
THE

House of Assembly Debates

(OFFICIAL REPORT)

FIRST SESSION 1999 – 2004

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Pursuant to the adjournment, the House of Assembly met at 11.15 a.m. on Tuesday, February 26, 2002.

PRESENT

His Honour I. A. ROETT, G.C.M., B.A., Dip.Ed.
(Speaker)

His Honour J. M. EDGHILL, J.P. (Deputy Speaker)

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY, LL.B. (Attorney General and Minister of Home Affairs) (Leader of the House)

Hon. Sir HAROLD St. JOHN, K.A., Q.C., LL.B.

Mr. L. R. TULL, Q.C., M.A. (Oxon.)

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND, B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed., LL.B. (Hons.), L.E.C., J.P. (Minister of Labour and Social Security)

Mr. D. CARTER (Chairman of Committees)

Hon. R. N. GREENIDGE, B.A., LL.B. (Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports)

Hon. G. A. CLARKE, B.Sc., Dip. Ed., J.P. (Minister of Housing and Lands)

Hon. R. D. MARSHALL (Minister of Public Works and Transport)

Hon. H. F. LASHLEY (Minister of Social Transformation)

Hon. R. St. C. TOPPIN, LL.B. (Minister of Commerce, Consumer Affairs and Business Development)

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON, LL.B. (Minister of Physical Development and Environment)

Mr. M. Z. WILLIAMS

Mr. T. A. PRESCOD, B.A.

Rev. J. J. S. ATHERLEY, B.A., B.Sc., J.P.
(Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney General and Minister of Home Affairs)

Mr. D. T. GILL, B.Sc.

Hon. N. A. LYNCH, B.Sc., M.B.A. (Minister of Tourism and International Transport)

Hon. A. P. WOOD, B.Sc., M.Sc. M. Phil., J.P.
(Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)

Hon. Miss C. Y. FORDE, J.P. (Minister of State, Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports)

Prayers were led by Reverend Canon Ivan Harewood.

Mr. SPEAKER: The House is now in session.

MINUTES

Mr. SPEAKER: Minutes of Tuesday, February 12, 2002.

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Minutes for the Honourable the House of Assembly for its meeting of Tuesday, February 12, 2002, which Minutes have been circulated, be taken as read.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: I beg to second that, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: If there are no corrections or observations, then let these Minutes stand confirmed.

ORAL REPLIES TO QUESTIONS

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Sir, the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 26 asked by the Honourable Member for St. John on October 05, 2000 is now ready.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move, Sir, that Standing Orders Nos. 6, 16, 18, 20, 42(5), 43 and 44 are suspended for the remainder of today's Sitting.

The question was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ORDER NO. 8 – THE ROAD TRAFFIC (COLLECTION OF CAR PARKING CHARGES) (VALIDATION) BILL, 2001

Hon. R. D. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Barbados owns and operates five car parks around the environs of Bridgetown. These are as follows:

One at Independence Square;

One at James Street;

One at Hincks Street;

One at the Lower Wharf;

One at Princess Alice Highway;

These car parks are all operated by the Police Department and all parking fees collected on behalf of the Government are paid to the Treasury. Under the Road Traffic Regulations Act of 1987, these fees are deemed to have been lawfully and validly collected. Since the implementation of this Act, the only car park which underwent any major change was the car park at the Lower Wharf.

Sir, with the construction of the Bridgetown Fisheries, an additional parking area has been brought into existence on the western end of the original car park and fees have been collected from patrons using this facility over a period of time. There are also Crown lands on the southern side of the Careenage, the east of the lower Wharf Road and on the north of the lower Wharf Road.

The Ministry of Public Works and Transport has advised the Ministry of Finance to prepare the necessary Validation Bill regarding the collection of these fees. The Bill was examined and deemed to be in order to be introduced into Parliament. Sir, Cabinet approved the introduction into Parliament of this Road Traffic (Collection of Car Parking Charges) (Validation) Act, 2001 and, Mr. Speaker, I ask that this Bill to amend the Road Traffic (Collection of Parking Charges) (Validation) Act, 2001 be read a second time.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second that, Sir, and reserve my right to speak.

The question was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

On the motion of Hon. R. D. MARSHALL, seconded by Hon. R. C. EASTMOND, the House resolved itself into Committee on the Bill, Mr. D. CARTER in the Chair.

COMMITTEE

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This Honourable House is now in Committee.

Clauses 1 and 2 were called and passed.

On the motion of Hon. R. D. MARSHALL, seconded by Hon. R. N. GREENIDGE, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported to His Honour, Mr. SPEAKER, the passing of one Bill in Committee and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

On the separate motions of Hon. R. D. MARSHALL, seconded by Hon. R. C. EASTMOND, the Bill was read a third time and passed and cited as the Road Traffic (Collection of Car Parking Charges) (Validation) Act, 2002.

ORDER NO. 12 – TO MOVE THAT THIS HOUSE RESOLVE ITSELF INTO COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY TO CONSIDER THE GRANT OF SUMS OF MONEY FOR THE SERVICE OF BARBADOS

On the motion of Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY, seconded by Hon. R. C. EASTMOND, the House resolved itself into Committee of Supply, Mr. D. CARTER in the Chair.

11.25 p.m.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This Honourable House is in Committee of Supply.

12 (a) – RESOLUTION TO GRANT THE SUM OF \$3 152 767 FROM THE CONSOLIDATED FUND – SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 2001-2002, No. 13

HEAD 16 – MINISTRY OF CIVIL SERVICE
– \$5 000

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Chairman, this very simple request for the sum of \$5 000 is to meet the cost of the National Insurance Contributions which resulted from

the creation of the Performance Review Development System Unit and which would not have been budgeted for originally.

As you are aware, Sir, Government is committed to the provision of performance review as an integral measure of public sector reform. As a result of that commitment, a Unit was formed and hence the need for the sum of \$5 000 to meet the increased cost of the National Insurance Contributions under Head 16 for the Personnel Administration Division.

With those few remarks, I beg to move that Head 16 stand part.

Hon. R. N. GREENIDGE: I beg to second that.

The question that Head 16 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

HEAD 25 – MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – \$277 790

Hon. A. P. WOOD: Mr. Chairman, this request under the name of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for \$277 790 is occasioned by the fact that funds are required to pay those workers who over the last 12 months have been working very assiduously to ensure that Barbados remains free of the foot-and-mouth disease problem.

You will recall, Mr. Chairman, that around February of 2001 there was a major outbreak of the foot-and-mouth disease in Europe particularly in the United Kingdom. To date, more than 1 706 cases of the disease have been reported there. Outbreaks have also occurred in countries such as South Africa, United Arab Emirates, France, Holland, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Argentina and in some African countries. I must also state, Mr. Chairman, that this disease is endemic in some Latin American countries, for example, Brazil, Columbia and Venezuela.

So recognising the potential disaster for the agricultural sector in Barbados if such a disease had gotten into the country, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and, by extension, the Government, saw it extremely necessary to put an emergency plan in place on hearing of the significance of the outbreak of the disease in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe.

Mr. Chairman, this disease affects cattle, sheep, goat, swine and wild ruminants. It can be easily transmitted mechanically, by rats, rare rabbits and other animal species. The disease is easily disseminated by the wind via human

beings, vehicles, soil found on potatoes as well as dust on shoes.

When one remembers the severe hit on the livestock industry in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom, as a result of this disease, it should not have come as a surprise to Barbadians that we needed to protect our vital livestock industry which has taken us quite some time to build to a respectable level. This industry is about \$60 million strong and it was vitally important that we did what was necessary to protect such an important component of the agricultural sector. You must recognise, Mr. Chairman, that if we had lost the battle in trying to keep this disease out of Barbados there would have been a virtual decimation of the livestock industry in a very short time.

Sir, it was incumbent on the Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism and International Transport, to formulate this emergency plan which was skilfully and smoothly implemented. Now 12 months or so later, I am very happy to report that the livestock industry in Barbados is not at risk from this disease and we are at the point now where we can put an end to certain actions which were taken over the last 12 months to reduce the seriousness of the disease.

With respect to the action plan, it is vitally important that I provide this Honourable Chamber with the aims of this plan if only to highlight one thing, that is, that there is a lot of scope for government agencies and government ministries to work collaboratively to protect the interest and livelihood of Barbadians.

At the time of the outbreak of the disease in the United Kingdom, recognising that the tourism product in Barbados draws heavily on the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe and recognising also the way in which a disease of this type can be transmitted simply by some of these tourists visiting a farm which had experienced an outbreak of such a disease, we implemented an emergency action plan to ensure that this disease was not introduced in the island.

Amongst the measures taken at the time, were a series of meetings which were held at the airport and the seaport with Customs and Port officials to sensitize them to the serious nature of the disease and the need for them to play their part in ensuring that the disease was not introduced into the island.

An inter-ministerial committee, chaired by the senior veterinary officer of the Ministry, was established to monitor, plan and review the methods being used to ensure that the country remained free of this disease. A garbage management plan was put in place by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development at the seaport and the airport to ensure that all garbage, especially international

garbage generated by aircraft and ships, would be properly incinerated.

It was also vitally important that we got information from those travelling into Barbados about their whereabouts as it relates to visits to farms in those countries that had experienced the outbreak. So the Customs Declaration Forms used at the ports of entry modified to include questions relating to the foot-and-mouth disease. Another very important component of the plan was the placing of disinfectants, soaps and mats at the Airport, the seaport and at Port St. Charles and all passengers were required to walk across these mats. 11.35 a.m.

Those who would have travelled anytime during the last 12 months would have seen nicely laid out green mats with disinfectant applied. It was important that all those moving to the arrival hall at the Airport, those disembarking from ships at the Port and at Port St. Charles walk across those mats so that in the event there was any contamination it was handled by their traversing these soaked mats.

It was vitally important that a twenty-four hour surveillance be instituted at the Bridgetown Port, the Grantley Adams International Airport and Port St. Charles particularly with respect to arrivals from the United Kingdom. This component of the plan meant that the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had to make full use of the available resources because it meant that workers had to be engaged on a twenty-four hour basis or the Ministry would have to seek the approval of the Ministry of Civil Service for additional staff to participate in this twenty-four hour surveillance programme which was designed principally to ensure that Barbados remained free of the foot-and-mouth disease and which would have allowed us to continue building our livestock industry.

Mr. Chairman, the first option had to be exercised in circumstances where the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had to engage some of its personnel for extended periods. This continued for the last 12 months. This is the principal reason why we are here this morning because those workers have been very patient and have done their part to make sure that this country remains free of the foot-and-mouth disease.

A meagre sum of \$7 500 is required to meet the travel expenses incurred by the Senior Animal Health Assistants at the Bridgetown Port who were part and parcel of the implementation of this plan. They functioned at the level of management and supervision of this programme. The funds for the Animal Health Assistants are required to cover the payment for a period from March 1, 2001 to March 31, 2002. So the major portion of this \$264 290 is based on overtime for workers involved in the foot-and-mouth disease programme at the airport and the seaport.

By way of update, Mr. Chairman, and I am certain that Honourable Members would have heard that the United Kingdom is once again in fairly good standing in respect of this foot-and-mouth disease problem. We have seen from the internationally recognised body, the OIE, notification to that effect so that it means that the threat to Barbados and other countries in the Caribbean is significantly reduced, bearing in mind that we draw heavily on the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe for our tourists. There has been a scaling down of the activity for this plan. However, it does not mean that we will go from one extreme to the next because we have to be very cautious how we deal with this. While we acknowledge and are very thankful to all those who participated in the implementation of this plan, the plan has been effective in ensuring that the country remains free of the disease but some of the measures which I have outlined must remain in place until we are virtually certain that there is no threat of entry of the virus.

We will continue to be very assiduous in monitoring all importation of meats and animal products whether for commercial or private use and this would occur alongside on-site incineration of international garbage and galley waste. We must be continually vigilant, because other highly contagious diseases such as cholera and African swine fever is still prevalent worldwide. We have done our best and the livestock industry has been protected and, as I said, this was an example of Ministries coming together at a very short notice, putting an action plan in place to ensure that major objectives were realised. We will scale down the activity and in the not-too-distant future you will see a complete removal of the disinfecting mats at the airport and seaports but we will continue to dispose of the international waste in a responsible manner.

Mr. Chairman, once again I wish to commend all those persons who have participated in the implementation of this plan. We have realised our objectives and I am happy that these workers who laboured very hard in the cause of the nation will be rewarded with their overtime payments. Thank you.

I beg to move that Head 25 stand part.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: Mr. Chairman, I am very happy to enter this Parliament at this time to deal with this particular Head. As you know, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is supposed to be a Head that I shadow. I want to say from the outset that we in Barbados at a crucial time are very much caught up with the foot-and-mouth disease.

Aside.
11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the real problem facing the agricultural industry is not a disease that was imported into Barbados

but a “head-and-tongue” disease that we need to correct. Mr. Chairman, we are worrying about diseases that affect other places more than they affect Barbados and we are not worrying about those that are affecting Barbados.

We have to worry about man-made diseases like globalization where we are taking all the policies and importing them into Barbados and allowing it to affect the development of this country.

Asides.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: Mr. Chairman, we should be worrying about the effects of globalization on our agricultural industry and how we are taking the policies coming out of globalization, putting them on our people and decreasing the capacity to produce in this country without recognising that globalization is all about keeping power in the hands of minorities.

Sir, we should be more interested in dealing with the problems that the poultry industry has encountered and the looming problems in the sugar industry. This should be a supplementary to solve the problems which the sugar workers are facing so that the sugar crop and the economy would not be affected. When one looks at the aspects of the industry that can be affected by the foot-and-mouth disease, it is clear to me that they are already dead and the foot-and-mouth disease cannot hamper it anymore because the policies put into place have caused a farmer living in my constituency to give away all his cows. The Minister is aware of this situation, Sir.

Sir, the foot-and-mouth disease did not create the problems in the agricultural industry. It was lack of foresight and not understanding the impact of globalization on small states like Barbados.

Sir, we cannot continue to allow people outside of Barbados to have the capacity to dump everything in Barbados and not create a market for your farmers. The Minister cannot tell me of any sector in the agricultural industry that has been affected by the foot-and-mouth disease but I can tell him about the many farmers who are suffering. I listened very carefully to what was said by the Minister. He spoke about the airport, the seaport and Port St. Charles but he forgets that there is a port of entrance at the Cement Plant.

Sir, am I to believe that because that port of entry is in St. Lucy that it is not significant? Or are we in St. Lucy so well taken care of that such diseases will not affect us?

Sir, I want to know what is being done at the jetty at the Cement Plant to stop the foot-and-mouth disease from coming into this country when everybody knows the men who work on these boats have to come onto the jetty. I have not heard of any policy being implemented to deal with this

port of entry and if we develop a policy, it must be foolproof. I want to tell the Minister that it is not too late to get some mats and solve the problem in St. Lucy.

Sir, we were given the impression that all is well with the economy. There was an article in May when somebody stated that I slammed the Governor of the Central Bank but I did not slam the Governor of the Central Bank. I told the writer that we in Barbados are being misled by people in senior positions and we are creating false hope in this country by giving the impression that all is well, that they were misleading us on agricultural policy and creating a problem for the Minister of Finance. Sir, I also said that about tourism too but we are not dealing with tourism at this time.

Sir, it is better to be conservative in your thoughts, as we say in the accounting circles, than to give the impression that everything is well. It does not make sense creating false hope in a small economy like Barbados when we need to make our people more productive.

Sir, before September 11th we felt we could sit back but I am saying that we have to understand that in a small economy like ours, we have to put protective measures in place even if we are not being affected at the present time.

Mr. Chairman, I have warned this country about what will happen to the poultry industry even though the poultry people have written many articles criticising me but today they are mouthing the same things which I warned them about and they now expect me to pick up their case and run with it. Sir, I am not here to put a case for the poultry industry. I am here to put a case for the people who the poultry industry wanted to shut out when they wanted to introduce tunnel ventilation without understanding that Barbados has been developed not only by the large players who came into production when they recognised that the small producers were making a profit.

Sir, I want to make a significant point. The reason why the poultry industry was spread across Barbados was to stop diseases because there was a fear that if you limited the number of people producing poultry, if there was a particular disease it would spread and affect the industry but all of a sudden people have recognised that money can be made from the industry and the people who built the industry are not being recognised.

I am telling those “too-free” who feel they have the right to everything in this country that the poultry industry is for every single Barbadian who wants to be involved in the industry. Sir, all of a sudden we feel that we must get on board with mergers. We do not have a social conscience any more in this country, Mr. Chairman. We are interested in coming together to see how many poor people we can

squeeze out and calling it globalization. If this type of policy is continued, these people who are trying to get everything for themselves will have to live on a small parcel of land and they will not be able to trespass on the rest of Barbados because they would have become the enemies of the masses.

Mr. Chairman, why would anyone want to alienate himself from the masses of people in a country where he has the riches but cannot do anything with it within the same country? Sir, even though there is globalization there should also be a social side to it. What is lacking in this country is the ability to understand the social side of the situation.

We as politicians do not understand it is the agricultural and poultry industry that brought us to this point and we have forgotten the foundation which this country was built on and are allowing a "too few" to dictate to us when we should be setting the policy for them to follow along with their ideas.

Asides.

11.55 a.m.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: There are a lot of constituencies that do not live up to their expectations. It has been voted for 28 constituencies and it cannot be fair that only two or three constituencies have to carry the weight of the other constituencies because these constituencies believe that they are above the issue.

Mr. Chairman, I am saying that as long as I am in this Parliament, I will continue to fight the fight that I have been fighting since 1994. Many people might say that I am talking foolishness but that does not deter me. I have heard that comment on many occasions.

Asides.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: The truth is, there are not many politicians who can make statements and paste these statements on a "political wall" and watch them come through. I am inviting all of you to come to "Moon Town" and look at the "political wall".

Asides.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: I am saying that this particular Head...

Asides.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: I am saying, Mr. Chairman...

Asides.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Honourable Member please continue.

Asides.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: I am saying, Mr. Chairman, that there is nothing wrong with putting preventive measures in place to ensure that our country is not affected by a particular disease. We cannot rely on that alone but we must also deal with the things that are affecting our economy and the particular industry we are dealing with.

Sir, whether it will be the new Slaughtering Act that would affect the industry and deprive the masses of the understanding of the true meaning of "stock". Barbadians need to understand that there are two types of stocks. The rich stock is the one that the rich people buy into companies and the poor stock is the one that poor people buy, like sheep, goats and cows in order to compete with the rich.

Sir, what is lacking in this Parliament is that we have forgotten where we came from.

I thank you very much.

Mr. D. T. GILL: M. Chairman, I rise to lend my support to this Resolution. It only goes to show how the outbreak of veterinary diseases, such as the foot-and-mouth and swine fever are a threat to our communities. Particularly, the last outbreak of this disease goes to show how vulnerable our livestock industry can be and how open the farmers are to losses, and how they can be brought to their knees in a matter of weeks as long as the contagion is neither isolated nor confined.

Sir, there is something that our local farmers could learn from the recent outbreak. There are the preventive techniques and good hygiene measures which could be implemented. The measures undertaken by our Ministry are to be complimented. However, farmers and farm workers should be advised and be very careful the way they move within their own location, as well as how they move from one farm to another farm. Also the manner in which they handle containers, such as the milk vats which have to be moved from one farm to another.

Sir, there is a point to be noted when a farmer is rearing a number of different types of animals and the same employees that are handling more than one type of animal. It is important that precautions must be taken at all times to prevent cross-contamination. Whether it is water or feed, there is a potential risk of cross-infection. There is also the manner in which carcasses are disposed of irrespective of the healthiness of the dead animal.

I was pleased to read in recent times one of our large poultry producers speaking to the setting up of a plant which

will not only incinerate the offal of the dead animals, but which will also help to supply us with fertiliser. Sir, such a move would prevent the spread of disease within the animal kingdom but it would also help to reduce our import bill regarding the importation of fertiliser. Sir, there is also a third advantage in that it would limit the spread of diseases into the food change.

Very often we have information coming out of Britain and western Europe, the problem of "Mad Cow" disease which is very real in that part of the world. Recently in the Caribbean there was fear, I think that it was the Dominican Republic, where a patient fell ill and it is believed that patient succumbed to the human CSJ disease. This CSJ disease originates from cattle suffering from the "Mad Cow" disease. When their meat is consumed, then the person falls ill. Sir, at the outset, I did not follow it up to see if the person was, in fact, a sufferer of the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy disease or whether it was another ailment but it did cause some concern in parts of the Caribbean.
12.05 p.m.

This again, Sir, should set our authorities to monitor very carefully the country of origin where not only our meats and fish come from but foods in general. Sir, caution has to be taken, particularly now with the free movement of trade around the world. With such disease along with other inherent diseases such as salmonella, ecoli bacteria, one must be very careful, cautious and vigilant, as to the habits of importation of our foods. Therefore, Sir, I am pleased to see that our Honourable Minister, his technical staff and advisors have had the foresight and have moved with great alacrity to stem the potential flow and spread of such diseases by putting such measures in place. I am also hearkened to see that they do not intend totally to dispense of these measures taken but, in some instances, to keep some of the measures in place. Sir, I am most grateful and am certain that the Ministry is in good hands. I am much obliged to you.

Hon. A. P. WOOD: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that Head 25 stand part.

The question that Head 25 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

HEAD 26 – MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES – \$127 012.25

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, the Expenditure which seeks to supplement the Minister's vote was occasioned in a very simple way. It is not a large sum, only \$127 012.25 and has occurred in this way.

Mr. Chairman, you will recall that the Rules indicate that whenever there are posts applied for in the Ministry of

the Civil Service that, at the beginning of the financial year, even if one anticipates that the post will come into play during the course of the financial year, you are not allowed to budget and allocate resources to these posts in your book. We had some new staff coming on; they came in during the course of the financial year and, in fact, before the Ministry was reconstituted as the Ministry of Physical Development and Environment. We are now seeking to supplement the vote to make allocation for some of those persons and in particular expenditure which involves payment of national insurance, payment of travel expenditure to staff who would be entitled to a travel vote. Sir, there are one or two components of the Supplementary; when the Estimates would have been done at the beginning of the financial year, apparently the expenditure for some items such as utilities and property were below the quantum which was anticipated and we are now seeking to supplement those two Heads.

Finally, Sir, there is one more component of the Supplementary which relates to an expenditure that should have been made in the last financial year. As you are aware, Sir, where a debt is owed, once the expenditure is not made within the last warrant period of the Financial Year, then the monies cannot be paid. Sir, monies are due for the National Petroleum Corporation, which was then part of the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Natural Resources, for some reason which I would have to confess I am not aware of, the rents were not paid within the requisite period but, of course, remain due and appear now as an arrear in this financial year. We are simply seeking the authority of Parliament to get this money to pay what would now be reflected in this new Ministry's vote as arrears.

Sir, essentially this is not a Supplementary of the sort which the Opposition likes to attack as unrestrained and unwarranted expenditure. It is quite in order and is exactly the kind of thing which I ...

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, the Honourable Member is reflecting badly on me. She is giving the impression that I attack wildly. I am not aware of...

Mr. CHAIRMAN: That is no point of order, Mr. Kellman.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Not only, Sir, does it not meet the criteria for being a point of order, it is also entirely true.

Sir, this is exactly the kind of expenditure for which supplementaries are given and I commend it to this Honourable Chamber and urge that we agree to it. I therefore beg to move that Head 26 stand part.

The question that Head 26 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: Mr. Chairman, I have no intention to be contentious on this particular issue but...

Asides.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: Sir, I cannot understand; whenever I walk into this Parliament, all Ministers get scared and I do not understand why.

Mr. Chairman, I was hoping, on this occasion, that the Minister would have been able to shed some light on the environmental problems created by dust because of the construction that is going on and that the Minister would have been able to tell us what new measures would have been put in place between the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Public Works to have created the health hazards that have been created by the Ministry of Public Works. Also, Sir, that the Minister would have been able to tell this Parliament how come the Ministry has spent so much money planting various types of plants throughout Barbados and that the Ministry of Public Works has been allowed to destroy those plants by the amount of dust that has been created by that particular Ministry; that the Minister would give us a report of the environmental impact of the Ministry of Public Works on the Ministry of the Environment. Sir, I hope the Minister will also be able to tell us when that good Ministry will be able to do some good work in the north of Barbados beyond the Judge Gap, better known as Kellman's Road and leading into Moon Town.

I would also have expected that we would have understood the importance of the environment, not only to the locals but the impact it is having on the tourism industry; that the Minister would have come to this Parliament for a Supplementary to do a total study of the environmental problems that we are now having within the country as it affects the locals and the tourism industry, and what will be the effect of those problems of the economy of Barbados. I thank you, Sir.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, there is only one issue to which I need to respond and it is to say that there will be a full debate on the Ministry during the course of the Estimates, at which time I hope the Honourable Member for St. Lucy will have some time to reflect and to raise issues of substance to which I can respond and which, indeed, I will be keen to respond to.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: On a point of order, Sir. Am I to believe that the Honourable Member is saying that I have misled this House by giving the impression that these matters are not urgent and that we have to wait for answers to these particular matters; that she does not see them as being urgent?

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Please, Honourable Member, be explicit as to what you mean.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, am I expected to respond to his non point?

Mr. CHAIRMAN: No, the Honourable Member of St. Lucy needs clarification as to whether you will reply to him now or at some time in the future.
12.15 p.m.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Sir, I would need divine inspiration to respond to him and even then, I do not think that I could satisfy a mind so confused.

Aside.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Sir, in relation to the issue of whether we hope to protect the environment, in relation to the road works currently underway by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, I wish to assure the Honourable Member for St. Lucy that having considered the matter, we are entirely persuaded that between now and the next general election, all of the roads will be repaired and people will drive to the polls in total comfort and we would consider that to be a substantial improvement to the environment.

I therefore beg to move that this Head stand part.

Asides.

HEAD 33 – MINISTRY OF LABOUR, SPORTS AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM – \$5 010

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Chairman, originally under the Ministry of Labour, Sports and Public Sector Reform as it was then constituted, the figure of \$92 975 has been voted to provide the payment of national insurance for certain categories of workers under that Ministry. The Ministry is no longer constituted as the Ministry of Labour, Sports and Public Sector Reform, but it is now called the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

Mr. Chairman, the vote which is being sought directly applies to the question of social security because the \$5 010 being sought is to pay the National Insurance Contributions, by this particular Government department, to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS).

Mr. Chairman, the Government must always set proper examples in relation to paying national insurance and also send signals to the Community that the payment of national insurance is a statutory duty, out of which nobody can contract or which nobody can opt out of. It is a cause for

enormous concern that since its inception in 1967, the sum of \$137.2 million is owed to the NIS for the last 35 years.

This sum of \$137.2 million is owed to the Social Security Scheme of Barbados in circumstances, Mr. Chairman, where lots of the defaulters could have done better. Sir, in circumstances also, where \$41.2 million had to be written off as irrecoverable debt.

Mr. Chairman, there are many relevant issues which I will outline, briefly. First of all on the positive side, I am heartened that many self-employed persons faithfully pay their national insurance. I was very pleasantly surprised when, walking the beach from Porters to Sandy Lane, I discovered that the licensed beach vendors all told me that they voluntarily registered as self-employed. I did further surveillance and all of the fish vendors at the Weston Market – ordinary working-class people – have been diligent and faithful to pay their NIS dues.

I rather apprehend, though, Mr. Chairman, that there are still large numbers of self-employed people and small businessmen who still seem, in this the year of our Lord 2002, blissfully unaware of the fact that they are under an obligation imposed by Statute. I suspect the Statute is Chapter 47 of the Laws of Barbados and that in time, when they pay and qualify that they will be contributing to a pool of funds, out of which Barbadians will be able to benefit, when particular needs arise.

The National Insurance Scheme in recent time had to be extremely prudent to pursue those who owe this net amount of \$96 million, since the inception of the Scheme and also to send certain signals to those who deduct employees' contributions. The way the Scheme works, Mr. Chairman, the employer pays a certain statutory percentage on behalf of the employee and the employee pays the balance. Sir, what we are seeking here is the contribution which the Government has to pay on behalf of employees.

Mr. Chairman, there are unscrupulous business persons in Barbados, who deduct the NIS contributions from their employees and instead of passing on the money deducted, they use this money as cash flow to support their current expenses.

It is possible, Mr. Chairman, indeed it may very well be probable that there are those business people who suffer from capital constraints and find themselves hard pressed to pay on time. Now, where a business person is hard pressed but still walks around with a conscience, he or she is free, acting under the influence of such conscience, to make arrangements with NIS to pay, even though the classic doctrine of bankruptcy always hints that an arrangement with your creditors is a sure sign of bankruptcy and that a person in cash never has to make any arrangement with his or her creditors.

Nonetheless, Sir, notwithstanding that time-honoured doctrine in traditional bankruptcy law, I would still urge all those persons who have been perennial defaulters – and the list of perennial defaulters is interesting – because they are not only defaulters and perennial, they are also of a certain inclination, not just in terms of their relationship with the NIS but indeed in their relationship with all mankind. Dishonest people seem to be endemically so endowed and treat their dishonesty as some type of esoteric quality.

Mr. Chairman, NIS is determined to pursue those who owe contributions and make no satisfactory arrangements to pay. The Director of National Insurance raised the point with me that there are working-class people in Barbados – a group of people from whom I have descended and a group of people close to my heart – who complain that in interacting with the staff of the NIS, they often meet bombastic people who turn them off, even as they are about to pay over the money. There are people who went there to pay their contributions but the behaviour of some of the persons working there was so crude, coarse, uncivilised and even vituperate that they ran away with the money. The Director of the National Insurance Department told me that he is disappointed with the quality of new workers coming to his place.
12.25 p.m.

Now, to work in the National Insurance Department for a career one first has to be rule oriented. The national insurance regulations are typically so complex that even leading luminaries and lawyers known for a lot of mouth do not necessarily understand them. There was a classic case of a lawyer who is known for his loquacity even if not for his veracity, I am not talking about a lawyer who having reached age 65 sought to apply for old aged pension never having paid the contributions, I am talking about another person wearing a different brand of shirt, who waited until he reached age 64 in anticipation of coming to age 65, having been possessed of being and of life in 1967 and having been already over the age of majority, who went to the National Insurance Department and said in typical terms "I come in here to pay all the arrears that I owe since the inception and I want to pay all these arrears now to qualify for a contributory pension".

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Chairman, I am fully awake as I make this point. The national insurance regulations are typically so technical that there is a manner of computing the contributions. The magic formula is 500 contributions to entitle you to certain benefits especially as regard pension. So here is this person who is growing old and approaching senility, having defaulted in his civic duty and having been profligate to his very self and in a position to pay over time but who waited until he was 64, not 54,

nor 44, nor 34, indeed, he may very well have been a lawyer at 24, and sought to back pay the NIS from age 64 down to when he started. I would not say to 24 because he might have been older than 24 in 1967. Mr. Chairman, I mention that, not out of any malice, ill will or spite but speaking anecdotally on a matter that has actually transpired within the affairs of Barbados.

Mr. Chairman, what is galling is where somebody else now, a typical, rural, humble and working-class person from near Kellman Drive, blessed be that name forever, formerly called the Judge Gap, who is a fisher and who has contributed 195 contributions, not the magical formula of 500 or even 250, and who goes in to pay as a self-employed person having previously been paying but a rude clerical officer pushes her aside because she was not in a position to speak Her Majesty's English. She was working-class and honest. She was not highly educated but was prudent enough to perform her civic duty and she goes in and they declined to take what she was trying to pay so much so that she got fed up and did not go back. That is not the same case at all like the loquacious lawyer I referred to earlier.

If a person is willing to pay and the person has been, as they will say in North America, declining the opportunity to pay and as we would say in Barbados refused the opportunity to pay then that poor person can end up being disadvantaged. Picture a robust lady parading under the nomenclature of Elizabeth and hailing from fair Baxters Road, which for some should be the capital of Barbados, who paid 200 contributions up to when she was 55 years old, who goes in to pay but some clerical officer turns her off and refuses to take her money. She gets fed up and then when she reaches 65 years she realises that she cannot qualify for the full contributory pension and instead had to settle for a grant of about \$1 000 and then the old aged non-contributory pension which is lower than the contributory pension.

Mr. Chairman, I happen to be in many places in this country within relatively short time frames. Mr. Chairman, I have this tendency to overhear and even when I am not directly engaged in a confabulation, I tend sometimes still to be privy to what transpired during such confabulations and last week I overheard this articulate young lady interviewing a conception of humanity from the law and she was thrashing them as to whether they understood the concept of national insurance which they did. She further pressed them into whether they were aware that the pool out of which benefits are paid is a pool that is poised, holding all things that we know constant, to go broke around 2032. I sense, in consequence of this survey, that many people either did not know that the pool of reserve available to the national insurance scheme is delicately poised and that it may go empty by the year 2032 or that radical measures would have to be taken to ensure the wholesomeness and integrity of the said pool.

Mr. Chairman, if the \$96 million, which we called debt for which there is the possibility of recovery, owed to the National Insurance Scheme is paid and if the false claims being made stop...

Mr. Chairman, within this polity which men and women call Barbados, there exist tendencies by some leeches, not pests and not like a mosquito but a leech – a leech as the Honourable Member for St. George South who is possessed of tremendous classical learning will tell you is a physician – and there are fewer than a dozen leeches in Barbados who verify 70 per cent of all the claims that go to the National Insurance Department whose conduct has had to be taken to the Barbados Association of Medical Practitioners.

12.35 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, if you assume that there are 350 doctors in Barbados...

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Not pejoratively. I am in a graphic mode today and certainly not spirited by any substance for which I am wont to be known. When you see a gentleman from St. George South, you would seem to acquire the habit and the girth of proper oratory and your perorations would assume a particular mode in consequence.

Mr. Chairman, it is nothing short of scandalous that seven leeches in this area out of 350 are certifying 70 per cent of all claims made at NIS. This leads to the powerful and irrefutable presumption that there are physicians who are registered and certified to be exclusively grantors of sick leave. God knows if they do anything but that. Shocking and scandalous! That matter, Mr. Chairman, has had to be taken before the Barbados Association of Medical Practitioners.

Typically, doctors in Barbados, especially those under 40, are scrupulous and careful and not given to any tendency to take pecuniary lucre for the granting of sick leave; but this culture is changing and girding itself with all the idiosyncrasies of countries up North where the concept of rip-off and fraud and even racketeering is well established, racketeering being a concept known to North American law.

We have had in this country two leeches who not only were known to be the principal leeches among those physicians granting sick leave with impunity but who dare not even admit that they were registered in conformity with the law. Could you imagine a professional person who is required by January 31, not being registered, knowing what people say about them? Other professionals registered. Interestingly, two physicians had not paid any kind of

registration but proceeded to practise medicine and proceeded to certify countless people both for the purpose of sick leave and for the consequential purpose of claiming on the NIS.

I have had to take this route which has been rather circuitous admittedly, Mr. Chairman, because I want to say a few things. Firstly, I would want the Public Service Commission to be very careful in whom they select to run the National Insurance. Successive directors sometimes feel done by when the wrong people come who are unable to be rule oriented and to appreciate the rules, who sometimes want a job only because they want income from the job without necessarily relating and interacting with the job. On that matter a person bears a certain relationship with their job and a person should go into a job not just for income but for self-fulfilment and to make a contribution.

Too many Barbadians sometimes want a job for income and we want the NIS to be able to recruit proper employees so that John Public and Joan Public would not be turned off when they go to meet their civic obligations and pay money to the pool from which we all benefit. I want Barbadians to know that whatever millions they hear go to the pool, it does not represent a financial asset. The millions in the pool are nothing compared with the pressures on the pool.

On current projections, Mr. Chairman, national insurance can dry up by 2032. If employment levels remain very high and I must tell this Parliament the consequence of this is that more people will be eligible to pay national insurance, then the contribution will proceed apace. There are specific heads about which I offer no details at this point under the NIS system that are doing better than others. Nevertheless, Your Honour, permit me, this humble servant, to wind up his peroration.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: You have eight minutes.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: From the time I developed a sense of control, I have been careful to caution Barbadians and to repeat the caution that even when one is young one can plan for one's retirement and one's pension. I am heartened, Sir, at the large number of pension plans offered by traditional life insurance companies, offered by some credit unions and some commercial banks and I would want to caution all Barbadians, irrespective of the present value of their resources and wealth, not to be complacent but to plan ahead in respect of how they are going to take care of themselves once crabbed old age has taken them right down to their innermost marrow!

Mr. Chairman, the point is that we owe it to ourselves to assess where we are in life in respect of where we are financially, what possessions we have to meet liabilities, contingencies and duties.

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: The Honourable Member for St. Lucy is a political person. If I call him anything other than that it would be unparliamentary. Let us say he is the Honourable Member for St. Lucy and he is certainly not, considering his wily ways, a political lilliputian, but I would not condescend or deign to call him a Caliban. But the planners of the day, in the 1960s, had the foresight to introduce a scheme that was statutory in nature that had a measure of coercion, anything requiring obligation and duties ultimately can apply coercion to make Barbadians contribute to a pool out of which they can draw a pension and along the route to a pensionable age out of which they can provide for themselves when things are not good with them.

There are things that I think the National Insurance is going to have to tell the public. There are those who pay contributions but do not qualify for the full pension. In some instances, they can get a one-off grant and then the old aged pension.

There are male persons in this country who pay national insurance faithfully and have a spouse who does not contribute, as the Honourable Member for St. Michael West would know, not because he has a non-contributing spouse but because he is very much interested in these matters. If you are a male person and you are well paid up with your national insurance and your spouse is not working and gets pregnant because of the fact that a male person was paying on behalf of a female – I have to check the law to see if this is true, because that Act may have been passed in the days of classical male chauvinism when women were not perceived as anything other than domestic idiots. That was the perception out there. Not me, I would never perceive God's humanity to be simpering domestic idiots. There was a time when male chauvinists sought to keep females either in the kitchen but more particularly in the bed and busy as well.

12.45 p.m.

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

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Chairman, are you tiring of what is both educational and enlightening?

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The problem is that I do not have a dictionary with me today.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Sir, if I bring one for you can I then continue to speak?

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Chairman, there are other claims that persons in Barbados can lawfully make on the National Insurance Scheme. We in the National Insurance Scheme bear a duty, as we go around seeking opinions on national insurance reform, to educate the public further as to the range of benefits and claims that exists.

I would like to plea with all Barbadians to pay their national insurance. If they are in default to go in and make an arrangement to pay. If, for some reason they are ill, they should prove this illness in an authentic and genuine way.

Mr. Chairman, I want to repeat the point that each one owes it to himself to plan ahead for retirement. This Barbados Labour Party has done more than any Government in terms of sensitising this nation as to the need to take part in proper paying pension plans because national insurance is importance.

I am obliged to you, Mr. Chairman.

On the motion of Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY seconded by Hon. R. D. MARSHALL, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported progress to Mr. SPEAKER and Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair and reported accordingly.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this House be suspended until 2.00 p.m.

Hon. R. D. MARSHALL: I beg to second that.

The question that the House be suspended until 2.00 p.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. Speaker suspended the House accordingly.

RESUMPTION

Mr. SPEAKER: This Sitting is resumed. When the Suspension was taken the House was in Committee of Supply. To that, it will now revert.

Mr. SPEAKER left the Chair and the House resumed Committee of Supply, Mr. D. CARTER in the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This Honourable Chamber is now in Committee of Supply.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: Mr. Chairman, there is no doubt that the National Insurance Scheme is one of the best schemes ever introduced into this country. It was not by accident that it was introduced in 1967 because it had to take

people of understanding and wisdom to introduce such a scheme.

Sir, I do not want to fool anybody that when it was introduced in 1967 there were no problems but the system started minus the present problems. Mr. Chairman, one of the biggest errors made was that old age pension was allowed to be paid from the contributions of workers. This is one of the fears which I always complained about because I recognise lately that there is a tendency to ask the poor to support the poor.

Sir, in order to solve this problem, the Minister should find out the amount of money paid by the National Insurance Scheme to persons who never contributed to the scheme.

Sir, the problem that the National Insurance Scheme now faces is one created by politicians when they allowed old age pensions to be paid out of the contribution of workers. The old age pension should have been paid by the Consolidated Fund of the country and not by the National Insurance Scheme so any depletion should be seen as wrong allocation of funds and the error should be corrected.

Mr. Chairman, the Minister needs to carry out a study to find out the amount of money paid out in old age pension which came from the National Insurance Scheme. Sir, those people who owe the National Insurance Scheme and can afford to pay should also be made to paid. There is no doubt that a lot of these people take the money and use it for other purposes when it should have been paid into the Scheme.

Sir, I have made the point for years that the Unemployment Scheme is negative to the National Insurance Scheme. Because of how it is calculated, a worker can get more money from the unemployment scheme for one period than he has paid to the scheme for his entire working life. We have to find a system to compensate the worker so that he could be encouraged to go back to work and pay into the National Insurance Scheme, instead of being unemployed and drawing unemployment benefits.

Sir, I am proposing to the House that we devise a system where the worker can receive a lump sum from the unemployment scheme and this would encourage him to find employment as soon as possible.

Sir, this country is suffering because the system encourages people to be lazy and unproductive. The players in the National Insurance Scheme must look at these factors. In other words, a man is laid off, he can find work for himself but because of how the unemployment scheme is structured, he stays at home even though he could easily be employed elsewhere. If there was a grant system in place to give this man a lump sum up front, the man would take the money, use it as an investment and find himself a job. This

is what is needed, not a scheme that encourages the man to sit at home for 26 weeks and be non-productive.

Sir, we have to find a counter to that because Barbados at this stage cannot afford to limit the number of people looking for work because as the number reduces it affects the amount of contributions paid in to the scheme.

Sir, we cannot blame the workers. When it is advertised that the workers are guilty, the politicians must take some of the blame because these systems, which were created by them, are hampering the National Insurance Scheme. I want politicians to understand the logic as it relates to this issue and implement the system to solve this particular problem. There was a time when it was paid by the Consolidated Fund but some brilliant leader felt that it had to come from the National Insurance Scheme to reduce the amount taken from the Consolidated Fund.
2.05 p.m.

Sir, what we need to do is to find out the amount of money that is being taken from the National Insurance Scheme and put it back into the Consolidated Fund. I would bet that if that were to be done, you would not hear any talk about the National Insurance Scheme being under threat. I am saying that it was a bad allocation of funds when the money was taken from the National Insurance Scheme to pay old age pensions when it should have come from the Consolidated Fund. The truth is that the National Insurance Scheme was supposed to be a scheme paid by the workers for the workers. Sir, what has happened is, the National Insurance Scheme is being paid by workers for everybody and that was not the intention of the Scheme.

I hope that we can correct this and recognise that if we cannot repay all the money in one lump sum, that provision will be made in the Estimates on a yearly basis where the Consolidated Fund repays the National Insurance Fund the money which was taken from the Fund to pay old age pensions in previous years.

Sir, we have an unemployment scheme that creates the desire to be unemployed, when we should be encouraging people to be employed. I have said that in one draw down from the National Insurance Scheme, a worker can draw down more money in unemployment than he or she can pay for their whole working life. I think that this is very serious.

I have no intention of preventing workers from getting their benefits. All I am asking the Government to do is to give a grant up-front or even give the workers an option where they have a choice of either getting the grant and go back to work or if they feel like remaining unemployed, it is entirely up to them.

Sir, I do not know of any sensible person who can get a lump sum of money in their hands, which they can put to

good use, that will not go back to work. The more people that we have employed, the more contributions will go into the Scheme.

I am saying that those persons who owe money to the National Insurance Scheme should try their best to repay. We cannot ignore the fact that there are times when some businesses will come under pressure and will not be able to pay. The point is that the willingness to pay is very important. There are some persons who deliberately set out not to pay the National Insurance Scheme and that is what leads to the problem.

Sir, there is another system that we have to look at and I think that I might need some clarification on this. As far as I know, the system used by the Government regarding the payment of National Insurance Contributions is not used by the private sector. I think that the private sector makes a higher level of contribution than the Government. I need some clarification on this. I do not want to say something that is not true.

Sir, we also have to look and see if the maximum limit of \$3 100 on which national insurance contributions are paid is the appropriate limit at this time. To the best of my knowledge, we had this limit for a very long time. If you take the rate of inflation into account, this limit has not changed for a very long time. We have to look and see if we can continue to keep a ceiling level of \$3 100 and whether that limit is realistic. The same way that you would expect a poor man to pay national insurance contribution on 100 per cent of his earnings, one would expect other workers in a higher bracket to pay a higher percentage of their earnings too. I remember once using that argument and a gentleman argued that I said that workers should pay all 100 percent of their earnings. That is not true.

We must look at the cost effectiveness of the National Insurance Scheme and whether it would not be better to increase the percentage paid by those at a higher level. Sir, as it currently stands, the maximum level on which national insurance contributions are paid is \$3 100. The type of salaries that I am hearing these days, I wonder if the \$3 100 is not only 10 per cent of some of these salaries.

There are people who work for \$30 000 and \$50 000 a month and we as politicians cannot even get that amount in a year. Yet, only a percentage of their salaries is paid as national insurance contribution. Taking into consideration everything that has been said, we have to do a thorough study of what is happening with the National Insurance Scheme and not deal with only one aspect of it. It must be a total study.

I want the Government to stop scaring people by saying that the Scheme will be broke soon. I am saying that the Scheme will be broke if the Government does not repay

to the Scheme the money that has been taken out to pay non-contributory pensions. In my opinion, that money is still owed to the Scheme.

Recently I received a complaint from a gentleman who spent most of his working life overseas working in the cold. He returned to the island with frostbite which prevented him from working. The gentleman was receiving a welfare contribution. Now that he has reached the age of 65, there are government employees who are giving him the run-around telling him that he cannot get a non-contributory pension unless he brings in a medical certificate from the time he first got sick. This is foolishness, because all of this information is already in another government department.

There are also some old people who do not understand how to apply for old age pension. When they do not apply in time, they are told that they have lost the right to claim that pension. Sir, to tell the person that he or she cannot claim for the rest of their lives is foolishness and it deprives poor people of their rights. I can see if they make the argument that the period loss cannot be claimed but to tell persons that they cannot get it for the rest of their lives is utter foolishness and is depriving poor people of their rights. Sir, I hope that the Minister will look at and correct these matters because it is unfair to old people who have worked so hard. Most of them have worked the fields in this country, helped develop rural Barbados and off the sweat of their backs have developed Bridgetown and have put it in the position in which it is. Why then should other people come and look at them and tell them they are not entitled to the benefits of what they had employed themselves in contributing and developing this country and that they are now unable to claim anything?

2.15 p.m.

Sir, I am also saying there is a concern that we must look at. A lot of poor people see this Scheme as an insurance scheme, where every time one works, he pays, but the biggest concern now is if one dies while not reaching the age of 65, then one does not get any claims even though one might have left some suffering children behind. Sir, even if it is just a grant; that is something we have to look at. Under normal circumstances if this was done in the private sector, paying that money into a fully funded and vested fund, there would have been something to which one is entitled, although I will be quick to point out there will be a cost, but my argument is that there is logic in the argument that is being provided by the masses. If we want to encourage the masses to become involved in pension schemes which people see the National Insurance as, it might be good that we put some trust in the ones that they know best. This is the one that you want confidence in, more so than the others.

Mr. Chairman, I hope people have understood everything that I have said. I still believe one of the best

Schemes one can get is this National Insurance Scheme because there are many other benefits that will come with it.

Mr. Chairman, I wonder sometimes if there was some way in which the Scheme could allow persons who have surplus funds to invest a little more, even though the limit does not ask them to do so. Sir, we have to see this Scheme as being a dynamic one and doing more than what it set about to do in 1967. As far as I can see, this Scheme is still a 1967 Scheme with some modification but it has not gone as far as it can.

Mr. Chairman, in terms of sickness benefits, I can understand the concerns of people. I think sometimes the reason why people feel they have the right to get sick and to claim sickness benefits is that sometimes people do not believe that when they are sick they should be at home. I think if that clause was looked at very carefully a lot of those persons who claim for sickness benefits would not necessarily claim for them if they knew the true rules; and this might be an educational process.

Sir, last but not least, employees must understand that they, too, must play their part in making sure that both the Unemployment Fund and National Insurance Fund are viable. They must understand that working is not just receiving a pay packet at the end of the week, and that the onus is not only on the employer but that there is a direct relationship to the employer/employee. The employees must understand they must make the company viable in order for the company to pay them what they are expect to be paid. The onus cannot only be on the employer; there is a two-way relationship and that responsibility must be shared fairly.

Sir, I sometimes believe that instead of just blaming the employer, it might be good sometimes to blame the employees too. But if you use all employers as whipping boys or girls, then the tendency is that the company does not have to make money but the employer has to find the money, whenever it is required, to pay the employees.

I know that there are some employers who dig into their pockets to make sure that everything is right. Sir, I am saying that we cannot behave as though all employers are wicked and deliberately set about to do wrong things. Some of them make a lot of personal sacrifice to ensure that their employees benefit, but employees also have to understand that they, too, have a role to play.

Sir, in recapping what I have said previously, I would like to see the Consolidated Fund repay the National Insurance Fund for the amount of money taken from the National Insurance Fund that should have been taken from the Consolidated Fund. I would also like to see us look at the way we pay out unemployment benefits. Sir, we could give the workers two options:

1. A right to a grant up front, and those who have the ability to get a job can go back to work and,
2. Those who do not have the ability to get a job can continue to draw those benefits.

Sir, I am saying, if those Schemes are put in place that we, as Barbadian citizens, will not have to worry about the viability of the National Insurance Fund. Sir, last but not least, we have to recognize that the Fund is for everyone and that how we invest those funds must be done in such a way as to get the maximum return from them. Sir, I am saying that a careful opportunity cost study must be done before any investment in the National Insurance Funds are invested. I thank you, Sir.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: I am deeply grateful to the Honourable Member for St. Lucy but before getting to them, there are two matters which I would like to clarify before continuing. If Honourable Members, including the Honourable Member for St. Lucy will allow, I need not wrap up during this one, I can always come back if there are issues that need to be addressed.

Mr. Chairman, this morning I did not intend to indicate that the medical profession in Barbados, as a whole, was part and party to any smart tricks to facilitate claims. I was just saying that a mere seven per cent of the total amount of doctors in Barbados actually sign 70 per cent of the claim forms by which people make application for sickness benefits.

Secondly, I want to clarify the matter regarding the attitudes of staff. I am sure that the particular anecdotal reference that I made earlier is no longer applicable. I had mentioned the case of a working-class lady who had paid in excess of 180 contributions, who went into the National Insurance Office and because she did not possess the sophistication one would normally associate with somebody entering a posh office, she was more or less turned away. I am satisfied that the persons who turned her away no longer work there. I am further satisfied that those employees who demonstrate incorrect attitudes are persons who do not intend to stay and who, therefore, do not want to equip themselves either with the attitudes, skills or know-how.

Sir, workers at the National Insurance Office, even at the level of receptionist and clerical officer, both require a particular yearning for interaction with people and, at the same time, a capacity to understand fine, technical rules written in technical language. Sir, also a tremendous knowledge of mathematics and accounting will help because some of the formulae by which claims are calculated are computed on definitive mathematical bases.

Sir, let me, however, go to three things which the Honourable Member for St. Lucy said so nobly. I want to inform the Honourable Member and to give him the assurance that the 10th Actuarial Review prepared by the

British Actuary, is out. I may have a copy in my car. If I do have it I will give it to the Honourable Member. I suspect the way the Higher Power works, I may have put a copy of that Review in my car, in which case I can give it to him. It makes very good reading. The projection as to the pressure on the Fund working in such a way as to exhaust the Fund in 2032 is based on a number of variables, constants and projections.

Mr. Chairman, let me say that if those people who owe the \$96 million could pay it tomorrow, then it would give the NIS more options and latitudes when looking at this institutional review. At the moment the entire operation of the NIS is being reviewed.

Sir, under the law, every three years an actuary study has to be done. The 10th Actuary Report indicates quite clearly that taking into account, not just speaking on it but demographic factors as well, that there will be pressure on the Fund by the year 2032. In fact, looking at the demography in that Report, they are actually saying that by the year 2059, the population of Barbados will be less than it is today and they have shown the level of increase in the population.
2.25 p.m.

Sir, the Barbados population is projected to decline to a level lower than 280 000 by the year 2059, while at the same time between 2030 and 2059, the total number of pensioners will be much higher than today, notwithstanding factors like cancer, forms of VD, HIV/AIDS and such like. That is the projection.

Actuaries and statisticians, highly trained in probability theory, who have to apply certain variables in one direction hold some constant and take into account a number of factors, that the average layman might not easily want to take within his range or store of knowledge or skill. Mr. Chairman, perhaps the best point made by the Honourable Member for St. Lucy is a point that no serious actuary can ignore.

The Honourable Member of St. Lucy has made me proud in my capacity as a northerner. I really feel a delight today that one of my scholastic underlings could demonstrate such an intellectual grasp of technical issues. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy is really enjoying his finest hour, no doubt brought on by the fact that today he is the sole, exclusive leader of the Opposition.

Aside.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: As leader of his side, he is clearly now showing the capacity both to lead and to understand the Parliamentary process, while embracing national issues. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy said that right now persons who contribute to the NIS, do not

have to contribute beyond a monthly income of \$3 100, and he is right. He suggested that we apply the principle of the progressive. He also said that for people earning more than \$3 100, we can consider increasing their contribution over what they paid, on a progressive basis, while trying to isolate those low income earners, decreasing their contributions. National insurance is not taxation but some people in the community mix up the two, unfortunately.

The Honourable Member has demonstrated a creativity that only an outstanding Coleridge and Parry student can evince. This is an outstanding point and we will, therefore, have to look at that concept very closely.

Aside.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Coleridge and Parry is a school which is very much the cradle of civilisation and long may it last! What the Honourable Member for St. Lucy has said, that for those low income earners who are not exempt from national insurance – I believe the ceiling is \$3 100 per month and the floor might be about \$204 a month or \$51 a week – those persons who pay on a 100 percent of their income and are under financial pressure, may very well represent a category that we should do well to embrace and look at closely, in terms of reform, while those persons who earn enormous salaries can be made to give back something higher. I am really impressed with that and will invite the Honourable Member for St. Lucy, without incriminating himself in any capacity, to write me on it so that I can look at the matter.

He also made the point – obviously meaning that in an era of pension reform and the type of pension policy that my side is encouraging, perhaps the NIS could consider enlarging certain areas of insurance coverage and projection beyond the current.

Now, I have always maintained, Mr. Chairman, that if you worked from age 17 to age 60 and have contributed that you should be given some option to pay a higher rate per week or per month and draw a full pension at age 60, rather than having to go to age 65. Anyone who worked from age 17 to age 60 would have worked for 43 years, Sir, but there are persons who can comfortably retire at 33 and one-third years at age 50 or age 51.

The Honourable Member for St. Lucy has made this point that in the context of commercial insurance, as rendered by Manufacturers Life, Life of Barbados, Mutual Life, Clico International Life and others, that NIS should look to see if the manner in which they pay claims or benefits when somebody dies before reaching age 65, should not be emulated by NIS. Let me make the point again. He is asking whether in a situation where the Honourable Member for St. Philip North can buy insurance coverage at \$40 000, contributes \$60 a month based on the age he bought

it – clearly he cannot do it now – but he contributed \$60 at the age 18 up to a given age and draws \$40 000, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy is asking why cannot NIS consider that policy.

The difference between national insurance and commercial insurance is transparently clear. National insurance, when enlisting somebody or joining up somebody as an insured person, does not insist on a medical examination to the same degree that the private, commercial insurers require.

For example, if somebody is unfortunately HIV/AIDS positive and seeks to register with the NIS, he will be registered. If somebody is HIV/AIDS positive and seeks to register with a private commercial insurer who is suspicious, he is made to undergo examination by a medical practitioner. Sir, a former underwriter, now a Minister, arranged for this very speaker to submit to such an examination, and with God's help – notwithstanding a number of variables, Mr. Chairman, – the results were most encouraging. Sir, to hear of something negative leading to a positive attitude, in terms of how one feels about oneself, is a tremendous achievement, taking into account all variables, temptations and intimations.

Sir, the National Insurance Scheme which registers 100 percent of those eligible without referring them to a medical practitioner will therefore be at greater risk than a private insurer. The Honourable Member for St. Michael West Central, if he so desires, can lend his expertise, having been a Member of a Special Committee here to look at insurance law.

In respect of unemployment, all the operations of the NIS are currently under review. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy said that when granting unemployment benefits, we must be careful to ensure, either that we do not develop a psychology of dependence or that we do nothing to discourage people from looking for work. We are looking at that and we are reviewing the system to see what improvements we can bring.

2.35 p.m.

There is another matter, Mr. Chairman, I will not give the details of it because I do not want prejudiced investigations, but we have this very sad scenario in Barbados of young people tricking the old people into arranging for these young people to collect their pensions. Mr. Chairman, an elderly grandmother assisted by a devoted and loyal granddaughter may genuinely arrange for that granddaughter to collect her pension but when youngsters ensnare old people into making arrangements for them by which the old people yield up their identification cards to the youngsters and the youngsters takes the identification card of themselves along with the old person's identification and could go and get the money, then the potential for abuse is great.

There have been cases in Barbados where long after pensioners have died, and somehow because the information did not go into the National Insurance Department, cheques were issued to deceased persons and agents and relatives of these people were not averse to continue to draw the pension for people who were dead.

There is one institution in this country which was the facilitator where those fraudulent people would go and endorse the cheques over to the institution and then through the system of an endorsed cheque were able to draw the money. There are also other instances of fraud.

The principal of *uberrima fides*, utmost good faith, apply in private insurance. To a remarkable degree national insurance does not expressly incorporate the principle of *uberrima fides* because of the compulsory nature of things, but clearly in a situation where it is your money and the money of the Honourable Member for St. Lucy and the Honourable Members on my left and all the other Honourable Members and all of the people's money, great care has to be taken that fraudulent and whimsical claims are not paid to the detriment of the Fund.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Honourable Member for St. Lucy as his first point said that the practice of making the NIS pay old aged non-contributory pensions may have caused some pressure on the Fund but the percentage of pure old aged pensioners as a percentage of total pensioners is not large. The percentage of old aged pensioners as a percentage of all claimants is very tiny. However, what prevails now is a very sophisticated system of accounting where these days in this Administration the Consolidated Fund actually pays funds over to the NIS on behalf of the non-contributory pensioners. That happens now.

There was a time when the Welfare Department use to pass cheques straight from them to the National Insurance Department and there was a time when clearly NIS was paying the non-contributory pensions. The Honourable Member for St. Lucy as a statesmanlike leader of the Opposition which he effectively is today has made that point obviously for the enlightenment of Parliament to enlighten Parliamentarians as to the fact that when you have to pay money from an internal source when this money should really come from an external source it could put you in penury.

Mr. Chairman, even though monies that should have been paid from the Consolidated Fund years ago were paid from the NIS reserves we do not think that problem is half as large as people owing the debt in the amount of \$96 million. If Barbadians were to pay that \$96 million, if employment levels could remain high and if we could reduce administrative cost that would enlarge the options available to us when we look to the scenario that we expect to prevail in the next 30 or so years.

There is no point in anybody panicking now to indicate that the NIS is in any great danger of suffering from financial problems. The NIS is healthy and good but based on current projections unless something radical happens to allow for massive inflows and a reduction in claims then we certainly will have to look at limiting options in respect of where this fund will be in the year 2032.

I conclude, Mr. Chairman, by commending the Tenth Actuary Review and even the previous ones to all Honourable Members of this House. I do not have copies here. The sole copy I have on the premises would be in S 130 and that has already been pledged to the Honourable Member for St. Lucy who today made the best speech he has ever made and, therefore, is in a position to say that he has made a significant contribution today. It has been a proud moment for me to see a student of mine shine today, but whether he distinguished himself 30 years ago is still a matter for debate.

I thank you.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: Mr. Chairman, even though the Honourable Member for St. James North spoke in such glowing terms of me I would not want this House to believe that the amount of money taken from the Pension Fund that should have been paid from the Consolidated Fund is not significant because if one was to ask for the amount of money paid out on a yearly basis and one was to multiply that amount of money by the number of years that it was taken from, one would understand the magnitude of the amount of money that I speak of.

I think that any actuary study should take into account the amount of money taken from the National Insurance Fund that should have been paid from the Consolidated Fund. An opportunity cost of that money should be done and that amount should be added to the national insurance reserves. As it now stands, one will realise that if that is so there will be no need for Barbadians to panic about the National Insurance Scheme and if all other monies owed to the Scheme were collected the National Insurance Scheme would be the healthiest Scheme in Barbados.

In looking at the National Insurance Scheme, Sir, I am saying that a total opportunity cost of the Scheme should be done and a true picture be given. As it stands now, Sir, we are not giving the public the true picture of the national insurance reserves. As I said before, the debt that is owed to the Scheme, not only the debt owed by the private citizens of Barbados but also the debt owed by the Government of Barbados must be taken into account, and once a future cost is done of that to the year 2032 one will recognise that the figure that is given now will be much healthier than it is today.

I am also saying that the Consolidated Fund should not be asked to repay all of that money in one scoop. On a yearly basis the Consolidated Fund should pay to the national insurance fund a certain amount for a certain period of time in order to correct the error.

I am saying, Sir, that there is enough evidence by the present Government to suggest that it was a cardinal error which was created at the time it was done to pay the old-aged pensions out of the national insurance fund and seeing that we have admitted that it was an error, that error should be corrected.

I thank you very much, Sir.
2.45 p.m.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, I have a number of loose sheets here with some statistics. So if you see me juggling and shuffling papers it is to be in a position where I can give the House as accurate figures as now are available.

There are two issues with respect to national insurance to which I would wish to focus my remarks today. We have to look urgently at what the retirement age in Barbados should be. The second is the expenditure for national insurance for sickness benefits, particularly those related to chronic illnesses and, by extension, the impact of chronic diseases on the workplace and on the persons who are in their most productive years of life.

To go to the first point, that of Barbados being an aging population. Barbados has a population of about 260 000 and our birth rate is 1.4 percent of the population, which is one of the lowest in the Caribbean. So when you look at what the birth rate is and we have a situation where our health standard, despite criticism of the QEH and the general system, is so good that a high percentage of babies make it to adulthood. As a result of low birth rate, we now have a small number of people relative to the general population coming into the workforce out of the school system.

At the far end of the demographic curve, Sir, you have a life expectancy of – the figures I have here say 72 years for men and 77 years for women – I believe that more accurate figures now place the life expectancy rate at 73 to 74 years for men and 78 to 79 years for women. At this time, as high a percentage of our population is 11.6 per cent and is already 65 years and over, that is, 11.6 percent of our population are out of the labour force, making no contribution to the national insurance but are drawing benefits from the national insurance that relate to the full range of pensions and other benefits to which they are entitled.

The projection is that by 2020, which is not all that far away... I remember as if it were only yesterday people talking about the new millennium and the year 2000, some

with trepidation and fear, anticipating that we would not make it to this new millennium and already, depending upon how you count, because there is a divide over whether the new millennium in fact started in the year 2000 or 2001. I am one of those who holds to the view that it started in 2001, but that is another debate. Depending upon which view one adheres to, which school of thought, we are already either one or two years into the millennium. Eighteen years from now, based on actuarial assessment, it is projected that as high as 25 per cent, a quarter of Barbados' population, will be 65 years or over, at retirement age. Add to that a number of people in the peak of their lives when they should be contributing to the national insurance and be valuable members of the workforce are going to be affected by disease.

We, therefore, have to ask ourselves, given the fact that our birth rate is so low and our population continues to age, and it is in those years, the post-retirement years when claims on the national insurance services can be at its highest because it is at those years, that you are most stricken by chronic and other diseases and have to make continuous claims. Those are the years when you are riding the bus, the years when you are drawing on the national insurance benefits, pensions and so on. I would not wish to see any of those stopped, but because of increasing improvements in health standards, where 20 or 30 or 40 years ago a person at 60 years old was virtually an old man, broken down and unable to offer anything back to the society, fit only for caring, the reality is that today because of improved nutrition and health standards, at 60 a man is in his prime or can be considered to be in his prime, depending on what he is able to do.

My father, who is a man 78 years old, assures me that he feels wonderfully well and at 78 is in fact typical of many Barbadians who grew up in the country on potatoes, cassava, salt fish and fish and walked from St. Andrew to Bridgetown, simple country people living the life of the average rural or urban Barbadian. At 78, many days my father works a 16-hour and 18-hour day, putting his daughter who grew up on macaroni and refined and processed food rather than the whole grains which he ate to shame.

The point I am making, Sir, is that our concept of a retirement age was forged at a time when at 60 you were in fact fit to retire and were looking forward only to a quiet existence before you entered the grave. Often now, men and women are able to work and contribute at every level. They are mentally and physically fit and able to contribute right up to their three-score and ten and many go well beyond that. In fact, it is a tribute to Barbados that we do not have just the largest aged population in the Caribbean but the largest number of centenarians alive anywhere in the world. One hundred and sixty people live today in Barbados who are 100

plus years, many of them looking like 70 and 80 years old and would defy anybody to guess their real age.

I had the good fortune of visiting with one of my centenarians in Hall's Village a couple of weeks ago. He said to me, "Miss Thompson, that is you? The eyes bad. Come close, girl, let me look at you."

I went in and he looked at me and said, "You look good. You like you lost a little weight."

I said, "I have lost a lot of weight, Sir." And he proceeded to chat me up.

Therefore, I am urging that we have been talking a lot but we have to give serious and urgent consideration to the extension of the retirement age so as to allow those persons who have acquired experience and skill over their working lives to remain in the labour force to help to give guidance and assistance to younger people and to continue to maintain themselves and contribute to the work environment and the wider society, but most of all, Sir, to contribute to the National Insurance Scheme from which they, themselves, within a few years will start to draw benefits.

That is critical, in my view more critical in a society where we have moved away from the extended family structure and moved into a nuclear structure where the old people who at retirement would come home and help care the grandchildren and the great-grands and remain active and useful as they engaged in that activity, and the children would give them a little something for looking after their children and they would have money to supplement their income, what you are seeing now increasingly is that these older persons are abandoned by the wider society, abandoned by the families with the nuclear family being now paramount as opposed to the extended family and they are forced, rather than rely on the assistance and support of family members, to rely now on their pensions exclusively. That is why today there are so many old people being abandoned at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and living in poverty in Barbados. Their pensions do not allow them to be able to effect adequate repairs and maintenance to their houses. It allows them perhaps to eat properly and to clothe themselves but old people do not buy a lot of new clothes. My father tells me that he has enough shirts to last him until he dies and if you give him a shirt he will "chupse" and ask whether you could not have spent your money on something else instead of wasting money on shirts for him, look at the shirts he has and so on. A lot of them are like that.

Aside.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: I know there was a point at which my mother used to give him linseed and sea moss. I do not see the same amount of these preparations in the house. I do not know what that is an indication of.

The point I am making, Sir, is that really if these people were in the workforce there would be a benefit to them as individuals. It would help them to be better prepared to care for themselves into retirement. Let us not fool ourselves, whatever our status, few of us like to contemplate the notion of aging or death. Invariably, we make very little preparation for our retirement years. The cost of living keeps going up all the time and the value of money is changing to the point where it is worth nothing.

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, my father told me in 1970 that he bought the land on which he now lives which was \$1.25 a square foot and at the time it was thought to be expensive. When he bought it, people laughed at him but today the same land is valued \$15.00 per square foot. I bought a piece of land in 1992 for \$55 000, which I did not keep, and today that same land is worth \$300 000. This is how the value of money has changed in a relatively short space of time. The point I am making is that when you reach retirement at age 65 and you think that a pension of \$1 000 is a lot of money but in five years if you are alive, the value of money would have changed radically over the period and the purchasing power of the dollar would have diminished so substantially that your circumstances can change dramatically to your detriment.

Sir, it is critical that we harness as much of our labour force as we can so that we do not lose our resources. Those persons who we regard as older people should be allowed to continue working for as long as they are fit. Mr. Chairman, a judge in Barbados cannot be retired except for ill health, insanity or behaviour which shames the office. He can continue to work indefinitely. However, we do not extend that same privilege to other persons who have just as much to contribute to the society even though there is clear indication that these persons want to work, are able to work and that they have something to offer.

This is evidenced by the fact that you see women and men who are 70 years and older pushing carts or acting as hawkers in Bridgetown. These people should be allowed to remain active in the labour force to derive whatever benefits they can from the labour force to put themselves in a position better to care for themselves until the deficiencies of aging truly set in. Often we send these people home to vegetate because they do not know what to do with themselves after working from the age of 15 because the concept of going home to sit down is alien to them.

I keep saying to my father that he wants to die under one of the machines and he admits that this is true.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I would like to advise the Honourable Member that only two minutes remain.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, I will conclude by saying that it is critical that the matter of National Insurance as it relates to aging be revisited and that we set a new retirement age for Barbadians. There may be tests that you have to undergo after you reach a certain age to ensure that you are still mentally and physically fit and that people do not continue to work when in fact they are not able to do so.

In light of current nutrition, health standards and life expectancy we need to revisit the whole matter of what the retirement age should be. Young people need not be threatened by older people in the labour force because only a few young people are coming into the job market relative to the number that is aging. There is room for everybody at both ends of the demographic section to continue to benefit from the National Insurance Scheme and being part of Barbados' labour force.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: Mr. Speaker, I had no intention of speaking any more on this particular matter but a point was just raised by the Honourable Member which I want to comment on.

There is a belief in this country that the age at which people retire should be increased. I want to say that I disagree because I believe that after you were in a job for a particular length of time, you tend to lose the urge to want to go on, and the capacity to produce at the same level also decreases. I also believe that after a while you would have developed sufficient knowledge and the best way to use that knowledge is to be self-employed. As far as I know there is nothing stopping anyone from working longer if they have what it takes to create the attitude.

Sir, it would be unfair to deprive youngsters of the opportunity to work when people would have built up enough knowledge to remove themselves from certain types of jobs and create businesses that would employ other people.

I would like to open up this part of the discussion because I do not believe the system should be such that one person can work in a job for 40 or 50 years and deprive another person of the opportunity of doing that job.

Sir, I have no intention of knocking the point made by the Honourable Member but I simply want to offer another view to this particular matter.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Honourable Member for St. Lucy for his intervention. It is healthy and gives richness and colour to the debate because it is a matter of national importance on which there should be national dialogue and may cause some friction as we seek to increase the retirement age.

Sir, I want to speak about the impact of disease and sickness on the National Insurance Scheme and what we need to do to address the matter.

I am advised that in the year 2000 the National Insurance Scheme paid out \$19 802 754 in sickness benefits. In the year 2001, \$18 899 990. I repeat that, Sir, \$18 899 990 was paid out in sickness benefits by the National Insurance Scheme.

3.05 p.m.

The Honourable Member for St. James North spoke very effectively and articulately, even with some degree of levity though making a serious point to the fact that there are specific doctors who are writing 70 per cent of the sickness certificates in Barbados. This is a matter that needs investigation.

I want to approach this question from a completely different angle. I was concerned, and I regret that today I do not have the figures with me in terms of numbers of people in Barbados who are suffering from chronic diseases. When I sought to get these figures from the National Insurance office for today's debate, I sought this only a few minutes ago, they were not in a position to give me a breakdown. I am of the view that chronic diseases, hypertension and diabetes, which are preventable diseases constitute significantly to the portion of national insurance benefits.

I do not have, as I indicated, a breakdown of figures for National Insurance but I want to point to the figures which are in my possession in relation to claims for hypertension and diabetes. Again, I must proffer an apology to this Chamber. The figures that I have date back to when I was Minister of Health. As I indicated, I was not aware that this component of the Supplementary was going to be debated today, so I did not seek to get current figures. I believe that these figures that I will give will appear to be alarming. If they were checked at current rates, they would be more worrisome.

Sir, the profile shows that while chronic diseases were primarily diseases of the elderly, 50s, 60s and onwards, there is a very dangerous encroachment of chronic diseases on persons in their most productive years and a significant number of people in Barbados in their 20s and 30s are suffering from very serious hypertension and diabetes. While we say, "Mary has sugar", we do not know that there is a whole range of physical compromise of bodily integrity that accompanies the idea of having sugar; the same thing goes for diabetes. The disease impacts on the kidneys, eyes, other than the potential impacts on the limbs.

Sir, when you say that somebody has sugar, we treat it with such simplicity. It is a disease which affects the body in a significant way and can affect every aspect of a

person's life, their social life, sex life and work life in ways that people do not speak about. Once the disease is contracted, there is no cure. You can control or attempt to control, depending on the degree of the discipline of the particular individual, but you cannot cure it.

Sir, my father has been diabetic all his life and he does not hide it. When I recognised that I was approaching the age of 40 and was overweight, the fear that I could become one of those statistics, made me decide to go on my weight loss programme. I do not want this to be a debate about my father and me, I just want to share with you the statistics that I have, Sir.

Life of Barbados paid \$575 000 from their insurance scheme in 1992 for claims relating to chronic diseases alone. A year later, 1993, that figure had increased to \$625 000. I would guess that if we got current figures, they would be up in the region of \$800 000 and \$900 000. The increase that I am seeing from the graph of the number of people who are developing chronic diseases, indicate that 14 – 16 per cent of all claims made to Life of Barbados were for hypertension alone. Life of Barbados indicated that 26 per cent of their claims were for diabetes, stroke and heart disease. The Barbados Mutual indicated that 44 per cent of all their claims were for the chronic diseases and that is a significant percentage.

The point that I am making is that while we do not have the breakdown figures for the National Insurance Scheme, since the persons who claim at Life of Barbados and the Mutual are typical of the physical stock that we have in Barbados, I am sure that the figures for National Insurance will show a similar story and, perhaps, theirs may be even more substantial. The reason being, the National Insurance Scheme will have claims from a large number of people who are not privately insured and who can only claim from the National Insurance Scheme, the percentage may be as high as 60 – 70 per cent.

Sir, the point is, we need to look at the chronic diseases in Barbados. They impact on individuals and their family. Every year 100 – 150 people lose a lower limb by amputation as the result of diabetes. Often, their capacity to work thereafter or to continue in their employment is compromised. A person who cuts sugar cane and who loses a leg is finished in the employment market, invariably, because their age, absence of academic training and because blue collar workers cannot get into any other areas of work. They are not people who are sitting at a computer keyboard, so it does not matter if they have one leg or two legs.

Sir, the impact of the chronic disease is not only on the individual sufferer but on their partner and their entire family, especially where the individual who contracts the disease is the sole or principal bread winner of that family.

We, therefore, must now target chronic diseases since they are preventable, as a specific problem because they impact not only on the individual but on the wider economy. Every time we lose someone from the labour force that person cannot earn and pay national insurance, but who is drawing heavily from the Scheme because he or she is not now able to function. Sir, this now has to be addressed.

Sir, when I held the portfolio of Health, I had established a Task Force to look specifically at chronic diseases and to make recommendations to the Cabinet. The Cabinet had approved the establishment of this Task Force. I felt that if the diseases were preventable, a properly structured campaign, with proper intervention and education, we stood a good chance of reducing the number of persons who are affected by these diseases and by extension could curb the adverse impact on families and the detriment to the economy.

3.13 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, I am unable to say what happened after I left the Ministry, except to say I have never heard anything about the Task Force but I have heard Senator the Honourable Jerome Walcott, the new Minister of Health, speaking about his concerns about the incidence of chronic diseases in Barbados. Sir, I would wish that given his medical background – I am not suggesting that the Honourable Member should revisit the Committee which I had established because he is and should be at liberty to find his own mechanism for addressing problems in Health – that whatever mechanism he chooses, I will be happy to support a system which addresses specifically the reduction of the burden and incidence of chronic disease on the Barbadian population. It has implications too for the hospital. I believe it is true to say that 60 per cent of the QEH's budget – when I left it was in the region of approximately \$70 million and when administrative expenses were taken out, depending on the year, between 60 and 70 per cent of expenses were diverted to the treatment of chronic diseases at the hospital. The same applies to the primary care services at the polyclinics and the Barbados Drug Service. When we came to Government in 1994, the Drug Service budget was \$14 million. When I left the Ministry of Health approximately six years later, the Barbados Drug Service budget had risen to between \$20 million and \$22 million. I am unclear as to what this current financial year will be and probably we will soon see what it will be this coming financial year but I am sure that it has to be in the region of \$24 to \$28 million, I am sure of that.

Asides.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Is that right? Over \$30 million? I was conservative, Sir. In the next financial year, the Barbados Drug Service budget will be over \$30 million.

Sir, I make the point that when we came in, it was \$14 million. This year, 2002, in 8 years, a \$16 million jump and 60 per cent of the Drug Service budget, once administrative costs are deducted, is used to treat chronic diseases.

Sir, by any extension of the argument, whether one considers the impact of the services and budget of the QEH...

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: On a point of order, Sir. The Honourable Member is misleading the House again in giving the impression that because the budget was only \$14 million in 1994, that \$14 million meant that patients were not getting the services required. What it meant, Sir, is that in 1994, the country was healthier than what it is now and that since 1994, there is more sickness going around and the budget has increased.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Let us continue the debate.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Sir, I can understand with the state of things in the Opposition as they are, that today's Leader of the Opposition would be hearing things that I have not said. I have never said there was a compromise of service; I was merely making the point but I welcome the intervention because it gives me the opportunity to say that chronic diseases are the diseases of the affluent – they are not diseases of poverty. One does not find it in Biafra or India; it is because Barbados is the 20th most developed country in the world and because the standard of living in Barbados has improved so substantially that people will go into Kentucky and Chefette Restaurants every day because they can afford it.

Mr. D. St. E. KELLMAN: On a point of order, Sir. The Honourable Member is misleading the House again. The Honourable Member has given figures as it relates to the Life of Barbados and also the Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society. Sir, one would have recognized that when looking at statistics from the right direction, the figures spent by the Life of Barbados was much less than the figures incurred by the Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society. I think that if the Honourable Member understands the difference between clientele, the Honourable Member would understand exactly of what I speak.

Hon. Miss H. E. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, I do not understand the point the Honourable Member is making. Life of Barbados has given no figures. The Barbados Mutual Society has said that 44 per cent of their budget went to chronic diseases and Life of Barbados has given a similar figure.

However, the point I am making is that it is anticipated that more people will be affected, and will die from chronic diseases than have been killed in both World Wars – and I might now add the war in Afghanistan.

Sir, this is a very serious statistic that we are confronting and it is a situation where we are already fighting the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, which is also striking at the most productive sector of the workforce and where we are having people who are aging affected by chronic diseases and therefore drawing heavily on the National Insurance Scheme. Increasingly, Sir, people in their most productive years – 20's, 30's and 40's – are also breaking down with chronic diseases and have to rely on the National Insurance Scheme rather than contributing to it. Sir, it is incumbent on us as an Administration to address the problem of chronic diseases because of its impact on the individual, the family, the wider society, and the economy.

I am much obliged to you, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank all Honourable Members today who have taken part for having contributed to a truly excellent debate.

In the context of our culture, there must be a serious Press out there that would take up this matter. There is no question of the fact, Mr. Chairman, that the question of national insurance and pensions, in particular, are questions that should occupy national attention and therefore I would wish that more people could take part.

Mr. Chairman, I am not unaware that any serious Press in Barbados is not unmindful of the need to take national issues and to carry them to the public's domain if, for no other reason, than feedback.

Mr. Chairman, one of the worse things that can afflict a human being, especially after reaching age 65, is fear of financial insecurities, or financial insecurity itself. There are persons who have never planned and that is why I was angered by the remarks made by the Honourable Member who just sat down. There are persons over the age of 65, who have never planned their lives and who are, more or less, at the whims and fancies of the elements out there.

When one visits casinos worldwide, who are the occupants? The occupants are persons who have ventured into these casinos looking to make money because of fear of financial insecurities – and lo and behold, they are hooked because casino gambling, once practised often enough, becomes habit-forming and gambling is one of these social problems that we need to address.

Sir, there is no question that my colleague, the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East, would have gone on public record as having lamented and deprecated the fact that there are some unscrupulous persons in Barbados who entice impressionable persons, 65 years and over, to go into arcades with their pension cheques.
3.25 p.m.

Sir, that is why I want the Press to be in this and that is why I want to push the whole question of providing for pensions. This Barbados Labour Party Government is serious about making us provide for our pensions for our old age but some old people go into arcades with their pension cheques both non-contributory and contributory and are lured into exchanging them for quarters. I do not think we have the bandits in Barbados that take dimes or nickels but we certainly have the bandits in Barbados that take quarters.

Even though one can argue that it is within a 69-year-old man's constitutional rights to go in an arcade, if I am the operator of an arcade and I have a conscience and I see the same old man comes in there and spends all his money regularly, I would not take his cheque. I would tell the man, to move with his cheque and go somewhere else. I would not take it. Just like some shop keepers when a man is made the worse for an alcoholic drink, refuse to sell that man an alcoholic drink, there must be conscionable Barbadians who stop the old people. I would like to hear from the Honourable Member for St. Michael East and the Honourable Member for St. Michael South East, two familiar social engineers, speak on this matter. I cannot see, Mr. Chairman, how a culture that is caring will allow old people to use their contributory pensions in that way.

Asides.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Sir, it cannot be right that somebody, whose only resource left is what the State provides them, out of the compelling resources of our workers and we, in this culture, in our uncaring and greedy way, permit some of them to bring their cheques in exchange for quarters to insert in the one-arm bandits.

Sir, a one-arm bandit is just what it says. It is a bandit because the probability of winning the jackpot is one in ten thousand.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I would like the Honourable Member to understand that the debate is three hours and we want to finish the other Head before the three hours are up. I would now like you to come to a conclusion.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Yes, Sir.

Let me clarify one point. I tried to raise the issue as to whether a female spouse, paying national insurance can bestow unconfirmed benefits on a mate/spouse. As far as I am aware, such benefits for the survivors are fine and I do not want Parliament's record to suggest that I meant other than the survivor's fund.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, as I beg to move that Head 33 stand part of the Schedule, let me say that the original sum provided under this Head which has proved insufficient, is \$92 705 and the application being made before this

Honourable Chamber is for the sum of \$5 010 to be applied towards paying national insurance.

I end as I started, the Government must set the example by paying national insurance on behalf of its employees and I would want it defined formally by which such payments can be done expeditiously.

Mr. Chairman, let me take this opportunity to thank you for your indulgence. I also want to thank all Honourable Members who have either offered moral support in silence but urging us on and those who have lifted the debate, especially the Honourable Member for St. James South. Long may she last in St. James South, long indeed may any political person on this Side coming from St. James reign as Member of Parliament in St. James! We are both thankful to the people of St. James for sending us here. I must say also, that even though I did not particularly press the people of St. Lucy to send the Honourable Member for St. Lucy here, he, too, beyond the wildest expectations lifted this debate to a standard and quality for which he had hitherto never been known.

I beg to move that Head 33 stand part.

Thank you.

The question was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that the following Heads – as a matter of fact the guillotine has come down – now stand part.

Head 30.

Head 32.

Head 34.

Head 37.

If the Honourable Members who spoke before me did not expressly and specifically beg that they stand part, I repeat that the following should also stand part:

Head 16.

Head 25.

Head 26.

I am deeply obliged to you, Sir.

The question that Heads 16, 25 and 26 and Heads 30, 32 and 34 stand part was put and resolved in the affirmative without division.

On the motion of Hon. R. C. EASTMOND, seconded by Hon. R. N. GREENIDGE, Mr. CHAIRMAN reported to His Honour the SPEAKER, the passing of one Money Resolution in Committee of Supply.

On the separate motions of Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY, the Resolution was read a first, second and third time and passed and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Miss M. A. MOTTLEY: Mr. Speaker, Sir, this brings us to the end of Government's business for the day. May I say on the Adjournment that when we meet next Tuesday, the date to which I propose the adjournment, we will be laying the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for

the year 2002-2003, in anticipation that the House will meet on Monday, March 11, 2002 to commence the debate on the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2002-2003.

In the circumstances, Sir, I beg to move therefore that this House be now adjourned to Tuesday, 5 March, 2002 at 11.00 a.m.

Hon. R. C. EASTMOND: I beg to second that, Sir.

The question that this Honourable House be now adjourned until Tuesday, 5 March, 2002 at 11.00 a.m. was put and resolved in the affirmative without division and Mr. SPEAKER adjourned the House accordingly.
3.33 p.m.

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