people to develop luxury accommodations and golf courses, et cetera? It will pay a Barbadian sugar grower to keep the land in bush and even if he was going into organic farming, he would have to purge the land for at least four to five years.

I do not think that the Honourable Member for St Peter understands what organic farming is about. I believe that the Honourable Member for St. Thomas will know that for one to get international certification, one has to purge the land and has to make sure that no chemicals have been used on it for at least four to five years. Therefore, the policy that the Prime Minister has announced yesterday, is so forward-looking that it cannot take place for another four to five years. If one wants forward-looking policies, that is obviously one of them. It is looking so far forward, that by then the agricultural sector in Barbados would be dead. Why would a farmer bother to spend \$5 000 on any initiatives outlined in the Budget, when he could get \$160 000 an acre, if it was approved for residential development, and more if it is for villas or other tourism developments. There are one-acre lots opposite St. John Parish Church, selling at \$160 000. That is a fact. So why would a farmer bother to spend \$5 000, \$10 000, or \$15 000 in an investment, where if he were to wait for 20 years and then sold it, he would be better off.

All of the other statements on agriculture and, in particular on sugar, are worthless in the context of a sector that is dying and it might be too late in relation to the sugar growers. What the Prime Minister was talking about yesterday was the price for the 2000 crop. Then we heard about the levels of local consumption of sugar and he included the amount which is used by the soft drinks producers as part of the figure for local consumption.

The Honourable Member for St. Peter cannot force the soft drink producers to buy local sugar, and they are not going to buy it at the current prices. So that again was a complete absurdity calling into question the whole reason why we are voluntarily requesting a reduction in the sugar quota, because all of it has been based on false, wrong premises. I do not know where they have come from, Sir, but it is something that the Government needs to clarify and very soon, because there is confusion on top of confusion. If there are no clear land use policies, no clear policies on the sugar industry, there would be no agriculture and it is as simple as that.

I am not getting into the Bulkeley Factory issue, because the Honourable Member for St. George South, my very good friend, said that they will close Bulkeley over his dead body. My grandfather was a pan-boiler there and he has already died, so that my direct connection with Bulkeley died then. I do not have the same kind of sentimental feelings as the Honourable Member for St. George South has, except to say that there are still a large number of persons from St. John, who work at both Bulkeley and Andrews Factories, who are obviously going to be affected by the reduction of the work week. The

Prime Minister is cutting down significantly and when one hears that they will be absolved elsewhere, they will be absolved in the context of working for less hours in the new arrangement. Therefore, at the end of the day, those arrangements cannot be of any benefit to them.

In relation to tourism, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our major foreign exchange earner is in a complete mess and will take far more than just throwing a few million dollars into the Barbados Tourism Authority to put the industry back on track. In any event, I am not sure that the \$6 million is just additional expenditure on promotion, or whether it has been realized from savings in relation to cut-backs in Europe and in the United States.

I hate to do this Sir, but I need to quote from a memo from the Director of Sales and Marketing in North America to the acting President and the former acting Vice President Marketing.

6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Sir, let me clarify it all, to show you the mess we are in. This is a memo from the recalled Director of Marketing and Sales in North America, to the acting President and the former acting Vice President Marketing. This is the kind of institutional confusion at the Board of Tourism. There is no CEO and that was a big issue in here. The Honourable Member for the City arranged the team. When she brought in these new CEOs, she said that you cannot have an institution functioning like this, and she put on her international voice, and then she appointed the great persons but for months you do not have a CEO. The Honourable Member for St. Peter, it appears is not living in Barbados so he does not know what is happening.

Aside.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

The subject is Project Reallocation. The memo is dated July 06, 2001.

“Further to our meetings in Barbados last week and your subsequent correspondence of June 28, we have identified US\$775 000 in the marketing budget to be reallocated to television advertising. This leaves a shortfall of US\$725 000 in the Marketing Committee’s target of US\$2.6 million television budget.”

Sir, then this thing actually goes on to set out all of the problems that would be associated with the reallocation of the money within the Board.

Aside.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

It can be laid. That is not a problem, since I quoted from it, I have to lay it.

“The future of the Barbados SuperSaver, QTC and Area Representative programs was discussed at the Marketing Committee meeting of June 26. The Area Representative system has already been adversely affected by the cut to the regional budgets and will be further dismantled if we cut again.”

The Government was cutting the budget in July and the Prime Minister has the temerity to come to this House in August, less than a month or two days more than a month after this memo was written, to tell us that you added an additional \$6 million, against a background of cuts. The cuts were not in Europe because we understand the money is to be spent in the US market. This memo is talking about cuts in that market and yet we are supposed to believe that this is financial wizardry.

It concludes:

“While the enthusiasm for allocating significant funds to television advertising is understandable, the wisdom of doing so at the expense of basic necessities is questionable.”

Sir, you have mass confusion. The people who are actually running the programme, already design and costed, are being asked to reallocate. They doubt that it can work. They doubt that it can work so what benefit can you have at the end of the day from this kind of mass confusion?

There has been no CEO for nearly a year. The acting Vice President has been shuffled around, now staff from overseas are being brought home for no clear reason. It takes months for a new manager in a market to become effective. The morale of the staff of the Tourism Authority has never been worst, with uncertainty as to who will have a job tomorrow.

Previously the BTA was run by a board which knew nothing about tourism, now all the decisions are made by a small clique of hoteliers who tell the professional staff what to do and it is all too often for the benefit of a few. The Minister has promised time and time again, to bring a new organisation, but apart from telling us he will be going to Cabinet about this and about that, nothing has been done and he does not know what to do.

Barbados has today, 20 per cent less hotel rooms than it had in 1980. Yet the Prime Minister tells us that the reconstruction of the Hilton Hotel has been delayed yet again and will probably not start until one year after it was proposed to have been started. Again, we have to ask, why did they knock it down.

Sir, industry and international business is a very important area. We would have heard much from the Minister of Industry and International Business about Barbados holding its own in the international marketplace. I am going to quote now, Sir, from the BIDC's own internal performance review. This is quoting from the Minister's entity, the Barbados Investment and Development Corporation, to show you why we will not achieve 3 per cent growth. Despite all the Prime Minister has said, this will give you an indication of what is happening in the offshore sector as well.

I am quoting from the document, Sir.

“A review of the Corporation’s performance during the period reflected the difficulties being experienced by businesses. In general, the target proved challenging based on recent experiences. The most encouraging performances were registered in certified exports where 92.3 of the maximum \$125.1 million target was set, was achieved. Rent collections, were 85.1 per cent of the \$4.9 million maximum target set was achieved. The range of local investment was lower than last year and foreign investment also trailed for the comparative period. Local firms for the most part remained cautious with figures indicating sustained attempts to trim operations. This is reflected in a reduction in numbers employed across several sectors.”

This is the BIDC, a key component in the employment strategy.

“The level of employment was also affected by company closures in the garment, furniture and information services sectors.”

Meanwhile, they then go on to say that conscious of the difficulties, the Government sought to ensure efforts at retooling and re-engineering. They talk about the Industrial Investment and Employment Fund, which has a capitalisation of \$25 million, announced by the Prime Minister in May.

“This programme is aimed at the development of an entrepreneurial class and should have a positive impact on the investment climate but with a lagged effect.”

The precise point that we are making, Sir, that many of the initiatives announced in here, today will have a time lag and it cannot change the growth targets significantly for the next fiscal year.

Sir, I will give you an example of what is happening in the key indicators.

The corporation effort to establish six new foreign- owned enterprises during the first half of this year, were scarcely constrained by development in the international business sector, as well as structural issues in the local sector. There was a noticeable decrease in the number of evaluation visits to Barbados by clients interested in establishing information technology and manufacturing operations.

We just heard in this Budget from the Prime Minister that there is full competition in the telecommunications sector and it appeared as though there were all of these clients waiting to come to Barbados to set up operations. The BIDC report seems to suggest something completely different.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a decline in the number of incorporations and registrations in the financial services sector, attributable to a slow-down in the economies of North America and the UK.

The unresolved issue of the harmful taxation raised by the OECD is suspected of having a retarded effect and high telecommunications rates locally, have been consistently reported to be a major issue among prospective investors.

The demonstration effect of what the OECD did has already taken root. Despite the valiant efforts of Barbados, nobody doubts that there is always a demonstration effect. If it is sent abroad that offshore activity is frowned upon, there are some people who are not going to get involved. It has an automatic demonstration effect and we have warned the Government about this effect.

Of the five eminent new companies started for the beginning of the second quarter of this year, the quarter from March to June, only one became operational. This brought the number of new foreign companies registered for 2001-2002, far below the target of six. Sir, I could go on to outline the lagging nature of investment, the lagging nature of BIDC certified exports, the lagging nature of new investment in Barbados. All of this is part of the record of this Government.

Sir, it seems as though the BIDC did not bring this information to the attention of the Right Honourable Member for St. Peter and, therefore, he would have constructed a Budget on a background of information that was clearly not correct.

Likewise in the telecommunications sector, budget after budget, then you had a Green Paper. The debate started on the Green Paper, it stopped. Cable and Wireless laid off two hundred and fifty people, again a sector in complete disarray with no direction.

6:40 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

Meanwhile in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) you can see a creative attempt to find a sensible solution to telecommunications problems, that eluded the genius of the Honourable Member for St. Peter and, his chief lieutenant, the Honourable Member for Christ Church East.

I want now to move in terms of issues to the substantive matter of taxation. I heard the Honourable Member for St. Peter, in fact, it was not in his text, he moved it in at a rather late stage in the debate, commenting about the Democratic Labour Party and taxation. Mr. Speaker, I feel very confident when speaking about issues of taxation because the Democratic Labour Party removed those iniquitous levies. We did not get any deductions. Levies were taken off the top of your income. The Barbados Labour Party introduced all kinds of levies in this country; health levy, transport levy and employment levy. It was the Democratic Labour Party that had to eliminate those levies and restructure the tax systems.

Asides.

Mr. D. J. H. THOMPSON:

The point is they were removed. Look at the tax effort of 1993/94 and compare it to what is happening in the Barbados economy now. The Honourable Member for St. Peter has no proud record. Let us go back to what he said in 1994 because he often forgets what he said. I am quoting from the January to June 1994 House of Assembly Debates. That was when even on his figures, the tax burden in Barbados was lower than it is now. Even if he does not accept the 40 cents in the dollar, he said he does not accept that, he has not given a basis that, to my mind, is convincing. At page 4767, even if he goes on those figures, this is what the Prime Minister said

“Now, we feel, Mr. Speaker, that tax reform in Barbados must be guided by something broader than

that for this country is overtaxed to begin with.”

Now, Sir, according to his figures in 1994, the tax revenue to Growth Domestic Product (GDP) at market prices was 27 per cent. In the year 2000, it is 30.6 per cent. I will continue to quote, Sir,

“If our tax reform is guided only by the principle of tax neutrality; that is changing the composition of taxes so that at the end of the day the new taxes give rise to the same amount of revenue as the old taxes, if you accept as we accept and the Government accepts, Sir, that the country is already overtaxed, tax neutrality, as a principle only means that the Government is giving the people of the country the very simple choice as between being beaten by a bull pistol as distinct from being beaten by a dog whopper.”

So when the tax effort was 27 cents in the dollar, he said it was a bull pistol and a dog whopper.

“It is a simple choice, either you get beaten by a bull pistol or you get beaten by dog hunter.”

He then changed it.

“That is all it means.”

That is when, as I said, as a percentage of the GDP at market prices, the tax efforts were lower than they are now. So if it was a bull pistol, then it is crushing and destroying Barbadians now but the Honourable Member for St. Peter seems to forget all of that.

As I said at the beginning of my speech today, yesterday’s Budget has nothing to do with a strategy to restructure the economy of Barbados and it has nothing to do with providing a vision for the future. It has a more sinister political design which should not be ignored. Watch it unfold over the next few months. The real story, Sir, has not come out yet. This is a side show the Minister of Finance is bringing. He had a Budget just ten months ago which was supposed to be so visionary and so on and now he has to bring another one ten months later. I would not say there is something up his sleeve but there is something somewhere that the Honourable Member for St. Peter is concealing.

A phrase which is attributed to Winston Churchill when he commented on Stanley Baldwin’s Government comes to mind when I think of this Government and I quote.

“The Government simply cannot make up their minds or they cannot get the Prime Minister to make up his mind. So they go on in strange paradox, deciding only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all powerful to be impotent.”

It often takes time, Sir, for the impact of a political drift to be felt. The last two years have been wasted years in terms of our national development. We must not, therefore, waste time on political stunts and side shows. The Prime Minister of Barbados has to decide whether he wants to play the role of an international personality because Barbados is too small a state for his ego, or spend the time giving hands-on attention to dealing with problems in Barbados. He has regurgitated the same ideas over and over but is presiding over a situation in which everything takes forever and nothing works.

One day, Sir, Barbadians are going to wake up and realise that it is past midnight, that they golden

carriage is only a pumpkin and their stately horses are only rats. They will find that their glass slipper will not fit and that the Honourable Member for St. Peter is no Prince Charming.

I thank you, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. D. A. C. SIMMONS:

Sir, I was looking to see if we could make any adjustment in the times that I have circulated but it does not make any difference. Therefore, I beg to move that that House be now suspended until 7:45 p.m. this evening.

Rt. Hon. O. S. ARTHUR:

I beg to second that.

The question that the House be now suspended until 7:45 p.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER suspended the Sitting accordingly.

6:50 p.m.

Tuesday, August 09, 2001

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER:

This Sitting is resumed.

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY:

Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in this debate to say that I believe that it is a distinct honour. We were treated yesterday with a truly comprehensive and creative set of programmes and policies, which are designed to stimulate our economy in the short and medium term and designed to reposition Barbados' economy, given the fact that we find ourselves in a global economy which has been experiencing tremendous difficulties within the last few months. Indeed, talk of the downturn in the US economy is widely debated. The Japanese economy has not recovered for a long time and the South Asian economies are all going back into some form of turbulence again as well as the other emerging markets in Latin America and we here in the Caribbean have seen some of our neighbours also begin to feel the pinch of these difficulties.

In addition to that downward trend on a global level, Sir, we find ourselves preparing for entry, as the Prime Minister has indicated in the last few years, in a set of international trading arrangements, which is going to change completely how we do business in Barbados and what products in terms of goods and services we can effectively sell as well as what we have to let into our markets, come 2005. Therefore, the strategic objectives, as outlined by the Prime Minister yesterday, are: the stimulation of the economy in the short term and the repositioning of Barbados' economy given those global and regional

circumstances as well as the new terms of international trade that we would have to face.

Sir, in those circumstances, the Prime Minister sought to outline very clearly a set of programmes which dealt with each of our productive sectors: agriculture, in particular, manufacturing, tourism and the international financial services sector. But he did not just stop there. He also spoke to the issue of our human resources development both in terms of traditional education as well as in terms of the non-traditional forms of sports and culture.

Mr. Speaker, after presenting a set of programmes and policies for over two and a half hours, we were left today to be entertained by the Leader of the Opposition who, in two and a half hours, neither spoke on the programmes for restructuring of agriculture as to whether the incentives designed in order to reposition a cotton industry in Barbados are appropriate; as to whether the acreage set out for food security in Barbados was a proper goal and whether we could attain it; as to whether the other incentives that were designed to reposition other elements of agriculture could, in fact, meet that demand or as to whether in tourism the rate of return, the concerns that have been expressed by investors over the years, were now being met by the new incentives the Prime Minister has allowed in the soon to come Sustainable Tourism Act or as to whether the Government's achievement of the tourism sector as a truly all-embracing hospitality sector was in fact appropriate in these circumstances.

Neither did we hear from the Leader of the Opposition whether other incentives put in place in relation to the establishment of an endowment fund for sports and arts so that young Barbadians who may wish to use their creative talents in a way that would give them a comparative advantage either on the regional or global stage, whether those were appropriate in terms of building a new productive sector while taking care of the individual needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens. None of that we heard in here today. Instead, Sir, we were treated to a range of ad hominem attacks on Ministers, people not even sitting in this Chamber. We were treated, Sir, to all kinds of innuendo and rumour. Indeed, Sir, it is fair to say that the Leader of the Opposition was fuelled by innuendo and buttressed by rumour. When one listens to him this evening one clearly understands why it is he is the leader of a decimated political party, one that was previously the Party of the majority in this country.

I believe that we have a serious duty here as parliamentarians and I have said in this Chamber before that Barbados has in modern history been generally well served by the fact that both Government and Opposition have been willing to engage in public debate to be able to improve the quality of life of the average Barbadian. I must confess, Mr. Speaker, that having listened yet again to the Leader of the Opposition, I truly am coming to the view that the Leader of the Opposition is interested only in a form of politics that is as relevant to Barbados today as riding on a horse and buggy on the ABC Highway. I dare say it is as dangerous to the welfare of the average Barbadian as riding that horse and buggy is for that person on the highway.

Sir, we have serious issues to confront in this country. This is not the first time that we will have to look at diversification economically or to look at restructuring this economy. Until the 1960's, agriculture was by far the bedrock of this economy. We saw in the early sixties the beginning of light manufacturing and the introduction of guesthouse tourism and that increased in the mid-eighties to the late eighties, when we saw the advent of the international services sector. What was important on each occasion is that the Barbadian Government and its people geared themselves for the environment within which they had to function. Now there is absolutely no doubt that with the World Trade Organisation in

place and new trading arrangements, how we treat agriculture and how we treat certain manufacturing will of necessity change, given the fact that our markets are going to have to open up.

We also have to prepare for the fact of the advent of the single market and economy within CARICOM. It is going to mean that there are going to be even greater benefits and greater things that we are going to have to give up in the context of the Caribbean Community than we gave up at the World Trade Organisation because of that single market and economy.

It means, therefore, that the average Barbadian producer whether in agriculture, whether in manufacturing or whether in the services sector has to be that much more competitive if he or she is going to survive. What this Government has sought to do is to examine those things, which right now prevent them from being able to reach that level of competitiveness, that are within the control of Government because some of the things are within the control of the particular firm or employee.

We tried, therefore, to create an environment by removing those obstacles. Take manufacturing, for example, Sir. We have set up a \$25 million fund which is designed as articulated by the Prime Minister to help the manufacturers retool, not to go out of business but to be able to retool to make their processes of production more competitive and more efficient. We have to determine, Sir, where those new areas that we can rely on in the economy are going to form but part and parcel of the successful equation as understood by the Prime Minister is of necessity going to be the people who work in those enterprises.

It is no sense saying that we want to develop further the international financial services sector and we do not have Barbadians who are properly equipped to work in that sector or the informatics sector. Part and parcel, therefore, of what we have been trying both in the Ministry of Education and indeed in the Ministry of Labour with the training programmes is to start adequately to prepare Barbadians to be able to man these positions and to be able to open firms so that they can create the wealth which would help sustain this country on a developmental trajectory. There is no doubt, also, Sir, that in the world in which we live that access to money to borrow is less and less available to us on a multilateral basis. Other than the Inter-American Development Bank, we have no options available to us in terms of capital borrowing from the international and financial institutions. As you see, we have had to go to the capital markets. Fortunately for us we got a good rating which has meant that we got reasonably good interest as well. Our rating is now on par with that of China, a prospect many of us may not have envisioned ten to fifteen years ago.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to be successful we have to be able to ensure that we have the human resources, the people who can rise to the challenge that is necessary in order for us to earn our way. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a University College of Barbados. The Leader of the Opposition did not even address that. He was so consumed with innuendo and rumour that he did not even make contact with the Budget.

7:55 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. M. A. MOTTLEY:

We have come to the point in our educational system where we recognise that unless we can put a strategic response to the reforms that we are putting in place at the primary and secondary level with EduTech, one that will allow us to train persons to man the new set of industries or the old industries which are operating in a different way, that we will not be able to reap the benefits.

Sir, a university college will have as its focus arts and sciences, technology, services, education teacher training and nursing. We have come to a point as a Government where we believe that we have a responsibility to train people beyond the national need. The recent experiences of persons coming to our shores seeking to attract persons to work either in North America or the United Kingdom is ample reason why it is imperative that we continue what is an old strategy that Barbados be a net exporter of labour in critical services like health and education.

We also feel very strongly, Mr. Speaker, that part and parcel of the restructuring into a single tertiary institution will give us the opportunity to maximise the resources which we have in terms of financial resources and human resources. It is not an easy thing for us to find three different sets of leaders to man each aspect of management of a tertiary institution at that level while, in truth and in fact, a single tertiary institution will be no greater than a small college in other parts of the world and, therefore, capable of doing the same task given the budget that we have.

Sir, we have gone even further. We have recognise that in today's world tertiary education more and more is going to be delivered on the basis of structured partnerships. What do I mean by that, Mr. Speaker? We have a hospitality faculty, a faculty in health services et cetera. Barbados may not necessarily have all of the resources within this island to be able to deliver all the types of training that we need to deliver but one of the advantages of the technology improvements is that we now have the capacity to be able to go into partnership with institutions across the globe. For example, the Barbados Community College has a partnership with the Carnegie Mellon University to deliver software programmes at the technology centre at the Harbour. We are soon going to be carrying before Cabinet a proposal from Mount St. Vincent University to offer programmes in special education with Erdiston College to Barbadians where previously we were not offering a Master in Special Education. The distance technology has allowed us to be able to look at both joint development of forces, joint certification and joint teaching of those course. More and more we are going to be able to offer a wider range of tuition in a broad set of areas to be able to equip the needs of this new economy.

Mr. Speaker, part and parcel of the restructuring of the Barbadian economy also requires that we have a mechanism which can appropriately assesses the value of your certificate, degree or diploma or whatever training you have embarked on and particularly in the context of a single market and economy where there is likely to be free movement of labour and free movement of skills. A person who goes to school in Barbados and get a diploma from the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, finds himself living in St. Lucia or Jamaica needs now to have that qualification assessed in order to be paid at the appropriate level. The converse of that is also true. A person coming here who may have studied somewhere else needs not to have that qualification assessed so as to determine at what level that person should be paid particularly in the public service where the requirements and qualifications are rigid.

Sir, we believe that the appropriately entity to do that is a national accreditation board which will seek not only to evaluate and determine the equivalence of qualification but it will also act in the interest of

providing and ensuring quality assurance of those educational institutions selling their services within our country.

Sir, a lot of young people and older people today do computer programming or computer classes and at the end of the day when they want to apply to the public service that qualification is not admissible as a valid qualification yet they had to pay eight hundred dollars to study.

We feel, therefore, that the establishment of a national accreditation board can put in place a mechanism which can adequately deal with those inefficiencies that now exist in the context of our labour market and also in the tertiary education realm because not only do they affect the levels of pay but they can also affect whether you want to enter school to study something else and whether what you have is an appropriate qualification to allow you to be able to access that course.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is firm in its commitment in putting in place those things which are necessary to create the new economy within Barbados. The Prime Minister's speech yesterday cannot be seen in a vacuum. Indeed, over the last eight years he sought to do a number of things which have strengthened the state of this economy to deal with the productive sectors and to increase the level of capital formation.

Sir, I believe that all of us in this Honourable Chamber can be in agreement that the macro economic fundamentals of the Barbados economy are sound. We have run a relatively small deficit. We continue to ensure that our monetary policy response to whether there is liquidity in the market or whether there is not and how we need to be able to spur economic growth in this economy. We ensure, Sir, that at the end of the day, when there is need to tighten the belt a little bit, we do so as in 1998, when we had a large deficit and the economy was overheating. We have taken unemployment down to the lowest ever of 9.3 per cent. Unemployment in Germany which is a developed country is 9 per cent. I do not think that we realise we have brought unemployment from as high as 25 per cent at the beginning of the 1990's.

The Leader of the Opposition is focussing on the fact that a thousand people have been sent home but, Mr. Speaker, you and I know that the newspapers unfortunately print how many people get sent home but they do not print how many people get jobs neither do they print how many new entities are opening and hiring people.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I am not prepared to question figures released by the Central Bank of Barbados because these institutions must be preserved in terms of their integrity or else this society will begin to suffer.

Sir, Barbados' inflation is 2.5 per cent while other countries are struggling to achieve single digit inflation and even with the introduction of a value-added tax we have managed to keep our inflation at a very low level.

8:05 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY:

Sir, one of the reasons is the price of oil, which went as high as US\$33 a barrel at one point. What has the Prime Minister said in this Budget? We have been cognizant of the fact that now that the price of oil has dropped and that we have been able to negotiate a better rate with the Trinidadians that we need to be able to reduce the price of energy in this country. Hence, everyone who has to buy gasoline in Barbados from next Monday, will pay 80 cents less a gallon and 42 cents less a gallon for diesel.

Mr. Speaker, the Government could have decided to hold back some of that but we have passed on all of the benefits to the consumer and also to those producers who rely on energy to produce their goods and services. We believe that in turn, it would help to spur the short-term economic goal that we need to maintain, hopefully, that would reach a level beyond the projected 1.7 per cent at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that part and parcel of attaining the success in this economy that we need to attain, requires the commitment of all levels of Barbadians and the confidence of Barbadians. We have shown as a people that we have it within us. We have shown as a people that when it is necessary to ease or tighten our belts we do so. When the Prime Minister spoke to the people about increasing the level of status, they did so. Hence, the reduction in interest rates because of the excess liquidity in the system which was largely motivated by the level of savings in the system.

I believe that we have to understand those other things that will help make this new economy work.

This Government since 1999, passed the Fair Trade Commission Act, designed not only to deal with utility regulations but also to deal with competition policy and consumer interest. The Minister of Commerce would speak on those matters tomorrow and would let us know that within a short period of time, those Bills will be before this Chamber.

We have brought the Small Business Act, designed to be able to offer a separate rate of taxation to small businesses in this country at a rate of 25 per cent instead of 40 per cent and given them a whole range of incentives for market research and other areas of product information.

We have recently brought before this Chamber a Securities Act to begin to restructure and expand Barbados' capital market, so that we can look at alternative sources of funding for investments and businesses in this country, rather than loan financing or dealing with the context of a family who may have a limited resource base but seeks to mobilise the national web to help build this country in a transparent and functioning way.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that these are the kinds of things that are necessary to help change the structure of this economy if we are to survive in the new world, with new trading goals and new expectations from us. These must go hand in hand with attitudes, values and participation by the average Barbadian. Perhaps, we need as a Government to do a better job in selling some of the policies because when CBC did a survey, night before last, of persons in Bridgetown, asking them what they expected from the Budget, those persons indicated that they were hoping that there was something in the Budget for the small businessman.

There are very few countries any part of the developing world that has put a separate legislative and fiscal regime in place for small businesses. People are still asking for it and, therefore, it means that we may have to increase the level of public relations as to what that offers, as well as to work with them but the opportunities are there.

There is one matter that I would like to address before I sit and that matter has to do with the St. Leonard's School. The Leader of the Opposition once again, buttressed by rumour, fuelled by innuendo, sought to impute in here that we gave a contract to former Cabinet Minister who was incapable of doing the work and further and that the Barbados Labour Party in due course reaped some reward for that awarded contract.

Mr. Speaker, I do not take likely to that allegation and I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition that he better not find himself outside of Parliament and repeat those words, because he knows that he would find himself in the law court. This Government articulated, through me three weeks ago, without being prompted by the Opposition what was the situation at St. Leonard's School. We did not wait for the Opposition to accuse somebody of any impropriety.

I came to this Chamber, the highest court in this land, and I voluntarily revealed all of the facts relating to the St. Leonard's School. I indicated then, as I do now, that the Special Tenders Committee awarded the contract to a company based in Trinidad called China Jiangsu Incorporated. That company China Jiangsu accepted the award of the tender, and for three months we in the Ministry of Education as well as that company operated under the belief that they were going to do the contract at St. Leonards's School. After three months, Sir, they bid bond expired and when asked to renew their bid bond, China Jiangsu indicated that they were no longer interested in the award of the contract.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make another point. If it were the intention of this Government or of me as Minister to give a contract to a former Barbados Labour Party Minister, then we would have gone to Cabinet to vary that award of the contract instead of giving it to China Jiangsu. I want to repeat it, Mr. Speaker, because it was open to me to refer the matter to the Minister of Finance and to have the matter go to Cabinet to have a former Cabinet Minister be awarded the contract.

We did not do that, Mr. Speaker. We accepted the recommendation of the Special Tenders Committee to award the Trinidad company, China Jiangsu. When China Jiangsu indicated that they would no longer renew the bid bond, it then came for us to determine whom it would be awarded to or whether it would go back out to tender.

Sir, St. Leonard's School has been waiting to have this construction completed for almost three years. Do you know why I am angry, Sir? The Leader of the Opposition has been part and parcel of a group of few people who have been on the Government's back about the urgency of completing the work. In spite of the fact that the people who were financing the project, the Caribbean Development Bank, indicated to us that they would accept the next lowest conforming bidder, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition would now want to come in here and tell us that we should go back out to tender, which would add at least another six to nine months to the project, so that instead of starting the project last month, as we were able to do, the project would be started in 2002.

Sir, I simply want to say that I hold no grief for the former Cabinet Minister, China Singh Corporation

or China Jiangsu Corporation or any of them. A tender went out, the people who were awarded the tender eventually refused it, the other Chinese company who would have been second in line in terms of the quantum of money bid, became a subject for investigation because of circumstances which I have already revealed to this Chamber. It was the advice of the Attorney-General's Chamber that in the interest of public policy, they are not considered for the award at this time.

Sir, the Caribbean Development Bank indicated that they would be happy with the next lowest conforming bid, which was PCC Steel Construction. Sir, that is the company of a former Cabinet Minister. Mr. Speaker, I do not know that the former Cabinet Minister is running the company but he is the owner. The Prime Minister said in an aside this evening that the fact that he is a former Cabinet Minister cannot be grounds not to be considered him for the award of a contract.

In those circumstances, Sir, all we are interested in is that the project comes in within Budget and on time. The project has approximately 13 months to be completed and if within those 13 months things have not happened, then the Government knows what its options are. The Leader of the Opposition would want to create an illusion of mischief and the smoke herrings which he referred to again this year and that should constitute the sum total of his Budget reply.

Sir, the Honourable Member started from personalised toilet paper and ended up talking about Cinderella and a Kadooment Budget. I can only suggest to him, that his most appropriate profession at this time, is, perhaps, to resign as Leader of the Opposition and take up a career either as a calypso commentator or as a fairy tale writer, because that is what we have been hearing in here today.

I thank you.

8:15 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Mr. SPEAKER:

The Honourable Member for St. Philip South.

Hon. A. P. WOOD:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me the greatest pleasure to speak in support of the Financial Statement and Budgetary Proposals delivered by the Prime Minister and the Honourable Member for St. Peter.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin the right way by thanking the good people of St. Philip South for sending me to this Honourable House to speak on their behalf and I do not intend to disappoint them in this Honourable House.

I would also like to thank the good people of St. Philip South for the good work and cooperation that they have given to me over the last 2½ years.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the meat of my presentation, it is incumbent on me to respond to some of the things said by the Opposition Leader, the Member for St. John. One of the things that disturbs me

greatly, Mr. Speaker, was when he said that for the last 2½ years the Prime Minister has been presiding over the weakest Cabinet that he can recall.

Mr. Speaker, when I heard these things coming from the Honourable Member and Member for St. John - and I did not hear any such disparaging remarks coming from the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, because he knows better - one, it does not surprise me, and two, the reason why it does not surprise me is because he knows very well what a weak Cabinet is.

The good people in St. Philip South, Mr. Speaker, and indeed, throughout the length and breadth of Barbados, will know that nothing can be further than the truth.

We have seen progress in this country, and my constituency not being left out, Mr. Speaker, which is indicative of a Cabinet that is functioning and, indeed, very well.

Yesterday the Honourable Member for St. Peter, informed this Honourable House that we have experienced eight consecutive years of real economic progress. He also said, Sir, that notwithstanding the fact that there has been an economic slow down so far for 2001, we can still expect real economic growth this year.

When I looked at the performance of the Government in the last 2½ years, where the Honourable Member for St. John refers to the weakest Cabinet, and I make a comparison between that and the early 1990's, the period for which he was Minister of Finance, then you can be the judge of the situation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, during that period there was unprecedented high rates of unemployment. We had social and economic ruin in this country. We had untold suffering to the unfortunate. We had negligible foreign reserves, and this country became the captive of the IMF.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, as I said, you can be the judge of the situation and tell me, which era had the worst Cabinet.

In his long, drawn out, and basically useless presentation, the Honourable Member for St. John did not make real contact with the Budgetary measures which were presented yesterday and I can understand why. That was because the Prime Minister was very calculating, very deliberate, and clear about what he was presenting to this Honourable Chamber to take this Barbadian economy forward. The Honourable Member for St. John mentioned that the interventionist policies by the Prime Minister came too late. What he did not tell us, Mr. Speaker, was whether or not those interventionist policies would have been impactful. We know that careful thoughts have gone into the preparation of those measures and also, Mr. Speaker, that if the right implementation mechanisms are determined that, of course, those policies and programmes will restore this Barbadian economy to that path of sustained economic growth to the order of three per cent that we had set for ourselves.

Therefore, I want to use this occasion, Mr. Speaker, to thank the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and the others on the Back Bench, for the real progress that this economy has made in the last 2½ years, and for the benefits which my good constituents in St. Philip South have been able to derive.

Let me take a few minutes to review the Barbadian economy, because I need to put the remainder of my speech in its proper perspective. As I said earlier, we have experienced real economic growth for eight consecutive years. Last year, Mr. Speaker, real GDP grew by an estimated 3.6 per cent.

This rate of growth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in excess of the 3 per cent which this administration has set for itself as a sustainable rate of growth and it is in excess of the 2.3 per cent we had experienced in 1999. What was particularly important about that growth in 2000, was that it was led by the trading sectors.

When one hears the Honourable Member for St. John speaking, one will get the impression that the pattern of growth in this country is so unstructured and unbalanced that it is consistently led on an annual basis by the non-trading sector. But that was not the case last year, Mr. Speaker; it was led mainly by the trading sectors.

Asides.

Hon. A. P. WOOD:

Mr. Speaker, once again, the economy experienced low inflation. We had an increase to over \$1.1 billion in the levels of foreign reserves and Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the Honourable Member for St. Peter said yesterday, that is in excess of 26 weeks of imports. We have an import cover in this country, Mr. Speaker, that is second to none.

8:25 p.m.

Wednesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. A. P. WOOD:

The economy experienced increased levels of savings. There were sterling investment, robust capital investment declining levels of poverty and strong consumer and investor confidence. To sum it all up, when we take a look at the statistics, the fiscal position of Barbados was very helpful.

Mr. Speaker, the economic fundamentals, let me use the phrase of the previous speaker, in this country, were of such that at this juncture, the Minister of Finance is able to recognise the state of affairs in the regional and international economies. Sir, what we need to do is to reposition and retool the productive sectors of this country so that we are in a position to bring to this country and to this Honourable Chamber, an economic programme that speaks to the core issues and to provide a level of vitalisation in the productive sectors that are required at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, once again, when the Honourable Member for St. John comes to this Honourable Chamber and he speaks about agriculture, one less informed would tend to conclude that we, at the Ministry of Agriculture, are doing precious little.

This is the record, Mr. Speaker, and it is contained right here in the Economic and Social Report for 2000. In the year 2000, sugar production rose by 9.8 per cent to 58 400 tonnes, continuing the positive growth in sugar output of 10.9 per cent recorded in 1999. In the case of non sugar, output increased by 5.8 per cent, compared to 4.3 per cent in 1999. There was a reversal in the fortunes experienced across the main non sugar agricultural sub-sectors. Sir, we had growth in the sector in the year 1999 and in the year 2000.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the good economic performance that this country has experienced in the last eight years, we cannot afford to rest on our laurel. The Prime Minister was very explicit yesterday, in pointing out to this House that the times ahead are very challenging. Sir, we need to face this head on and we need to structure an economic programme, one that is grounded in relevance and one that would secure the gains of the Barbadian economy well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, the evidence for the first half of the year 2001, indicates that there has been a slow down in economic activities in Barbados. However, this economy is still expected to record its ninth consecutive year of growth. We need to examine these Budgetary proposals and evaluate them in the context of a changing, regional, hemispheric and international economic environment. We need to keep this economy on a sustained growth path. The Prime Minister reminded us yesterday, that the target which we have set for ourselves, as a sustained growth path is three per cent and that is what we are aiming for at this time.

Sir, this administration has a moral, political, and economic duty to reposition this economy by focusing on strategies, programmes and policies to deal with the problems confronting the productive sectors. Sir, this Budget is all about devising a set of policies, strategies and programmes to get the productive sectors going and to make these sectors more regionally and internationally competitive.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, I am quite convinced, through the measures the Prime Minister presented yesterday, that this country will benefit tremendously, if we are able to determine proper implementation mechanisms.

The Honourable Member for St. John alluded to a very ridiculous statement he gave the impression that clear objectives were not identified by the Prime Minister yesterday. He would want this House and those sitting at home to believe that the Prime Minister, whose stewardship in this country is second to none, I would go a little further to say that the period of sustained growth that we experienced in this country, under the stewardship of the Prime Minister is beyond comparison in any other period.

When I turn to pages 19 and 20 of the Budgetary Proposal, there is a caption here called 'Stated Objectives' and I am going to read it quickly, Mr. Speaker.

"The two broad strategic objectives sought by the proposal to be presented to Parliament will therefore be:

To stimulate economic activity in the short term so that Barbados can be restored to the 3% real growth path as soon as possible, up from the 1% path on which it now finds itself; and

To continue to devise and implement new fiscal, sectoral, human resource development, capacity building, institutional reform, productivity enhancing measures necessary for us to make our economy more competitive in the context of the regional, hemispheric and global economies, as they are likely to evolve.”

If you want a clearer statement of intent and purpose, Mr. Speaker, someone would have to show me different. This says it all, we are aiming to do two things:

In the short term, to get the productive sectors functioning even better so that we could move the economy forward; and

We are not losing sight of what is confronting us down the road to position us or to reposition the Barbadian economy so that the growth could be virtually assumed when we get closer to those crucial dates like 2005 and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced, as I said earlier, that these policies will take us where we want to get. Of course from time to time we will have to fine-tune them but the broad programme is such that this economy will be propelled forward.

Mr. Speaker, just a couple of days ago at a funeral in my constituency, I spoke to of the public officer, one who has distinguished himself in the economic and financial affairs of this country. He now the Ambassador to Geneva and consistent with the thinking of the Prime Minister and the others on this side, Ambassador Griffith reiterated that the things we do now by way of policy formulation and implementation, should be done in such a way that in 2005 and beyond, we do not regret. We should not only be planning with a narrow short term focus but we should be doing it in such a way that there is some level of dynamic consistency in what we are doing so that in 2005 and beyond, we can look back on 2001 and say that we have made the right decision and that is what this Budget is all about.

Mr. Speaker, let me get on to agriculture. I have reached the point now where I am no longer disappointed with what the Honourable Member for St. John says because it seems to me that every time he is to speak in this Chamber, you expect to hear things that are not grounded in facts and things that do not square well with the empirical evident.

8:35 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. A. P. WOOD:

So I am not disappointed anymore. I was disappointed, while I was driving home last night, when I heard someone whom I thought should know better, having been a former student of mine at the University, on a programme with Senator Barker ...

Asides.

Hon. A. P. WOOD:

... seeking to give Barbadians the impression that all is lost in the agricultural sector and that the measures that are put in place now are too late and a whole set of stupidity which is consistent with what the Honourable Member for St. John said. Mr. Speaker, those who are involved in agriculture have a completely different view to a former member of this Chamber who sat on the other side and the Honourable Member for St. John.

Mr. Speaker, the members of the farming community, those to whom I have spoken, have asked me to convey their appreciation and thanks to the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for focusing so heavily on the agricultural sector. Indeed, I will go a little further to say that, I listen to the agricultural programme this morning on my way to Cabinet, commentators who previously spoke in the negative about the management and the functioning of the Ministry - some of those commentators are well known to the Honourable Member for St. John, I do not know if they are related - spoke glowingly about the measures prescribed and contained in the budgetary proposals yesterday.

So the people who know about agriculture and the people who want to be involved in agriculture at the level of production and marketing are comfortable and the people who do not know about agriculture are uncomfortable. Mr. Speaker, I will prefer, as the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, to continue dealing with the people who know about agriculture and set aside those who do not know anything about agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier - the Honourable Member for St. Lucy knows about agriculture and I would not deny him that - there is no secret that the changes in the regional and international economic environment will impact negatively on our agricultural sector. I came into this Honourable House and went elsewhere and listed the major changes such as the movement toward the establishment of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, the Free Trade Areas of the Americas, the World Trade Organisation discussions, the changes in the Common Agricultural Policy of Europe and the changes to the EU/ACP trade relations.

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary, and I cannot help emphasizing it, that we retool, recapitalize and modernize the agricultural sector to allow it to exploit local and foreign market opportunities while at the same time allowing it to withstand the pressures which would be placed on the agricultural sector from these developments.

This Budget, Mr. Speaker, is about keeping commercial agriculture alive and creating an enabling environment for a new entrepreneurial spirit and drive in the agricultural sector. This Budget recognises the need to rationalize activity in the sector, reduce the cost of production and increase efficiency all with the aim of improving competitiveness locally, regionally, and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, these measures are targeted. We have made the bold step to deal with the sugar industry. Some may argue that it could have been done already but we have taken the bold step to deal with it. When one looks at Barbados as a sugar producing nation within the ACP block, one will find that we are the highest cost producer in that block.

Some of our neighbours have been taking or are about to take decisions to do away with their sugar industries. We heard about the likely recommendation in the case of St. Kitts. We heard some talk of what is about to happen in Trinidad and Tobago and we know of the importance of sugar to the continued development and progress of this economy. We have said that we will continue with the sugar industry but it cannot be business as usual and we have taken the bold step or are about to take the bold step ...

Mr. Speaker, there are still tremendous prospects for cotton. I am happy that the Prime Minister has put a range of incentives in place to help with the development of an integrated cotton industry starting with incentives for replanting and bringing idle land back into cotton but recognising that the real benefits in the change from cotton production rest at the level of value added, we are creating, through fiscal measures and legislative changes, the necessary environment for the development of an integrated cotton industry to have it stay a little longer into the chain.

Mr. Speaker, mention was made that organically produced crops and livestock products are fast-growing markets in the international food trade. Healthy lifestyles of Barbadians and visitors alike mandate us to pay more attention to organic farming in this country and I am very happy to report that, as I speak, there is a project proposal at my ministry for the establishment of an organic poultry farming project. You know who the architects of that proposal are, Mr. Speaker. I am also happy to report that my officers have viewed this project proposal and have given it the thumbs up. It is the first project of this type in Barbados. This organic poultry project will be based at the Home Agricultural Station in St. Philip and will be managed by two enterprising young ladies.

The budgetary proposals also focus on other important areas in agriculture to move the sector forward. Post harvest technology would facilitate better handling of produce, better sorting, better grading, better presentation of produce, export promotion, product differentiation, niche marketing and new crop technology. In this area we will be concentrating on encouraging the farmers to concentrate on the adoption of updated methods of technologies which would allow them to reduce the cost of production and increase the level of efficiencies and productivity.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for your kindness in giving me an extra minute or two but there really was a lot to be said on the budgetary proposals.

8:45 p.m.

Tuesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. A. P. WOOD:

I know that agriculture figured prominently in them. As I said, the farming community has asked me to convey its appreciation to the Prime Minister for devoting attention to the sector and once again, I commend the measures that were delivered by the Prime Minister.

Thank you.

Mr. D. T. GILL:

Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this annual debate but, first of all, I would like to compliment the Honourable Minister of Finance for putting together a very wide and comprehensive statement and policy. Sir, this debate must have touched every living category of Barbadian. If we extend it a little further it even touches the unborn yet to come into this sinful world. Sir, at the other end of the spectrum it has even made the flight or the passage, as the “goodly Rev.” would say, for he or she who is crossing the Elysian fields would do so a lot more dignified as is the case with the increase of a funeral grant.

Sir, notwithstanding the fact that the North American economy is now suffering chills and is a bit febrile, the Honourable Minister of Finance has been able to bare his chest, come on the deck of the economy, reposition the ship of the economy and set a fresh chart in his style. Sir, this Budget, as I said, has sought to empower all levels of the society. Sir, you only have to look at the plans which will further strengthen the carrying capacity of the country. Another \$185.6 million for the Grantley Adams International Airport.

If we leave here right now and travel along Roebuck Street to the James Tudor Roundabout, I am sure that you would find people there working diligently to achieve the completion of the road widening and safety exercise. Sir, if you go even further, I am sure that you will find some more working by the other roundabout as you go further east, the Nita Barrow Roundabout. All this is happening notwithstanding the fact that big and powerful economies are tonight recoiling. In the words of the Prime Minister, we are now moving ourselves to safer ground.

Sir, he has had the audacity and the economic willpower to continue with certain infrastructural improvements in spite of our neighbours in the USA having to take protective measures and to slow down. Not only that, Sir, two weekends ago when I read one of the weekend publications that there were plans afoot for overhauling the Bridgetown Port, I literally rubbed my hands together and said, “Thank God!” Construction on the West Coast has come to a halt and lots of young people were beginning to get a false sense of uncertainty that the whole construction industry had started to slow down and as I read in the newspapers only to be confirmed in this Financial Statement more investment would be coming not in the hotel industry but in the Port, totalling another \$67 million, I said this would translate to these young people who are beginning to get a little panicky and insecure about their future employment.

Not only that, Sir, \$153 million for the Hilton Hotel and not only that, Sir, \$75.5 million in an urban rehabilitation project. Not finished yet, Sir, \$18.5 million for a business park. Not finished yet, Sir, superimposed on that is the contribution earmarked from the private sector. What does this mean cumulatively? Sir, the Opposition always speaks about this “poor black man” and yet they do not have plans whenever they are in office, such plans to keep young unskilled workers off the street as whenever there is a Barbados Labour Party regime. Check it, Sir! These programmes will help to restore and bring a level of decency and self pride to the young unskilled individual, both male and female.

I would go as far as to say that the unemployment rate will drop even further with all these projects.

Aside.

Mr. D. T. GILL:

You will gaze like on the day of Pentecost, look up in the air. I am saying that it will drop when all of these are superimposed. Sir, when I say "you" I do not mean you, Mr. Speaker, I mean the Honourable Member for St. Lucy. Sir, I speak to the young unskilled male and female, to get two skills right now because if you thought there was a construction boom when the Sandy Lane Hotel was being built and a few other hotels were being reconstructed on the West Coast, the construction earmarked for the rest of this financial year and the following financial year will make that look like a Sunday School party. I am asking the young people to get two skills for the simple fact that when one project ceases to involve the intensive labour skills, that is to say, after they have come out of the ground, to use the construction parlance, they will not feel dislocated and displaced.

8:55 p.m.

Thursday, August 9, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. T. GILL:

They can then go on to either work on that project or shift themselves to another project where they can aptly apply a skill.

I tell young ladies not to wait for INTEL or CDS, which carry the flag in the 1980's, to come back because they have found other niche markets and what they used to pay one Barbadian worker would now pay five workers from Central or Latin America or parts of the Pacific. I tell them that this programme has been tailored for them and once they have improved their skills or acquire a skill then it should be plain sailing from there. I also tell them that the work has no gender tag attached. There is no work which says male or female be it tiling, electrical work, plumbing or interior decorating. I am sure the same fine motor skills which you aptly use with electronic companies can be used with these building skills.

Mr. Speaker, I hear people say that young people do not like work but that is a joke. I have been to my office early in the morning and see young men waiting at seven o'clock to start the work at upper Tweedside Road and Welches Road. I have seen them worked past midnight just as they work in the days when the Barbados Labour Party supervised the construction of the Bridgetown Sewerage, the Cement Plant, the Spring Garden Highway and the new bus stand. The same attitude is there to get ahead and make a dollar but, Sir, if there is no work for them to do, Satan will find work for idle hand.

Mr. Speaker, this same activity of construction carried the German economy and other economies in Western Europe shortly after the war when the economy was at its lowest. As I said, whether it Sandy Lane or the ABC Highway this Barbados Labour Party administration like previous administrations, has made construction the bedrock and hallmark of its economic activity.

Sir, some of us talk about dislocation and discomfort from the ongoing construction but I say there are

better times ahead. How can you compare a detour with a perennially dangerous road like Black Rock, St. Lawrence and Pine Road? The detour will last for a few weeks but the dangerous road lasted for years. How can you complain about debris when the whole sewerage system on either coast is going to be improved? How can you complain about dust pollution when there will be more spacious roads on which to drive? Sir, the discomforts have a short life span but, at the end of the day, the improved position is the position which we all aspire towards.

Sir, while talking about construction I would like when MPT and the contractors embark on similar projects, as they are at the moment, with the road widening and safety exercise that their impact studies and what they would like to achieve be taken and discussed seriously with the householders in the area so that they will know about water outages and how to prepare themselves for things like dust pollution, the noise past midnight and when the initial ground breaking will be started.

Asides.

Mr. D. T. GILL:

At the end of the day is it an improvement and they will appreciate all of that. What is also significant is for the traffic division to be part and parcel of informing the residence in these societies. Sir, the greatest problems are caused by hasty and uncouth drivers who still want to drive at the same pace as if the roads were level and without inconvenience.

Mr. Speaker, I heard a caller on the radio speaking on behalf of the farming community asking for a helping hand to be extended. This Financial Statement has not only extended a helping hand to such communities but it has given them a leg up so to speak.

In the year 2001 medical and agricultural problems will in great measure be solved by genetic principles. I was heartened yesterday to see what a fresh and novel approach was brought to the farming and agricultural industry. We know that small families have been running hectares of land because farming and agriculture today is buttressed by new technologies. The approach which has been taken in this Financial Statement is one to chart and spur on a sustainable and renewed thrust in farming and agriculture.

Sir, the success of farming is like manufacturing whether it be manufacturing of textile, metals or pharmaceuticals, there is one thing basic to the core and that is the economy of scales. These economies of scales are secondary to the efficiency of the system, efficiency being the ratio of output to input whether it is the volume of product or whether it is the cost of the product.

9:05 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Mr. D. T. GILL:

Sir, it has to do with by-product salvaging. Sir, you could add value to the by-product salvage. These are determining factors whether a process is efficient or not - conservation of energy and automation along the process. Sir, these are the principles, factors and the determinances which have influenced the European countries and they adhere and follow a common agricultural policy.

We are hearing, we have heard and we do know that the days are long gone for price supports, quotas, subsidies and other forms of protection as my good friend, the Honourable Member for St. James North, have informed in an aside. If you were to follow how the common agriculture policy in Europe is designed, it is designed to assist in new nutritional techniques for livestock, new milking techniques, which will reduce labour cost, saving energy techniques and new genetic engineering techniques.

Sir, it is for this reason I compliment the technicians, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance who have so designed a policy to chart the course of agriculture along these guidelines. Although we know that for us in Barbados to be truly effective and meaningful, we must have a common agriculture policy for CARICOM.

I am happy to see duty-free concessions for organic agricultural inputs, grants for organic inputs, rebate for green houses, rebate for cost and design for soil conservation measures, the whole speaks gamut of sustainable development for farming. I think that in the not so distant future, this Parliament will have to consider genetically modified crops and foods as big countries are getting to know the genetical make-up of plants and animals and understand them a lot better. It occupies, British Parliament, American Parliament and lobby groups and it will not be long before it occupies our Parliament, farmers, ecologists and environmentalists.

It is not difficult for an individual to get on a web site and become an importer or a manufacturer's representative. It is also a fact that as consumerism increases and trade is more liberalised, we will all be involved in the importation of genetically modified foods and crops.

We must not fool ourselves that everything is alright and we do not need to apply the techniques of genetic engineering in Barbados. Our yams, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, peppers and some of our most exotic vegetables have suffered.

We also know that the sunshine and warmth which are necessary for ripening, also affects our products on their way to market. America has taken an easier position regarding genetically modified vegetables and fruits. Europe has taken a much more conservative position through their action and I would say that Barbadians must begin, whether or not they are vegetarians, to come to the realisation that we do have coming into our imports genetically modified foods because the Americans do not label the products as such. The Europeans are sticklers for labelling and disclosure of such products. Since 1990, these products have been proliferating in North America.

Sir, we hear of the recession, of the slowing down in the economy of America but I have every faith that with the good management the St. Paul's School will be ready next year, the Carrington and Erdiston School will get started next year, the pavilion at Brittons Hill will be started, the widening of the North and South Pine Road will be completed, the concrete road projects will be well on the way and the repairing and restructuring of those which have been impaired because of the road widening exercise would be fit and ready.

Mr. Speaker, with that contribution, I commend this Financial Statement, 2001. I thank you.

Hon. R. R. GREENIDGE:

Mr. Speaker, when I was sitting reflecting that it was my turn to speak next, I said to myself that this opportunity would never have been possible were it not for the good people of St. Philip North. I, therefore, remain eternally indebted to the good people of districts such as Cole's, Lucas Street, Duncan, Content Cot, Lynches, Eastbourne, Well House, Sandford and Mapps.

9:15 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. R. N. GREENIDGE:

I will always be grateful, Mr. Speaker, to the good people of Church Village, Ebenezer, Brereton and Sunbury. Also the people of Blades Hill, Fortesque, Three Houses Hill and Bay Field. I will never forget, Sir, the kind people of Chapel, Colleton, Padmore Village, Vineyard, Bushy Park, and Gaskin Land. I have been given this opportunity, Sir, because of the people of Industry Hall, Inchscape, and Castle Heights, Marley Vale, Merricks and East Point and the entire constituency of St. Philip North.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I listened to the Honourable Member for St. Peter and if one did not know it then, I believe that one knows it now, that the Honourable Member for St. Peter is going to go down in history as one of the best stewards of the Barbadian economy ever. We know that a strong and well-managed economy is like a tide; it is going to lift all boats and everyone will benefit.

Under his stewardship we have witnessed, what is perhaps the greatest home ownership ever in history of this country, a very low unemployment rate, the highest level of foreign reserves ever and now, in these trying times, Mr. Speaker, he has come and given us confidence about our future and our children's future.

My greatest admiration, Mr. Speaker, is for the number of promises he has made to Barbadians and the number of promises that he has kept. Also the minute attention that he always pays to details, to ensure that his plans and economic strategies are put into effect. It is clear to me, and to others on this side, that his primary aim is to safeguard the health of the Barbadian economy.

Mr. Speaker we at the Ministry of Labour, Sports and Public Sector Reform, will continue to do our part to take this country forward and in particular, to earn foreign exchange for Barbados.

I believe, Sir, that within my Ministry we are now seeing the most varied outreach programme ever in the history of the Labour Department. We have our farm labourers who still go to Canada, though it is now a male-dominated area. We have the H-2B Hotel Workers Programme in the United States, which is female-dominated. I also have to say that persons have not realized this point, that we at the Ministry of Labour, are doing our best to send jockeys, grooms, exercise boys, et cetera, to Canada for their horse racing industry. I believe that approximately some 25 persons have already been sent and, perhaps the biggest blend between labour and sports, is that link between the liaison service and the horse racing industry.

We have uncovered opportunities for Barbadians at Woodbine Race Tracks, Eyrie, and other race tracks throughout Canada, but mainly there are being concentrated at Woodbine. I have to let Barbados know, that these young men are performing extremely well beyond expectations and are giving this country a very good name. The behaviour of our jockeys and grooms has been described by the horse racing authorities as being impeccable.

I have to say, Sir, that I usually visit Canada on the Farm Labour Programme and always make it a point of duty to go to Woodbine to speak to the authorities there. I will be doing it in another week or so. There is another caveat here which I have to share, I am not holding back any secrets on it. About two weeks ago, I met with some members of the Turf Club who are very concerned about what is happening. They are telling us that the best jockeys are going to Canada and they are losing trained persons, therefore, we should cut back a little bit. There are now five more persons who are waiting on plane tickets and perhaps, after this, we can look and see if there is anything that we can do to assist this venture, because we do not want to destroy the horse racing industry in Barbados. One of the things that I think we will have to look at, is a joint venture between Barbados and Canada at setting up a training school for jockeys and grooms, et cetera, this is something which I am quite willing to pursue.

Mr. Speaker, on speaking of our overseas workers, I have to touch on the matter of the teachers going to the United States of America. This is not just a Ministry of Education matter, but also a Ministry of Labour matter because it has to do with our human resources. Certainly, speaking for myself, I will not join with those who can only see the negative, or the downside of our teachers quest for the United States schools. Indeed, Sir, no one will ever get me to say anything offensive about contract teaching.

Sir, I have built the modest house in which I live out of contract teaching. I have to say I did it in the Turks and Caicos Islands, the Cayman Islands, and no one is going to get me to criticize it in a negative way.

I have to say that we, in Barbados, must again become an exporter of labour. We have to restructure the Barbadian economy and to devise creative means of earning foreign exchange. Barbadians, Sir, can no longer be inward-looking. We must position ourselves, Mr. Speaker, to be able to export both goods and services. We should be proud to know that our country has a good reputation when it comes to education internationally. We should be proud, Sir, to know that without any further manipulation, our teachers can walk through the doors of any schools, in the most developed country on the planet, and begin to teach in the classrooms. We should never be ashamed of the proficiency of our teachers.

I have to say too, Sir, that one cannot beat the experience of teaching overseas. I believe our local system will be better off when those teachers, who have gone on a two-year contract, return to Barbados. I did a contract, then another one, and now I am back, Sir, and I do believe that I have made a contribution and, therefore, Sir, I would hope that the same thing would happen to those teachers who have gone off.

Barbados, Sir, has always been exporting its trade. In the 1950's we were one of the main suppliers of nurses going to England. Throughout the Caribbean, we have supplied policemen and for years, have also been exporting our teachers. Therefore, I do not think I can say that we have ever suffered from a brain drain.

I remember about 30 years ago, a gentleman, who is now deceased, came back from Africa and was making the point that when he was in Africa, he came across a Barbadian in an African village teaching Latin.

I am saying, Sir, that we have actually put teachers on the African continent and, therefore, this is nothing new to us and nothing that we should be afraid of. All we have to do, Sir, is to make sure that, as a country, we do not overplay our hands.

Certainly, at the Ministry of Labour, we will not knowingly send hotel workers overseas to the detriment of our local hotel industry and I do believe that, in the same way, we will not knowingly send hundreds of teachers overseas at the expense of our school children.

9:25 p.m.

Wednesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. R. N. GREENIDGE:

I think, Sir, that we are actually overflowing with talent in Barbados. We are at the stage where I personally know of two trained teachers who are now working on a term by term basis, waiting for a letter to continue next term and they have not yet been given a permanent job.

We have a lot of talent in Barbados and so, Mr. Speaker, I just want to turn, briefly, to the National Sports Council which continues to do extremely good work in hard courts for pavilions, lighting and other sporting facilities. I must say that right now members of the Sports Council are in England trying to get ownership of road tennis for Barbados.

This is our indigenous sport. This is a sport that we want to say belongs to Barbados. We want to be able to say that the ball has to be like this, that the racket has to be like this, that the court must be this size because no one yet has put ownership on it. We believe that even the ones who play in the region, have got it from us. We want to do everything with the playing of road tennis and put a Barbadian stamp on it and say, that it is ours.

Only today, Sir, Cabinet agreed to the laying in Parliament our National Sports Policy as a Green Paper. We want to chart a new course for sports in this country. Only last week Cabinet committed to the provision of eight Cuban coaches for sports in Barbados. Swimming will be getting two, volleyball one, hockey one, boxing two and athletics two. We believe that Cuban coaches are among the best in the world and we want only the best for Barbados.

Sir, what was for me, perhaps, the saddest section of the Prime Minister's statement yesterday, could be found on page 120 where the Prime Minister said:

"Last year, I generously proposed to reduce the taxes on lotteries, provided they merged their operations, create one successful lottery, and put the difference between the existing tax and the reduced

tax into a Sports Development Fund.

The operators of the lotteries have refused to co-operate. The carrot having failed it is now time to use the whip.”

Sir, that was very sad for me because, just over a year, the Prime Minister gave certain concessions to our two main lotteries, in the form of tax reductions and told them - what I thought was an excellent suggestion, “Go and form a single lottery.” And sports was to have been the main beneficiary of that particular initiative. To this day, it has not happened.

There are many sports persons who have been meeting me, calling and asking me what has happened to the lottery and when are we going to get some money from the lottery. This is extremely sad. I want to say to the operators of the lotteries that it is not so much that they are doing us a favour, the lotteries have to realise that were it not for a licence that was given them, their operations would have been illegal and that is crucial.

We made it possible for them to operate legally in Barbados and they made a commitment that they would do a lot of social work for this country, including assisting with sports.

Sir, we would have thought that since there were two lotteries and they were both operating virtually in the same way, the same business, the same types of machines, the same games and so on, that it would have been so much easier for them to merge. But for an entire year, there has been a lot of ‘toing’ and ‘froing’ and the real merger has not taken place. It has been a terrible disappointment.

I believe, Sir, that Barbados cannot accommodate three lotteries and that is my personal view because we are much too small. I also believe that if we have three lotteries, two will suffer and perhaps one will be successful. Eventually, for that the Prime Minister has not changed. I believe that we may still end up with one because there is one particularly lottery that is so much indebted to Barbados, owing millions of dollars and if we had to insist on payment, that particular lottery would go under.

Mr. Speaker, I do not see the point or the reason for all the ‘toing’ and ‘froing’ and I believe that if the Prime Minister had put his foot down and said, stop with that, let me increase the taxes now, that come this same time next year, they would still be having the same problem, and sports will continue to suffer.

I would believe, Sir, that with this now, we should see some action and I know that there are provisions where you are making the directors of the lotteries liable when they have collected taxes and not paid them over. That too, would change that mind set.

I also, Mr. Speaker, want briefly to touch on the whole question as to what happens at the National Training Board. It continues to do extremely good work and one of the things which we have to admire the Training Board for now, is the fact that it is no longer just concentrating on those in the classrooms but it is looking at multi-skilling the general public.

Indeed, one of the very exciting things happening at the Training Board now is that there are some extremely popular programmes. Some members of the public who work during the day, go to these classes on evenings. The tiling and decorative finishes class is very well patronised. It is indeed the

most popular of all. The figures show that since March 2001 an additional two hundred and fifty-nine persons have graduated from that evening programme. Sir, it is not just the people in the classroom but members of the working public go to those classes and they pay a very modest fee for it.

Sir, I just want to briefly list some of the other programmes offered in the evening classes for the general public. I would urge the general public to make much use of the Training Board and to attend these evening classes. Other programmes offered are, building drawing, cake and pastry making, cake icing, ceramics, cupboard construction, drapery, dress making, floral arranging, horticulture, interior decorating, laundry, masonry, plumbing, small appliance repairs, small business management, soft furnishing, tailoring, tiling and decorative finishes, that is the popular one, and upholstery. A lot of people who are building their houses attend these classes because they want to help themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to turn a few minutes to the Honourable Member for St. John. To my mind, Sir, this has to be one of the bleakest days in Parliament when the Leader of the Opposition could find nothing to say about a Budget which was presented to this Honourable Chamber but could come here and talk about a Kadooment Budget; that “Ka” means Knight of Saint Andrew and “Doo” means all kinds of nonsense; that he judged the Budget on lyrics and melody and originality.

He then moved from the calypso and went on to somebody called, enigma, singing a song named, “Will the Real Slim Shady Stand Up?” Then he spoke about the personalised toilet paper.

It has to be a shame when you can find nothing to say about a Budget and that is what you have to sit and listen to as a reply. He spent a lot of his time, Sir, attacking, not the Budget, but Members of Government.

Mr. Speaker, he does not seem to get the message because those around him are taking him to the top of a very high precipice and they are telling him, jump off or be pushed off. They are insisting, Sir, that he makes his valedictory speech as Leader of that Party.

9:35 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. R. N. GREENIDGE:

You see, Sir, he wants to be inoculated against the damage that he has inflicted on those members who were in the same boat as he was. We must remember that there were 28 of them. They went out and two of them came back and it is as though he is telling those drowning men that he is not concerned about them and that he is in charge of that economic boat.

Mr. Speaker, if he walks away from that party tomorrow, there will be rejoicing and there may even be a fireworks display but there will be no sadness. It will be as though someone has died but there will be no funeral. I want to urge the media that when, not if, that happens not to make it a headline.

We on this side have never said that he does not appeal electorally. I know who said that about him.

We on this side never said it about him. I want to say to him, through you, that attacking the innocent when the guilty is in your House is a very terrible mistake to make. We on this side are not the ones he should be scared of. He should be scared of those around him because they are some of them around him, whether he knows it or not, who have political daggers out for him. You know Julius Ceasar, Sir, and you know that it was the dagger that was closest to Julius Ceasar that was drawn on him. Et tu was Cassius and Brutus.

I know for a fact that some of his colleagues sits at meetings with him and they do so with knots in their stomach. This is what they have said. We are not the ones who said as long as he remains our leader - notice our leader - there will at least be 25 also ran as long as he remains their leader. He does not seem to care about the magnitude of his defeat or anything like that.

We are not the ones who said of him, he rose too fast, he was dragged upwards too fast, he never had public endorsement, the public never sanction him or that he lacks the requisite authority to lead us, meaning the Democratic labour Party. We never said that. We never said because of him our party is not attracting customers or that he is a failure on the political stock exchange. We never said that about him, Sir, but I know who said it. No one on this side ever said that there is nothing to him and all he has is a hunger for the office of Prime Minister, that he is not electable for that office or that he is totally unacceptable to the electorate. We never said that but I know who did, Sir.

This is what I said because as far as I am concerned, the present member for St. John to my mind have never really and truly walk in the footsteps of the Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow. I do not even think that he won the election in St. John. I believe that even after his death, the Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow continues to that. All the present member for St. John is doing really and truly is looking back to the future and hopes that whatever remains of the Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow will pull him through.

I would hope that when he looks back, he would compare himself to the Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow and wonder what it was and why it was that when he was there - the Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow - that he was leading what was then the most attractive political agency in the Caribbean and how come now that he is actually leading, it is the most unsought and unpopular political agency in the region.

I heard the Honourable Member for St. John on the Floor of this House insultingly describing the last day's of the Sandiford Administration as minimalist government. You heard it too, Sir and all of us knew that there was a problem then but he became the antibiotic, the medical treatment and the plaster and bandage but little did we realise that the cure would have been worse than the disease.

The Honourable Member for St. John entire political life has been spent in search of that illusive thing called Ilaro Court and you could hear it from the way he began today about the Prime Minster not being here. He is an angry man and too many good people have run away and left him. He has very little left to work with and I believe he would need a bit more meat on his plate. I believe that he would be a lot happier if he had better raw material to work with.

Mr. Speaker, I close now with an African proverb which says:

“It is not that dogs preferred bones to meat, it is just that no one ever give them meat.”

I am obliged to you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY:

Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this Economic Statement for the year 2001 and I want to start by thanking the people of Christ Church East on whose behalf I speak.

Secondly, I want to congratulate the Right Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for a most excellent and appropriate presentation which was delivered with seriousness but with love, good nature and, indeed, good humour as one would expect of a politician who is worthy of the high office of Prime Minister.

By very sharp contrast, even by way of a deep chasm, one had to look unfortunately at the presentation of the Honourable Member for St. John, the Leader of the Opposition. Sir, I looked, listened and took notes and then we left to go to dinner but when I came back a strange thing happened.

9:45 p.m.

Tuesday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. R. R. FARLEY:

I had the notes of last year's presentation on my table and they got mixed up and I could not tell which note was which, which were today's notes and which were last year's. It was the same warmed over soup. Sir, I should have remembered the Honourable Member is obsessed. Indeed, Sir, we saw him on the front page of one of our dailies in apron and all but I would have thought he would have been a little more original in his cooking and that he would have chosen a menu for today which is more appropriate for the time and the circumstances.

The Honourable Member made the very important point and closed his presentation to this nation that all that is required for societies to descend into anarchy and swift decline is for good people to do nothing. The Honourable Member for St. John had the opportunity, as other persons in his position, as leader of an opposition party in this Parliament of Barbados to present an alternative position in terms of how they want to see the nation grow and develop to urge the Government on how it can improve its performance and things which are positive and uplifting.

What we had, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was a tirade from, as the Honourable Member for St. Philip North said, an angry man. Sir, thankfully before I came today, I took my usual post-Budget visit to my constituency to hear what the people whom I represent had to say about the presentation of the Minister of Finance and I took a little note. In terms of the incentives to the sugar industry, the planters as well as the workers in the north-eastern part of the constituency, Walronds, Fairview, St. Patrick's area where they still grow sugar cane, Sir, are very happy because many persons live in Packers and those parts - Foursquare, Hannays. The Foursquare valley is still one of the greatest sugar growing regions in this country and they are thankful.

With respect to cotton, Spencers Plantation in Christ Church East is one of the areas where cotton grows and they are thankful for the scheme for cotton. They are anxious that there should be some employment there. There are two agricultural breadbaskets in the constituency, two of the areas of Barbados where there is irrigation and where there is intensive farming activity by an excellent group of farmers. Lears, Fairview and Charnocks are in one area, Ealing Park, Ealing Grove and Chancery Lane are in the other. They are very happy for the insistence by this Administration that Government institutions will give that strong positive support to the farming community by insisting that we use Government procurement to expand the commercial market which is available for agricultural products in Barbados.

The Honourable Member for St. John asked what was in it for people and he quoted one lady. He obviously did not move around and talk with many people. Sir, this people-centred budget is all about making a better life for our people, stabilising the economy to avoid the slowdown, repositioning to ensure that we have sustainable growth but at the same time, as has been consistent with this administration since 1994, we take the people along with us.

Sir, over the next eighteen months, there will be new joint venture housing arrangements, the National Housing Corporation, Barbados Mortgage Finance Company, and private developers. Sir, we lead the way in Christ Church East again. One hundred and eighty-three lots at Coverley in Christ Church were developed by the National Housing Corporation.

I am thankful, Sir, that the Minister of Finance has approved in principle the joint ventures from private developers because there are proposals on the other side of the highway at Coverley for over 150 additional lots to be put in and for that, the teachers, the policemen, the other civil servants, the middle income and lower middle income persons are very happy. Sir, the provision of the loan facility for the tenancies in the area, for that, the persons at Wilcox, at Silver Sands where there are a number of private tenancies are very thankful to the Prime Minister and they said to me, "Skipper, I cannot thank him personally and I would ask you to thank him for me." So I want to make sure that I pass that message on.

Mr. Speaker, the elderly gentleman in Pilgrim Place overlooking the back of the Airport, was very thankful for the adjustment in the pension and there are several other pensioners who are happy about this particular increase. The young lady in Pegwell who is about to have her first child is very happy, Sir, to be able to benefit from the increase in the maternity grant from \$500 to \$800. The Silver Sands football team was very excited about the very strong financial input which this Administration in addition to the policies announced by the Minister of Sports for the Green Paper on Sports Policy, the establishment of the Sports and Arts Endowment Development Fund through the increase in taxes on lotteries which will ensure that there is a dedicated fund to give strong positive support to successful community teams as well as national teams.

Of course, Sir, we do have a number of persons in St. Christopher, Silver Sands and the Gibbons Boggs area who work at the hotels in the area and several who would like to work. Can you imagine the hardship which has been previously done by way of charging any kind of registration fees or otherwise at places like the Hospitality Institute? This caring Government has eliminated those.

For those measures, in particular, I want to thank the Honourable Minister of Finance on behalf of the good people of Christ Church East. What we are doing by way of a people-centred form of development by way of using economic management tools to advance the interest of the people is not new. Sir, when I examine the position of the Barbados economy and when I look at independent and objective exams from the Inter-American Development Bank and other institutions they all agree that the economic fundamentals of Barbados are very strong.

Sir, we have had the longest sustained period of growth in the history of Barbados. We have heard the foreign reserves are \$1 billion up from \$11 million at the depths of despair of the Democratic Labour Party. This year, per capita income, that basic indicator of individual welfare, \$16 100, up 3.9 per cent over 1999. When you look at the number of persons who wake up every morning and go to work who are playing an active part in the economic development of this country, who are having their self-esteem renewed and reinforced every day by being able to earn their own living, what do the numbers tell us? One hundred and twenty-seven thousand persons are employed in Barbados at the end of the second quarter of this year. When I checked what the figure was in 1994, it was 105 500.

9:55 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. R. R. FARLEY:

According to my quick mathematics and additional 21 500 persons additional will be getting up in the morning to go to work in Barbados as a result of the Barbados Labour Party's effort of economic management in this country.

Sir, I want to deal with the positive. We have all heard the unemployment figures and I am dealing with employment figures and the number of people who every day say they have a stake in this economy. Sir, that is what is important and we intend, by way of these policy measures that we have taken, to avoid a slow down of the economy in the short term and more particularly, to position the economy in the medium term to long term to ensure that we are able to earn our way in the new economy.

Sir, this issue of the structural transformation of the Barbados' economy is not new but the challenge is always to know when to do it and how to do it. The Barbados economy of 1950 was very much different from what it was in 1980 and it very much different in 2001 from what it was in 1980 and we will continue with this process. We have a responsibility as the Government of the day not to fall prey and cling to short term exigency. We have responsibility to use the fact that we have elbow room because of the quality of the management of the economy and its soundness at this time, to make the adjustments which we have to make.

Sir, I want to reflect again on the stewardship of this administration because we have all been taken to task by the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon, so I will look at how our economic policies over the years have affected our people in a positive manner. Sir, an additional \$250 million in mortgage money has been injected into this economy of Barbados between 1994 and 2000 and you know, Sir, that

unemployed people do not get mortgages. You know that people who do not have net disposal incomes do not qualify to get mortgages so, Sir, you will understand that the vast numbers of ordinary Barbadians have been able to improve their lot. We have seen it in terms of the transformation in the quality of houses in the villages and all over this country.

Sir, the Honourable Member in sotto voce was asking about money. We have insured that workers of Barbados have been able to obtain pay increases over the last seven years which have outpaced the average inflation of 2.6 per cent over the period 1995 to 2000, as stated in the Economic Report of the Central Bank of Barbados.

Sir, I am using public sector salary settlements as a gauge:

April 1 to March 31, 1996, 2.5 per cent at the top and 3.5 per cent at bottom.

April 1996 to March 1997, 3 per cent across the board.

I am using 1997 to 1999 public sector salaries.

April 1, 1997 to March 31, 1998 a 6.25 per cent increase.

April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999 a 4 per cent increase on top of that, Sir.

In 1999 to 2001 there was 4 per cent increase in the first year and 2.5 per cent in the second.

This is how persons have been able to improve their lot and the private sector salaries are not out of line with those figures.

Sir, it is against that strong background where the Government in partnership with its people, brought them along in a process of improvement and empowerment. It is set against the backdrop of a strong foreign exchange position, low external debt and strong social capital and we are in a position today to be able to make the adjustments which are necessary and which we propose to do in a timely manner to allow us to secure our economic future.

Sir, we need to continue on the path of transforming our economy to ensure that, notwithstanding, the economic issues out there that we are able to stay on course to make Barbados a fully developed society. Sir, that is our vision and objective and we will not resile from that but in order for us to get there we need to create a new enterprise culture, we need to ensure that our people are more entrepreneurial and take opportunity of the new markets which become open to them with trade liberalization. We also need to ensure that our entrepreneurs are persons who master the skills of the new economy, like information technology and related matters.

Sir, I am not surprised that the Democratic Labour Party has taken the stance they have taken in this matter. You will recall their stance in the face of difficulty is to go into their bunkers, tell the general public to put on their seat belts and prepare to crash land. This has never been our policy. In fact, in terms of how they dealt with the economy and the productive sectors in the early 1990's one could only compare it to the situation where the traveller was set upon a road way, attacked and left to die by the

side of the road but the good Samaritan came along, nursed the wounds and restore that stranger to good health.

The Barbados Labour Party has always had faith in the productive sectors particularly the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. The Democratic Labour Party principal spokesman on economic affairs in the Other Place has been consistent. He has condemned manufacturing and agriculture and said recently on public radio that they were dead from the early 1990's.

The comments coming from the Democratic Labour Party have been very consistent. We have always had faith in the capacity of our manufacturers and our agriculturists to continue to play an important role in our society. We recognise that those two sectors have borne the brunt of trade liberalisation efforts. The fact of the matter is that with trade liberalisation you will have some products which will become obsolete, you will have some businesses which will fall by the wayside because the products they make are no longer attractive or become uncompetitive but, Sir, there will also be new products coming on stream because we live in an ever-changing world and there will be new companies emerging to create new products and services for a new market. It is that sense of optimism, grounded in reality, which we on this side have always held to be the path to go.

Sir, I want to make a few comments about manufacturing before we go too much further. I have already commended the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture for their positions on those two sectors. The manufacturing sector in Barbados continues to be an important one for our economy. Notwithstanding the flat growth for the last year and modest decline this year, the manufacturing sector continues to contribute some 8.9 per cent to our gross domestic products. What is critical for this sector is the fact that we are fully into the Caribbean Single Market and Economy. We are also very much committed to the other aspects of liberalisation and integration and much of the challenge which comes today to the manufacturing sector really comes from Caribbean goods on which we cannot legally impose duties or tariffs but we must not see the fate of the manufacturing sector and the fact that we have exposed the manufacturing sector to competition in a vacuum. We are under an obligation to pursue a path of development which is in our own interest of deeper integration with Caribbean what we may lose on the downswing in the production of goods we will gain on the upswing in our competitiveness in the provision of services to CARICOM.

We cannot fool ourselves, it was ridiculous that while individual CARICOM countries had signed up with the World Trade Organisation, that while individual countries had signed up with the Free Trade Areas of the Americas and while they were individually making commitments to liberalise their economies within those larger agreements, they have been moving sluggishly in terms of liberalising with one another right here in CARICOM.

10:05 p.m.

Thursday, August 09, 2001

Continuation of Hon. R. R. FARLEY:

The net effect of that would have been that we would have established a proper CARICOM Single Market and Economy before having to rush into the larger integrations. The Right Honourable Prime Minister during his tenure as Chairman of CARICOM, and more particularly as the Prime Minister responsible for the Single Market and Economy, rightly recognised that we needed to ensure that integration efforts in CARICOM moved at a faster pace and that they were more extensive than our integration efforts within the Free Trade Areas of the Americas or the WTO. How else could CARICOM be a distinctive element within that wide arrangement if we have the same arrangement for all other countries outside of CARICOM?

Therefore, it is in that framework that we have taken the steps in this Budget to announce our accelerated programme for the liberalisation of trade in services with CARICOM. I do not know about other Honourable Members but I enjoy Caribbean travel. I know that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition does too.

Sir, every day on LIAT and BWIA Express, there are Caribbean people, particularly Barbadians, going to work in other Caribbean countries. Barbados already does a brisk trade in services throughout the Caribbean but we could do more. Through opening up our market, we force other countries to open up theirs.

I have sat on aeroplanes next to brain surgeons going to do their two-day clinic in St. Kitts or St. Lucia. I have sat on aeroplanes next to attorneys-at-law going to do court cases, sometimes of a criminal nature or Commissions of Inquires.

Asides.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY:

I have sat on aeroplanes next to ophthalmologists. I have sat next to funeral directors, computer technicians, who repair hardware and I have sat next to computer programmers who create the software. The bottom line is, Barbados has competitive advantage in the provision of services.

The Honourable Member for St. John has provided legal services throughout the Caribbean.

Asides.

Hon. R. R. FARLEY:

The bottom line is, that Barbados needs to ensure that through the application of the Caricom Single Market and Economy, particularly, fair reciprocal application of the provisions of Protocol 2, that Barbadian businesses, individuals and money are able to move freely into the Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for St. John referred to Kadooment. I referred to Kadooment too but not from the perspective that he did. Our cultural industry - there is nobody in the Caribbean who can put on any kind of show, whether it is the official opening of an event, be it an annual award ceremony or a fete, like Barbadians. Our lighting technicians, ITM, does lighting jobs throughout the Caribbean. Our bands, DJs, stage owners and management people, sound technicians and chefs are already doing that. What is needed is for us to go the next several steps along the way to fully capitalise.

In order to do that we have to ensure that we also give way on our manufacturing.

How could we expect to force persons to open their markets for our products and services, when we have ours closed? I will have to make the point that the same applies to others. In my case, Sir, I cannot have my constituents in Silver Sands who happen to work in that noble profession of fishing in Trinidadian jails, while their families eat Trinidadian foods purchased in our supermarkets. The bottom line is that if Trinidad or any other countries is benefiting from the trading goods, because they may have a superiority in production of some manufacturing products, then they need to ensure that their markets are opened so that our people who may have a superiority in the provision of services, can function effectively. That is the kind of reciprocity, not just between goods and goods but in terms of business activity generally, which CARICOM Single Market and Economy is seeking to engender and this is what we are encouraging.

Mr. Speaker, I know that my time soon comes to an end but I want to make a point on another aspect of my Ministry's portfolio. Concerns were raised about the future of national business and financial Services sector of the OECD. I can tell you without getting into too much detail in the short time that is left, that the threat that has been posed by that measure has considerably abated. Indications are that the provision which was referred to as 'brick-fencing' has been dropped, because it caused countries like ours to dismantled our tax system and to get rid of special incentives, thereby, effectively ruling us to be uncompetitive.

Additionally, mechanisms which we have successfully used for the last several years, for example our Tax Information Exchange Agreement, signed with the United States of America back in 1984, are now being held up by the United States Secretary Treasurer as models for international corporation and the tools around which cooperation between countries like ours and the OECD countries can be built.

We are, therefore, satisfied that those changes to the OECD's initiative go in the direction which all indications point to, that the matter will not pose a threat to the continuing future of the Barbados financial services industry but that matter will be kept under monitor. I am sure that the Parliament will continue to have sight of it and I propose to raise it with the Parliamentary Committee Establishment, the Honourable Member for Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to indicate that the Ministry which I have the honour to lead, has a number of programmes and strategies to ensure that we are able to properly contribute to the economic growth and development which have characterised the seven years of this administration thus far.

I believe that growth to which we have contributed, has been able to result in the improvement of the lives of the citizens of Barbados, is not paper growth. I have indicated from the statistics, that the people of Barbados have had a better life because of the Barbados Labour Party. I thank you, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to participate. I thank the good people of Christ Church East of permitting me to speak on their behalf.

I commend this Budget to this Honourable House.

SUSPENSION

Hon. D. A. C. SIMMONS:

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this House do now suspend until Thursday, August 10, 2001 at 400 p.m.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND:

I beg to second that, Sir.

The question was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER suspended the House accordingly.

10:15 p.m.