

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL
(NO. XXV OF 2005)**

Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): M. le président, je vais être le dernier orateur du côté de l'Opposition à prendre la parole sur ce projet de loi. J'ai écouté avec beaucoup d'attention ceux qui sont intervenus sur cet amendement.

M. le président, en 2000, nous avons pris l'engagement de donner un nouveau souffle aux collectivités locales, et nous l'avons fait. Il n'y a que ceux qui ne veulent pas voir la vérité en face aujourd'hui qui tiennent un langage dans le sens que c'est seulement le fait de rétablir les élections villageoises qui va aider les conseillers à pouvoir gérer les affaires des collectivités locales.

M. le président, je pense que nous avons deux visions différentes de la démocratie régionale. Nous avons eu le courage de venir de l'avant avec une loi qui a changé et aidé à donner un outil de travail aux conseillers.

Laissez-moi revenir sur ce qui a été dit un peu plus tôt par les membres du gouvernement. Il est vrai, M. le président, qu'aller faire des recherches, voir ce que j'ai dit en tant que ministre et ce qu'ont dit d'autres députés dans la chambre est intéressant. Comme si nous étions le seul gouvernement à avoir renvoyé les élections municipales! Non, M. le président! Ils ont la mémoire courte! Il faudrait remonter au 20 Novembre 1980, où un membre de cette chambre disait ceci –

“L'Opposition a voulu, tout simplement, épater la galerie, a voulu, pour le grand public, faire croire que le gouvernement bloque les élections municipales, que le gouvernement craint les élections municipales, que le gouvernement ne veut pas jouer franc jeu, que le gouvernement ne veut pas donner libre court à la démocratie. Et voilà pourquoi, M. le président, je pense qu'au départ même, il fallait faire cette précision’.

C'était au cours des débats sur la motion du *Leader* de l'Opposition d'alors intitulée '*Municipal Councils, Village Councils and District Councils – Disallowance of Orders*', et le membre qui avait dit cela est l'actuel ministre des collectivités locales. Nous assumons pleinement nos responsabilités, M. le président, pour le renvoi des élections, car nous avons donné des raisons à ce renvoi. Premièrement, nous avons eu pas mal de difficultés pour travailler sur cette loi. Quelqu'un plus tôt a mentionné le rapport Sooben, et on a eu des difficultés à finaliser ce rapport. Dites-vous bien qu'il y a eu un *dissenting report* concernant le rapport Sooben. C'est à partir de là que nous avons commencé à travailler lorsque nous sommes arrivés au pouvoir. Il y a eu pas mal de consultations, que ce soit au niveau des villes, des villages, et c'est par la suite qu'on a donné l'aval à l'ex-Juge Ahnee pour rédiger cette loi. Cela a pris du temps; il faut le reconnaître. Ce n'est pas facile d'amender la loi concernant les collectivités locales, parce que la démocratie régionale a été une évolution graduelle. Cela a pris son temps, M. le président. Il faut accepter que la loi de 2003 n'est pas parfaite. Aujourd'hui, qu'est-ce qu'on vient nous dire, M. le président? On vient nous dire qu'on va restituer les élections villageoises et les conseillers des villages pourront travailler. Mais ce n'est pas vrai! Allons les écouter, ils n'ont pas les moyens, M. le président. Comparez les différents villages qu'il y a dans l'île; il y a des villages qui ont les moyens nécessaires pour faire le développement, mais il y a des villages qui n'en ont pas et ils n'en auront pas sous cette loi. C'est pourquoi je dis que nous avons deux visions différentes, nous avons cru dans cet état ville, c'est-à-dire faire la municipalisation de toute l'île Maurice, M. le président, et mettre sur le même pied d'égalité les villes et les villages et éliminer ce développement à deux vitesses qu'on voit au niveau des villages et au niveau des villes. Vous n'avez qu'à écouter les radios libres chaque matin, les gens qui téléphonent des villages et qui se plaignent qu'ils n'ont pas les services nécessaires dans leurs endroits.

(Interruptions)

Mais c'est la pure vérité! Tout à l'heure quelqu'un avait dit que nous avons réduit le nombre de conseillers, mais faire de la municipalisation automatiquement demande à réduire le nombre de conseillers parce qu'on voulait rénumérer ces conseillers, M. le président. Aujourd'hui, personne ne veut travailler pour rien. Il faut les rénumérer pour qu'on aît la qualité de service. Alors, voilà pourquoi quand nous avons travaillé cette loi, nous

avons réfléchi pendant longtemps avant de venir de l'avant avec cette loi pour les collectivités locales, M. le président, et il faut le dire dévolution de pouvoir c'est le fondement même de cette loi, la décentralisation. Nous avons travaillé dans un premier temps sur l'autonomie de Rodrigues et par la suite, basé sur cette expérience nous avons commencé le travail pour les collectivités locales. Pourquoi? Parce que la loi de 1989 est une loi centralisatrice, tout se tourne vers le ministre. Le ministre a un pouvoir extraordinaire dans la loi de 1989. C'est pourquoi, pendant une certaine période, nous avons eu des projets qui étaient bloqués et je peux vous citer des exemples. Il y a l'Association des Maires de France qui avait donné une certaine somme d'argent pour un centre polyvalent à la Cité Briquetterie. Ce projet a été bloqué pendant des années. Pourquoi? Parce que le ministre jouait un rôle centralisateur. Nous avons eu le projet de terrain de *football* de Bienheureux Père Laval et cela aussi a été bloqué. Tout récemment nous avons vu la même chose se répéter.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, s'ils vont venir avec une loi qui va donner beaucoup plus de pouvoir, décentraliser, cela va aider les conseillers que ce soit des villages ou des villes. Mais sous la même loi dire *that this is empowering* les conseillers, n'est pas vrai. Allons lire la loi de 1989 qui existe et faisons la comparaison avec la loi de 2003. Il y a autre chose qu'il faudrait dire. Tout à l'heure j'ai entendu le ministre Boolell parler de l'octroi des permis. Mais nous avons introduit dans la loi un délai, c'est là et nous avons donné pouvoir à l'administration pour octroyer des permis, c'est très clair.

(Interruptions)

La loi est très claire, M. le président. Si après six semaines quelqu'un qui a fait une demande de permis et que le permis n'est pas octroyé, la loi prévoit qu'il a automatiquement son permis. Alors, venir dire là qu'on a débloquent tant de permis! Expliquez-nous dans quelle collectivité locale et où on a débloquent tous ces permis.

M. le président, j'ai fait le point sur la loi que nous avons votée en 2003. Nous avons entendu parler de démocratie, qu'on a assassiné la démocratie, mais la loi de 2003 reste et restera une loi moderne et avant-gardiste.

M. le président, je vais terminer sur cela. Nous avons posé la première pierre pour un système moderne pour des collectivités locales. M. le président, ce que nous faisons aujourd'hui, c'est enterrer cette première pierre.

Merci, M. le président.

MOTION

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME 2005-2010

Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal): Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to congratulate you. I would have congratulated Mr Speaker as well. I am the last orator on this side of the House and I would like to say why we want the House to vote for a Motion of Thanks to the President.

M. le président, quand j'ai écouté les parlementaires de l'autre côté de la Chambre, je me suis posé une question car c'était comme-çi le président devrait remercier l'exécutif pour l'avoir invité à prononcer le discours gouvernemental. C'est le monde à l'envers! Nous demandons qu'il n'y ait pas de rupture avec les traditions établies et nous voulons que le Parlement *which is the heart of our democracy keep its sovereignty and sanctity.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of those, who moved the Motion of Thanks in the past, was the Speaker of the Assembly and I am going to read a few extracts of what he said. That was on the 01 March 1977.

“Sir, it is in the interests of both Government and Opposition to see that the superior interests of this country are given priority on everything. Party passion or emotion should not be put at a point at which any possible agreement or compromise disappears.”

“It is in the interest of the House and the country that there should not be party passion and party emotion”. The impression we have, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the Presidential Address has been couched in such a way that you can see the party passion and the party emotion. From this side of the House, my colleagues explained what the Presidential Address was. We have been relating to India and we see what reference is made to the

Presidential Address. The Presidential Address, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in both Houses of Parliament assembled together, is the most solemn and formal act under the Constitution. Utmost dignity and decorum befitting the occasion have to be maintained. What happens during the election, Mr Speaker, Sir? During the election, you have a party alliance, which comes with a manifesto and seeks a majority in the country. Once this majority is obtained, the manifesto is a political mandate, but it has to become a national Government Programme and it is in this process that you have the importance of the Presidential Address, that is, the Government Programme is given some sort of solemnity, one programme, which was a political manifesto, which obtains a political mandate is moved to a Government Programme, which is the Government mandate to be achieved in the best interest of the nation, in a climate of unity. That is where the Presidential Address derives all its solemnity and that is why we ask the President or the Sovereign to come and deliver that message to the nation.

The hon. Attorney-General said that everything was done, all the decorum was there, the fanfare was there when the President came. But then if we had all this and the President did read the speech, why not a word of thanks? What would it have cost the Government to go in the same vein, in the same flow. I think there has been a huge debate on usage, custom, convention. No, it is outside the debates. It is a question of the image we have of our Parliament, Parliament which is the heart of our democracy. As I said, it is as if the President should thank the Executive for having given him the opportunity to deliver the message. No. Not everything has been there. This country is divided today, we know why. It is true that they have a majority.

(Interruptions)

Yes, but this country is divided and we are talking about the state of economic emergency.

Mais quelle est la préoccupation essentielle du gouvernement? D'humilier le Président! Quel est le programme? De le déboulonner. On a parlé de rencontres politiques à Réduit mais le Premier ministre d'aujourd'hui a eu aussi des conversations politiques à Réduit. Ils ont oublié...

(Interruptions)

Oui *li alle boire di thé!* On a oublié. Mais c'est pour dire qu'il y a la pérennité des institutions, il y a la souveraineté du Parlement. On peut appeler cela pratique, convention ou usage. C'est vrai que, dans certains cas, il faut qu'il y ait une rupture mais il faut que ce soit dans l'intérêt du pays pour qu'il y ait plus de dignité. *The Government has no mandate to divest the President from any of his powers, prerogatives, status or decorum.* Comme mon ami Ganoo a bien dit, il faut rendre à César ce qui appartient à César. M. le président, le Premier ministre, dans notre système à la Westminster, est maître du jeu politique, est maître de la durée et du temps de vie du Parlement, mais il n'est pas le maître du temps de vie d'un Président en exercice parce que il est le maître de la durée en ce qui concerne son gouvernement et le Parlement.

What I would like to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been a voluntary omission of a fundamental subject matter in the motion, that is, the Presidential Address. It is as if the President never addressed this House. It is as if, he never had the shroud of solemnity associated with the Head of State and the National Assembly. We are talking about the President, Mr Speaker, Sir. He is the Head of State. He is the pinnacle of our Constitutional system.

Il y a deux légitimités différentes parce qu'il y a deux modes de désignation différents. Il y a la légitimité du suffrage universel mais il y a aussi la légitimité constitutionnelle accordée au Président. If you invite the President to address the speech, it is the least that you should render him – a vote of thanks in the way, in the decorum as you can call it practice, you can call it tradition, you can call it usage, you can call it convention, but the most important thing is the dignity which goes with it and when you remove that dignity, you make it undignified. So, what they have done was an undignified rendering of the Presidential Speech; and it was legitimate that, in our Parliament, there should be a Motion of Thanks to the Head of State for having delivered the Address.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my colleague, hon. Mrs Françoise Labelle, addressed the issue of what the Prime Minister had said when he replied to the amended motion of the Leader of the Opposition. He said that the whole point, I say it again, is the manner in which the President uses his nominal powers, would be in the British Constitutional context a Constitutional Convention, but the wording of a motion to initiate a debate would be a

custom and a usage. What he is saying is that the President should abide by the Constitutional Convention, but as the Prime Minister has the authority to modify the wording of the motion and because it is a usage and a Convention. The debate is not on words, but on the solemnity and the importance that we give to our Parliament which is the heart of our democracy.

M. le président, comme je l'ai dit, le Premier ministre n'est pas maître du temps de vie et de la durée du mandat d'un Président en exercice. C'est vrai qu'aujourd'hui il n'y a pas une alchimie, une entente et une symbiose entre le chef de l'Etat et le chef du gouvernement. On en a parlé et on en parlera dans les débats sur le *Presidential Address*. Mais même s'il n'y a pas cette alchimie, notre Constitution a suffisamment de flexibilité. Notre Constitution est clair pour que les deux hommes puissent, tout en se tenant à leur statut, à leur rôle et à leurs fonctions, comme régis par la Constitution, puissent faire de sorte que le pays aille dans la bonne direction.

M. le président, comme je l'ai dit, je ne vais pas répéter les arguments qui ont été évoqués. Ce n'est pas une question de débat sur les mots, mais une question de sauvegarder - et qu'il n'y ait pas de rupture - la souveraineté du Parlement et sauvegarder ce que notre Constitution nous a toujours accordé. C'est pour cette raison que pour nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, ce n'est pas une question politique. Il faut faire de sorte qu'il y ait une motion de remerciements parce que nous avons invité le Président à prononcer ce discours, à sacraliser ce discours comme un programme de gouvernement. Puisqu'on lui a demandé de le faire, comme la tradition le maintient, c'est à la Chambre de lui faire une motion de remerciements.

En amendant la motion, nous n'empêchons pas qu'il y ait des débats et que le programme du gouvernement soit sacralisé, accepté et approuvé. On peut l'appeler tradition, usage ou convention, mais ce qui est important avant tout c'est que la dignité de notre Parlement soit sauvegardée.

Merci, M. le président.

Debate No. 5 of 23.08.2005

MOTION

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME 2005-2010

Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me, once again, congratulate you and also congratulate all the hon. Members who have made their maiden speech in this House.

Having said so, Mr Speaker, Sir, this House witnesses two major events: one is the Presidential Address, and the second one is the Budget Speech. Both are very important for our democratic process, accountability and transparency. On 29 July of this year, we have had the opportunity to listen to the Presidential Address of the present Government at the second sitting of the National Assembly which I believe in itself is a contradiction to the provisions of the Constitution, section ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, if the hon. Member has a point to raise on the Standing Orders and feels that same have been breached, he has to raise the matter as a point of order.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to say that there has been certain non-respect of institutions also. *Bon, passons dessus!* We have moved also from parliamentary traditions. There has been a debate on this and during the debate, the actual Government, especially the hon. Prime Minister stated that we want to get rid of vestiges of our colonial past. Fair enough! Why only move away from parliamentary traditions? This Government, perhaps, should consider also changing the names of certain institutions that still bear the names of certain colonial vestiges? And, maybe, why not also assure that all Mauritian citizens holding British passports return them or cancel them, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Having said so, let me make certain general remarks on the Presidential Address. There is nothing new in the Presidential Address. C'est du déjà vu et déjà entendu. The same old wine in a new bottle, Mr Speaker, Sir. Allow me to make certain general comments before coming to certain specific issues. Firstly, numerous measures announced have already been undertaken by the previous Government.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the few new measures announced will be nearly impossible to implement because there is a need for constitutional amendments and the present Government does not have the necessary majority. For that, Government will imperatively need the support of the Opposition.

Thirdly, other measures will depend on the preparation of Master Plans. If you go through the Presidential Address, there are six Master Plans, a lot of reports of Commissions, for example, the electoral reform will depend also on a referendum and the rest, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a series of measures copied from the Presidential Address presented on 12 January 1996 and that has never been implemented by the former Labour Government.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, to briefly give certain examples. For example, the Equal Opportunity Act – paragraph 15 has been copied from paragraph 28; the right for appeal for PSC – paragraph 36; the use of the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Director of Audit's Report. There are many other measures on SMEs, agriculture, marine resources, Police, especially on Tourism, if you allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to quote paragraph 111 of the Presidential Address, which states –

“Government will review the legal framework relating to tourism and will adopt a new Master Plan for tourism development for Mauritius and Rodrigues.”

And when you go back to the Presidential Address of 1996, it says -

“A Master Plan for tourism development which will set specific long- term strategic plans etc (...)”

So, where is the change? There is nothing new, what has been stated in the 1996 Presidential Address is again found in this new Presidential Address. Similarly, on the air access.

To end this comparison, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to take one last issue, *un thème qui est très à la mode ces derniers temps – la démocratisation de l'économie* which has been the guiding philosophy of the electoral Manifesto of the Labour Party so many times used in this House during debates and used in almost all public gatherings of the *Alliance sociale*. Six

paragraphs of the Presidential Address are confined to it, the cherished dream of the Labour Party is nothing new.

Let us go back to paragraphs 83 and 85 of the 1996 Presidential Address. If you allow me, I will quote again, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“Government will take steps to democratise the economy. A Monopolies and Mergers Commission will be established.”

And if you go to paragraph 85, it says -

“Government will publish a Master Plan on privatisation of State owned assets to define its policy to support the democratisation of ownership.”

I have said that there is nothing new which has been stated again.

Four and a half years since 1996, when the actual Government was in power, they presented their Presidential Address, Mr Speaker, Sir, but nothing has been done on this issue. There was no plan of work, not even a single report and to gain votes in the recent election, again this issue has been given wide publicity: *nou pour tire l'économie depuis dans la main quatre/cinq familles."*

(Interruptions)

Vous avez embobiné la population, mais pas pour longtemps.

(Interruptions)

They have never been serious on this issue. What did we expect from them? We expected as least certain solid measures in this Presidential Address if they really mean business on that issue. It is now that we hear that a committee has been set up. The committee will have to work, but we do not know its terms of reference, the people who are going to sit on this committee, when it will submit its report and how these recommendations will be implemented. Mr Speaker, Sir. But, meanwhile, it is good to remind this House what we have done in respect of democratisation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dowarkarsing: Listen! It hurts! But, listen.

We have set up the Real Estate Investment Unit Trust and the Employee Share Ownership Trust. We have announced in the recent Budget the

Energy Equity Fund and I hope this Government will go forward with it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The implementation of the Employee Real Estate Investment Trust will enable 325,000 citizens of our country to benefit from the capital appreciation of prime land sites. In the meantime, while waiting for the report, we have taken a series of measures in this direction, Mr Speaker, Sir. *"Anne, ma soeur, Anne, vois-tu venir la démocratisation? Loin, très loin! (Interruptions)*

Mr Speaker, Sir, the first two sentences of paragraphs 48 and 49 have drawn my attention and I wish to react on these two paragraphs. We all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that *le carré magique de l'économie* is the stabilisation of prices, sustainable growth, unemployment rate and public debt.

On the economic issue, allow me to quote the hon. Prime Minister. He stated -

"First of all, we need to create the condition to boost the economy. *Il faut créer les conditions de la relance économique.* That is the first thing we have to do."

We have heard this so many times. While going through the Hansard, I came across a speech made during the 1996/97 Budget. The Concession Project Bill was announced including the BOT Bill, (Build, Operate and Transfer) BOO (Build, Own and Operate) BOOT (Build, Own, Operate and Transfer). This Bill was introduced in Parliament with a Certificate of Urgency on 27 June 1997 because the then Government had to implement a series of important projects through the mid-term strategy. A series of projects were even listed in the Schedule of the Bill. Moreover, all these projects were put outside the purview of the CTB. Cabinet's approval alone was needed. Where are all those projects, Mr Speaker, Sir? We have one in my constituency. Today we are listening to the same types of promises. I sincerely wish that this time, all that has been said in this Presidential Address do take place, Mr Speaker, Sir.

It is wrong to say that all the indicators are in the red. The recent FMI country report on Mauritius, published on 09 August 2005, has been praiseworthy of the *gestion économique du gouvernement MSM/MMM.* *(Interruptions)*

These are facts. It is in the report and allow me to quote some extracts, Mr Speaker, Sir -

"In anticipation of the coming shocks in international trade in sugar and textile, the Government has already started implementing reforms to adapt the economy to the new challenges. The Authority has embarked on a

restructuring plan for the sugar as well as for the textile sectors. They are also trying to diversify the economy

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Bhagwan, I do not think you have

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the report goes on -

"They are also trying to diversify the economy through the promotion of the ICT sector, financial services and tourism. Along with remarkable economic growth and diversification, Mauritius has achieved low and stable inflation. The transparent operation of monetary policy has benefited from frequent consultation between the BOM and Commercial banks."

Having said so, let us see what is happening today. What has not been said by the hon. Members of the Labour Party when they were in the Opposition, especially by the actual Minister of Commerce. I refer to his PQ No. B/762.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Dowarkasing: Be patient! Let me quote, Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Jeetah -

"Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that all these frequent price increases since September 2000 have made life unbearable in Mauritius?"

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from the milk saga whereby certain popular brands have disappeared from the shelves of supermarkets ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dowarkasing: *Bizin pas jouer avec dilait chaud, to la main pou bruler!*

Mr Speaker, Sir, many other articles like butter, chicken, juice, paints and a series of other commodities have witnessed a rise in price. Even certain brands of milk - and I stated it today in a PQ - like Nido has witnessed a rise. Is the Minister aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, that today he is making the life of people even more unbearable?

(Interruptions)

Strangely enough, I do not know whether it is a *politique pas moi ça, li ça*. Strangely enough!

(Interruptions)

Today the Consumer Protection Unit, which was under the aegis of his Ministry, has been shifted to another Ministry. The Consumer Protection

Unit *aussi ine lève paquet, ine aller*. Mr Speaker, Sir, what have not we heard on this issue of sustainable growth!

During the electoral campaign, in a press conference, the actual hon. Minister of Finance stated that a growth of 7% is required to put their economy back on track. In paragraph 50, the Presidential Address mentions the figure of 6%. Which is which? It seems that the hon. Minister is not yet fixed. At a time, Mr Speaker, Sir, where other countries, namely our big neighbour, South Africa, has witnessed a growth of only 2.7%, we have had an average growth of 4%. The FMI Report says long about it.

(Interruptions)

My friend, you will have the opportunity to come to it. Strangely enough! Mr Speaker, Sir, on 13 May 2005, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) forecast a growth of 5.1%. And, immediately after election, the same CSO forecast a growth of around 3.8%. What has changed within one and a half months?

(Interruptions)

Nothing, except Government! Does that mean that a change of Government has forced the CSO to revise its figures?

(Interruptions)

If this is so, then it is very alarming!

Insofar as the unemployment factor is concerned – in paragraph 12 of the Presidential Address – the present Government, while being in Opposition, blamed the former Government for the loss of jobs and unemployment. Let me point out certain figures, Mr Speaker, Sir, that have been published by the CSO. In 1996, when the Labour Government came into power, unemployment rate was around 5.8%. In 2000, when they left power, it was 8.8%, a 3% increase. Today, the hon. Prime Minister has stated that unemployment is around 11%. If we make a simple mathematics, we can see that it is less during those 5 years that we were in power.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, what has not been said during the electoral campaign! The hon. Minister of Finance said, '*nous allons créer 50,000/60,000 en cinq ans.*'

(Interruptions)

Which means, roughly, 12,000 jobs per year; which means roughly 1,000 jobs per month!

(Interruptions)

A few weeks later, the same Minister of Finance '*prévoit une remontée du chômage.*' Mr Speaker, Sir, what is more is that we are heading towards a jobless growth, despite the promises.

Let us come to paragraph 14 of the Presidential Address. I quote –

'My Government will work towards the creation of more employment'.

Which means that they agree that the former Government has created employment and that they are going to create more!

(Interruptions)

They acknowledged it; it's in the Presidential Address black on white, Mr Speaker, Sir. But where it stinks...

(Interruptions)

Let me tell you where it stinks! It is when one reads paragraph 12. Let me quote, again, Mr Speaker, Sir.

'The object of change is to improve the quality of life. To improve the quality of life first and foremost some people need jobs, (...).'

What does this imply?

(Interruptions)

Who are those fortunate some? Who are those lucky people, Mr Speaker, Sir? *Politique de petits copains!* And we are talking of equal opportunities! A joke, Mr Speaker, Sir! Their slogan of 'Putting people first.' should be modified.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members ask me to continue reading the paragraph, well, I'll certainly do so. I quote –

‘(...) some people need jobs, others need better jobs (...)’

Who are the ‘others’?

‘(...) Still others will need to be better rewarded (...)’

Rewarded for what, Mr Speaker, Sir? So, I am trying to understand the philosophy of employment of this Government. Something to ponder seriously by the new Employment Equity Commission that they want to set up, Mr Speaker, Sir.

M. le président, ce gouvernement a essayé de faire le procès du gouvernement précédent sur le plan économique en parlant de politique de terre brûlée, de lourd héritage, de mauvaise gestion, etc. M. le président, quand on est du côté de l'Opposition, on a les solutions pour tous les problèmes les plus épineux!

(Interruptions)

M. le président, au pouvoir, le langage change et les masques tombent! One former Minister of Finance, in a recent interview, Mr Speaker, Sir, has rightly stated that the economic situation today is not that gloomy...

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Member referring to press reports?

Mr Dowarkasing: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is not entitled to refer to any press reports.

Mr Dowarkasing: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, in that case I'll refrain from mentioning that part, but it was quite a valuable argument, and

everybody on the other side of the House knows about the contents of that press report.

Coming to paragraph 71, Mr Speaker, Sir, I quote –

‘Any society is judged by the way it deals with the issue of poverty. (...) Government is determined to alleviate poverty and will ensure that its economic democratisation programme permeates to all citizens.’

If not in the 100 days to come, we expect therefore that, in a very near future, the lives of those living in poverty will change. To use the figures of one hon. Member when he was in the Opposition side, now Minister in this Government, 240,000 people were living below poverty line. Now that they have a mandate, I do hope that they will see to it that the living status of same rise. Certain Members of the present Government, when in Opposition, were championing the cause of the poor, Mr Speaker, Sir, mentioning that they only eat ‘*carri daleton*’ and walked barefooted. Now that they are in Government, I do hope that they will provide them with shoes and better meals! Measures that can be part of your ‘Master Plan’ that this Government is are planning to set up, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In 1996, in your programme, mentioned was made of a Marshall Plan. Today, they are talking of a ‘Master Plan’. Tomorrow, it is going to be the ‘Forgotten Plan’.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me inform the House about our achievements on this issue. We did not rely on plans; we were action-oriented. One of the ways to verify the fight against poverty, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to measure the gini coefficient. In 1991/92, it was .379; in 1996/97, it was .387; in 2001/02 it was .371. It has decreased, Mr Speaker, Sir. To help the poor to stand on their feet, 1,974 projects worth Rs333 m. was approved by the Trust Fund. 90,000 households have improved their living status. 388 women have been supported for micro projects, so on and so forth. It is based on these facts, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the excellent work that our Government has done that the EU, under the FED programme, has again approved a grant of Rs460 m. to this new Government to continue the successful work that we have achieved for the eradication of poverty.

Since Members of the then Opposition were championing the cause of poverty, so many issues were raised here, so many Parliamentary Questions were put on the CEB disconnection, wastewater and CWA charges, I expected, at least, some very solid measures in the Presidential Address. Successively, Mr Speaker, Sir, during his speech on the Appropriation Bill 2004/2005 and through different Parliamentary Questions, hon. Jeetah had raised the issue of CEB disconnection.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, please!

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do hope now that the hon. Member is a member of the Executive...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I said, order. Members have no right to have crosstalking in the Assembly.

Mr Dowarkasing: ...he will find means and ways and pledge to the appropriate Ministry and institution to solve this problem. It is so simple to criticise when you are in Opposition. Now, they are mandated and we'll watch them carefully on these issues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if there is one issue that the previous Government has done a great job and the then Opposition demagoguery, it is the wastewater issue. It is the Labour Government that had introduced the 100% calculation of wastewater charges based on the amount of water consumed.

(Interruptions)

In and outside Parliament, the then Opposition had campaigned a lot on this issue. There were public demonstrations and some were going around the country telling people not to pay the charges, Mr Speaker, Sir. Again, on this issue, I was expecting some very solid measures in the Presidential Address. Zero! Outside, people are waiting for their promises to be

honoured, Mr Speaker, Sir. When we go through paragraph 144, we find that it makes mention of free house connection programme, but let me just remind the House that the free house connection programme is already an ongoing process. We have already done this, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is nothing new.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Presidential Address, the Government has targeted a coverage of 50%, but the efforts that the former Government had undertaken will bring this country very closely to the 50% coverage. The Grand' Baie Sewerage Project, the Baie du Tombeau Sewerage Project, the rehabilitation of infrastructure on CHA estates, the extension of phases I and II, will contribute a lot; and this has already been achieved by this Government.

The Plaines Wilhems Sewerage Project which will be providing for the connection of 32,500 households in itself represents 15% of the 50% that we want to achieve, Mr Speaker, Sir. The wastewater issue is an issue of national interest, and again, I sincerely hope that we go as far as we can to make this country a fully sewered one in the next 10 to 15 years in order to prevent the contamination of our water table and lagoons.

We cannot think of combating poverty if we do not address the problem of housing. A roof is the basis for breaking the poverty circle, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Presidential Address is very economical on this issue. In fact, it is very poor and empty.

During our last mandate, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government had constructed 1,530 Firinga-type houses on 20 sites at the cost of Rs592 m. 1,474 houses for the lower middle class at the cost of Rs830 m. 25,000 families benefited from an amount of Rs700 m. to improve their houses through the slab grant. Five sites and services projects were launched. 3,000 squatters were regularised, Mr Speaker, Sir. We did not practise the *politique "Leve paké allé."*

This present Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not very clear about its housing policy. I wish *que vous accordez vos violons*. Very recently, I have seen the hon. Minister of Housing, proudly handing over the keys of houses that our Government has constructed. Let me tell you, Mr Speaker, Sir, I

was very proud and I am sure the former Minister of Housing and Lands and the former Prime Minister also should be very proud because it was our project. *Zone alle déclare nou zenfant.* Mr Speaker, Sir, I sincerely hope that the housing project goes on because this is very important; and I do hope that in the very near future the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands will hand over the keys of houses that this present Government has constructed. Mr Speaker, Sir, to win the battle against poverty, I have said that we have to win the battle of the construction of houses, and I am afraid that this present Government has started on a very wrong footing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will end up my speech on the issue of the National Development Unit and the environment. The National Development Unit is the baby of our former Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, who had a vision, a dream to bring development at the doorstep of the people, and during the last five years that is what we have been doing precisely.

With the measures in the Presidential Address, with respect to the National Development Unit, especially paragraphs 199 and 200, today I am a bit afraid the way that we are going to proceed. We are going through the conduction of a survey to identify the most pressing needs. This already exists at the level of each constituency, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have been a Parliamentary Private Secretary, I know that this already exists. Now, we have to wait for the preparation of a 5-year plan for the implementation to take place and I don't know how long that plan will take place, Mr Speaker, Sir, one year or so.

My appeal to the hon. Minister is that there is fairness in the allocation of projects. Do not marginalise those constituencies where you have not been returned from, because there also there are people who have voted for them. There should be a fair distribution of funds also to all constituencies on equal footing. I am sorry that the hon. Minister is not here, but he knows what I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir. I expect that not all the funds and projects be directed to only some constituencies, as it has been in the past.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, environment is one thing and ecology is another thing, but both are very important issues. Environment is the more visible cousin of ecology and can be solved without fundamental changes in the

present values or patterns of production. I totally agree with the concept of "*Production Propre*" launched recently by the hon. Minister. Ecology, Mr Speaker, Sir, presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world and our mode of social and political life.

That is why the holding of SIDS conference was of great importance to all of us. Are we all conscious that environmental scientists have predicted that by the year 2050, the planet will be subject to a global warming of between 3° to 5° which will bring a rise of about .5 to 1 metre in the sea level, Mr Speaker, Sir? When you hear these things, it makes you shiver, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we have to take measures. And then when you hear certain Members of the then Opposition criticising the holding of such a conference in Mauritius, stating that we have spent Rs3 m. to buy limousines, which today they are proudly using, it is a shame. They are proudly using them today. Why don't they sell them? Why are they proudly using them? The holding of such conference should have been above party politics, because the ecological threat is great. We have to put in all our efforts to limit the damages, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am fully supportive of paragraphs 190 and 193 related to the ecological aspect.

The Government stated that it has a mandate to change the lives of people. Then, I sincerely believe that they should stop hiding behind issues like difficult international economic situations, budget deficit, public debt, heavy heritage, *la roupie faible, les bâtons dans les roues*. Because when they were on the Opposition benches, they were boasting themselves of having durable solutions to all these problems, including '*solution dans poche*', economic growth, combating unemployment, democratisation of land, sugar protocol, textile, education, and so on and so forth, Mr Speaker, Sir. "Putting people first" is one thing, make it happen is another thing.

I have done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Thank you.

Debate No. 06 of 30.08.05

On resuming at 5.05 p.m with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

MOTION

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME 2005-2010

Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River): Mr Speaker, Sir, since this is my maiden speech, I wish to congratulate you on your election as Speaker and I assure you of my cooperation in upholding the dignity of the House.

M. le président, en parcourant les discours-programme de 1996 et 2005, et en les comparant avec celui de 2000, je suis tentée de faire la distinction entre deux classes de politiciens. La première est celle qui balance des slogans et fait miroiter des illusions devant le peuple pour cacher ses vraies intentions. La deuxième est constituée de vrais bâtisseurs et des visionnaires qui agissent dans la sincérité pour le bien commun.

M. le président, je suis fière de faire partie de la catégorie des bâtisseurs sincères qui se trouvent de ce côté de la Chambre.

(Interruptions)

Et je n'ai aucune hésitation à dire que les illusionnistes sont de l'autre côté dans les rangs du gouvernement. Je vais prouver cela.

Mr Speaker, Sir, instead of the usual magnanimity that prevails when a newly elected Government presents its five-year programme, pettiness was the order of the day on Friday 29 July. The amendment proposed by the Leader of the Opposition on the motion of the Prime Minister with respect to the Presidential Address has been lengthily debated and I do not propose to come back on this issue. Mr Speaker, Sir, however, I wish to state, *en passant*, that the ruling alliance had not asked - and does not have a mandate - to claim the departure of Sir Anerood Jugnauth as President of the Republic. The 51 per cent who have not voted for the ruling alliance - and even people from the Labour electorate - do not approve the vindictive approach of the Government of today.

Mr Speaker: Sorry, I will have to intervene here. This question has been fully debated during the motion for the amendment presented by the

Leader of the Opposition. I will ask the hon. Member to refrain from making repetition.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: This is what I had to say on this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the *programme gouvernemental*. One of the main themes is democratisation of the economy. This has been thoroughly canvassed during the last four years by the Labour party. What the nation expected were concrete measures to put an end to the much criticised and alleged concentration of economic power in the hands of five families. People at the bottom of the social ladder were looking forward to know how and when they would be obtaining a plot of land that was promised to them by the Labour party.

On s'attendait à ce que le slogan ronflant de la campagne électorale fasse l'objet de mesures concrètes. Or, c'était mal connaître les illusionnistes à qui j'ai fait référence auparavant. Dans les faits, les cinq familles ont disparu subitement du vocabulaire des dirigeants du parti travailliste. Maintenant, tout ce qu'ils ont à proposer c'est la mise sur pied d'une commission qui va étudier toute la question de démocratisation. Les masques tombent et ils tomberont davantage durant les semaines et mois à venir.

On our side, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are proud of the numerous concrete initiatives and measures that we have implemented during recent years to pursue the democratisation process of the economy. We all know how successful the Sugar Investment Trust has been ever since its launch in 1994, in making planters and workers of the sugar industry true partners in the development process. They are today shareholders in sugar milling companies, in power plants using bagasse, in the Mauritius Post and Cooperative Bank and in the Belle Mare Water Park Company. Through the SIT Land Holdings Ltd, planters and workers are owners of 7,000 *arpents* of land acquired through the Illovo deal, land that historically belonged to sugar estates. Many of them have had the opportunity to buy plots of those lands in agricultural and residential *morcellements* at very low prices.

Furthermore, through the reforms engaged in the sugar industry since July 2001 by the MSM/MMM Government, some 8,000 sugar industry workers have obtained more than 800 acres of sugar estate land with all necessary amenities as part of the VRS package. These, Mr Speaker, Sir, are clear examples of democratisation of shareholding and land ownership.

Moreover, the previous MSM/MMM Government has set up the Employee Real Estate Investment Trust. Some 340,000 workers on the national savings register, as at 30 June 2004, have been offered a unit free of charge, making them partners in real estate development projects on 500 *arpents* of land proposed to be acquired in prime site.

C'est là un autre exemple de la démocratisation de la propriété à mettre à l'actif du précédent gouvernement. Il ne faut pas non plus, M. le président, oublier les avancées réalisées en terme de démocratisation à travers la réforme de notre système d'éducation, l'accès à la médecine de pointe dans nos hôpitaux, l'accès à des infrastructures sportives et sociales dans toutes les régions du pays, l'accès au logement pour encore un plus grand nombre de nos compatriotes ainsi qu'à travers les innombrables initiatives pour favoriser le développement des petites et moyennes entreprises afin d'élargir la base économique.

Avant de terminer sur la démocratisation, je note dans le discours-programme que le gouvernement se propose de vendre une partie des actions de Mauritius Telecom aux employés de la compagnie. C'est présenté comme quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Or, le précédent gouvernement avait pris la décision d'offrir gratuitement 1% des actions de Mauritius Telecom à ses citoyens! Peut-on comprendre que c'est un pas en arrière que fait le nouveau gouvernement? Je suis sûre que les employés du Mauritius Telecom apprécieront.

Mr Speaker, Sir, SME development to enlarge the economic base of the country was already a key priority of the previous Government. A series of concrete actions were taken to boost that sector. These include the introduction of a Support to Entrepreneurs Programme, a Young Entrepreneurs Scheme, an emerging Entrepreneur Loan Scheme, an Equity Participation Fund, an SME Efficiency Improvement Scheme and an SME Loan Guarantee Scheme. Two SME industrial parks were set up at Bambous and Flacq. The setting up of a SME village at Terre Rouge had

already been initiated. Between 2001 and 2004, loans to the tune of Rs800 m were granted by the DBM to SMEs while the Mauritius Post Office and Savings Bank dedicated Rs200 m for loans to SMEs following the 2004-2005 Budget.

Dans son discours-programme, le gouvernement du jour donne l'impression de vouloir beaucoup faire en faveur des petites et moyennes entreprises. Nous venons d'entendre le ministre des finances sur la relance des PME, mais dans les faits, rien de concret n'est proposé pour ajouter aux initiatives déjà mises en oeuvre par le précédent gouvernement. Des *schemes* mis en place par le gouvernement MSM/MMM ont été tout simplement rebaptisés. C'est ainsi que l'on voit le *Support to Entrepreneur Scheme* devenir l'*Enterprise Empowerment Scheme* ou *Fund*. Les *Equity Participation Funds* deviennent *Equity Fund*. Pour vous dire, M. le président, que le gouvernement n'a fait que changer les appellations mais dans la réalité il n'y a rien de nouveau. On s'attendait tout au moins à ce que le projet du fameux *National Entrepreneur Bank* promis par le Dr. Vasant Bunwaree, lorsqu'il était ministre des finances, refasse surface. On a eu droit qu'à du blablabla.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish now to say a few words on the economy. The Government of the day has emphasised on a new economic model where innovation would be a key component.

Quelle est l'innovation proposée? Rien, M. le président! Encore de l'illusion! Aucun nouveau secteur, aucune nouvelle initiative de création, de richesse n'est proposée. Le présent gouvernement n'a même pas le courage d'admettre que le précédent ministre des finances est venu avec l'ingénieuse idée de faire de Maurice un paradis du *shopping* hors taxe.

L'actuel ministre des finances auparavant disait que le *duty-free* est un *joke*. Maintenant, on vient de l'entendre, il le maintient. Son collègue, au moins, le ministre du tourisme a reconnu récemment que le *shopping* hors-taxe représente un gros atout pour l'industrie touristique. Il est vrai qu'il faut libéraliser davantage l'accès aérien, effectuer un *marketing* agressif et tout entreprendre pour attirer des investissements dans des centres de shopping de *standing* international. Mais tout cela avait été enclenché par le précédent gouvernement. D'ailleurs le *time frame* avait été clairement indiqué, le précédent gouvernement s'était donné quatre ans pour faire du projet *duty-free island* une réalité.

The future growth of the economy, Mr Speaker, Sir, will depend largely on the development in the tourism sector as well as in the emerging sectors like ICT, sea-food hub and duty-free. The nation knows that the previous Government had created a conducive environment for an accelerated and integrated development within the tourism sector. The IRS projects and the duty-free initiative were meant to give a new impetus to the sector. Both of these initiatives have been extensively criticised by those in Government today. But what have we heard today? Today we have learnt that Government will be maintaining both these projects, both the IRS project and the duty-free initiative, but with some cosmetic modifications. Whatever was already put on course by the previous Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is being renamed or rephrased and that's all. There have been attempts, Mr Speaker, Sir, to paint a dark picture of the economic situation with the intention to demonstrate that the previous Government had mismanaged the economy.

Il faut se rappeler que c'est l'honorable Sithanen lui même qui avait dénoncé, en des termes très sévères, la gestion économique catastrophique du précédent gouvernement de Navin Ramgoolam. Il s'est malheureusement évertué par la suite à contredire ses propres analyses, à transformer le blanc en noir et le noir en blanc. Récemment on a vu des changements subits par un rapport aux prévisions de croissance économique. De 5.1% pour 2005, ces prévisions sont ramenés à 3.8%. Comment ne pas avoir des doutes, M. le président, quand on voit la rapidité des manoeuvres pour influencer l'opinion publique!

Mr Speaker, Sir, the truth lies in the fact that the previous Government had successfully put the economy anew on the track of sustainable development and progress after inheriting an economy in doldrums. Today the glittering ICT sector propelled to the visionary endeavours of the MSM/MMM Government, the growth potential of both the innovative sea-food hub and duty-free initiatives, the optimism created in the tourism sector to the duty-free boost together with the bold reforms engaged in the sugar sector and the restructuring process in the textile sector spearheaded through specific measures have all set the conditions for economic growth to go on improving. The new Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, does not have to re-invent the wheel.

Le Fonds Monétaire International dans son *Country Report* sur Maurice qui a été publié le 09 août dernier fait des commentaires très favorables sur la gestion économique du gouvernement MSM/MMM. Je vais citer quelques extraits de ce *Country Report*.

Sur le sucre et le textile, this is what it says, M. le président, je cite –

“In anticipation of the coming shocks, due to the liberalisation of international trade in sugar and textile, the government has already started implementing reforms to adapt the economy to the new challenges. The authorities have embarked on a restructuring plan for the sugar as well as for the textile sectors”

On employment this is what the Country Report says and I quote –

“In response to the unemployment problem, the government has begun to address of problem of apparent skills mismatch through far reaching educational reform”

Par ailleurs dans son rapport datant du 25 août, l'*Executive Board* du FMI avait fait les commentaires suivants, je cite, M. le président –

“Directors were encouraged by the steps being taken by the government to address the impending loss of trade preferences in the sugar and textile sectors. They welcomed the planned review of the Sugar Sector Strategy, and urged the authorities to take further actions to strengthen the sectors’ competitiveness. Directors also welcomed the establishment of the Textile Emergency Support Team to assist in the rehabilitation and restructuring of those textile enterprises judged to be viable”

The report goes on to say, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“Directors commended the authorities for their success in reducing inflation”

It further says –

“Directors commended the authorities for their efforts to diversify the economy and create new job opportunities by developing the financial services, tourism, and information and communications technology sectors”

Ces remarques, M. le président, du fonds monétaire international, parlent d’elles-mêmes du travail abattu par le précédent gouvernement.

En ce qui concerne les finances publiques, les accusations ont été faites contre le précédent ministre des finances à l’effet qu’il aurait utilisé un *colourable device* pour intentionnellement montrer un déficit budgétaire plus bas. Rien de plus faux, M. le président. Par contre, *colourable device*, il y avait quand l’actuel ministre des finances occupait ces mêmes fonctions de 1991 à 1995 avec le fameux FRN loan de R 150 millions de US\$ contracté par ses soins sans aucune raison valable pour être placés hors budget dans un *National Infrastructure Development Fund* dans l’absence de véritables projets infrastructurels à être financés. Le docteur Bunwaree sait de quoi je parle car il avait dénoncé systématiquement ce gigantesque *colourable device*.

Concernant la dette publique, M. le président, toutes sortes de critiques ont été dirigées contre le précédent gouvernement. Ces critiques sont totalement injustifiées. Je dois ici faire ressortir...

(Interruptions)

I’ll come to that. Je dois ici faire ressortir que le gouvernement de 1995 à 2000 avait doublé la dette publique de R 37 milliards en juin 1995 à R 74 milliards en septembre 2000. L’argent avait servi pour financer les dépenses courantes du régime et aucun projet d’envergure pour l’avenir n’avait été réalisé. Le gouvernement MSM/MMM, pour sa part, a emprunté, oui; mais a emprunté pour investir dans des infrastructures socio-économiques -

construction des collèges, routes, logements sociaux et autres aménités sociales – ICT, tout-à-l'égout, etc afin de préparer l'avenir. Ces investissements totalisent R 42 milliards, mais on peut voir clairement où l'argent emprunté est allé. Alors faire le procès du gouvernement MSM/MMM sur ce chapitre relève de la malhonnêteté, M. le président.

Autre démagogie tentée par le gouvernement concerne un prêt de R 500 millions, contracté par le Road Development Authority. Le gouvernement parle d'emprunt hors budget pour faire croire que le vrai déficit budgétaire a été volontairement faussé. Ridicule encore une fois, parce que c'est un prêt contracté pour répondre essentiellement à des urgences, celles relatives à l'étude sur les possibilités de réalignement du *south eastern highway project*, le réasphaltage d'une partie de la route de La Vigie et les travaux concernant des drains dont la nécessité s'était fait sentir après des inondations importantes dans de nombreuses régions du pays. Je dois faire ressortir que seulement R 65 millions avaient été dépensées pour certains travaux effectués. Des contrats concernant la construction des drains avaient été alloués pour un montant de R 287 millions. Ces contrats, je comprends, M. le président, ont été annulés par le présent gouvernement qui estime que les drains ne sont pas une priorité.

Concernant la *State Trading Corporation*, je dois ici souligner qu'un formidable travail d'assainissement financier a été accompli et qu'il est malhonnête de venir faire croire le contraire. Le déficit accumulé de la corporation, qui se chiffrait à R 1.92 milliards en octobre 2000, a été ramené à R 532 millions en juin 2004. Mais en raison de la flambée du prix du pétrole et du gaz ménager, ainsi que les augmentations substantielles à l'importation des commodités comme le riz ration, la farine et le ciment entre 2004 et 2005, le gouvernement s'est assuré à ne pas faire porter tout le fardeau de ces augmentations par la population. Si le nouveau gouvernement estime qu'il y avait une autre alternative, pourquoi n'a-t-il pas pris des décisions jusqu'à présent? La démagogie est trop facile, M. le président.

Il est vraiment déplorable qu'une opération machiavélique ait été orchestrée pour faire croire que le déficit budgétaire est plus élevé que prévu. La vérité réside dans le fait implacable que le précédent gouvernement a réussi à réduire le déficit budgétaire de 6.7% en 2000/2001

à 4.9% en 2004/2005, soit mieux que les 5% prévus. La nation, M. le président, a le droit de demander au gouvernement des réponses suite aux dépenses substantielles qui vont être consenties dans la mise en application de certains programmes électoraux.

The hon. Minister was referring to the MRA, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to the MRA, le *discours programme* makes mention - and the Minister of Finance has just stated - that Government will make of it an effective instrument towards fairer and more efficient operation of the revenue laws and better delivery services to the public. Mr Speaker, Sir, there is nothing new once more in this argument, as the MRA was set up by the previous Government precisely with this objective. So what is new?

Mr Speaker, Sir, some nasty comments, I must say, have been made on my competencies as former Chairperson of the MRA. In so doing, let me say that the Minister of Finance *désavoue son Premier ministre et aussi l'actuel ministre du logement qui était le chairperson* of the implementation team *du* MRA.

I will remind, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member that my appointment was made by the President after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. The Minister of Finance has been saying that

nothing has been done at the MRA. This is far from the truth. In fact, a huge job has been done. Either the Minister of Finance, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not familiar with administrative practices or he pretends not to know. The Chief Executive has been recruited after a thorough selection exercise. The scheme of service for about 1,500 posts had been prepared. Constructive dialogue had been favoured all along with trade unionists to ensure that consensus prevailed. The logo of the MRA has been launched. So, the criticisms, Mr Speaker, Sir, made against me are really unfair and I should say at the same time that these criticisms do not spare the other Board members and they are still there.

On sugar, Mr Speaker, Sir, many things have been said these days as regards negotiations that were conducted by the previous Government relating to our sugar interests in Europe. But I deeply regret that Government is trying to derive political benefits from an issue of vital national interest.

Mr Speaker, Sir, party politics should be cast aside on such matters. We all know that the lobbying process to safeguard at best our sugar interests with the European Union is an ongoing one. The technicians, Mr Speaker, Sir, involved in the negotiations are basically the same. The documents and arguments submitted by Mauritius as spokesman for the ACP cannot change when there is a change in Government in our country. The arguments should remain the same. Perhaps the Minister of Agro Industry could inform us on the content of his recent speech before the European Parliament...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mrs Hanoomanjee: ...and from what I have gathered, Mr Speaker, Sir, not a single new argument has come from the Minister of Agro Industry. The previous ACP spokesmen, Pravind Jugnauth and hon. Nando Bodha, have undertaken a marvellous job, and their precious contribution to the ACP plea has been very much appreciated by all the parties concerned. It is no use trying to criticise the contribution as such criticisms will only be interpreted as ridiculous.

I would like to remind the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that thanks to the qualitative negotiation led by Pravind Jugnauth as spokesman for the ACP sugar group the date of coming into force of the Everything But Arms Initiative in favour of the LDCs was postponed from January 2005 to July 2006. Moreover, the present European Sugar Regime was maintained in 2001 for a further period of five years till 2006. Still under his able spokespersonship, the World Trade Organisation has recognised the importance of special and differential treatment for small and vulnerable States like Mauritius. All these, Mr Speaker, Sir, are achievements that cannot be denied.

As far as lobbying against the European Commission's proposals for a 39% cut in sugar prices is concerned, I can say without hesitation that Mauritius initiated a series of discussions with France, Germany and other influential European States in order to safeguard at best its interests and those of the ACP group.

France had already assured us of its full support. We were reasonably optimistic as to the out-turn of the negotiations. The responsibility now lies on the Minister of Agro Industry who is the new ACP spokesman to deliver on that front as well as on the local front where there is a pressing need to take decisions to implement the already prepared accelerated Action Plan. This plan takes into account the interests and future of all the stakeholders of the sugar industry, including those of the small planters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say that there is nothing new in what the hon. Minister of Finance said earlier in his statement as regards agriculture. All that has been said was already scheduled by the previous Government, namely, derocking, land preparation, all these were scheduled to ensure the long-term viability and competitiveness of our sugar sector. There can be no excuse now for failure as the most difficult has been done despite the campaign that the former Opposition led against the reform initiated by the MSM/MMM Government in 2001.

I have noted that there is no mention in the *discours programme* of the Government on the accelerated Action Plan which I mentioned earlier. But the same thing is now being presented in a different manner as a fast-track modernisation and diversification. Old wine in new bottle, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Je constate aussi une énorme contradiction concernant la production électrique à partir de la bagasse. Alors que dans le chapitre concernant l'industrie sucrière dans le discours programme au paragraphe 95, le gouvernement souligne la nécessité d'optimiser la production d'énergie électrique à partir de la bagasse, il est précisé au paragraphe 141 concernant l'énergie que le CEB sera encouragé à augmenter ses propres capacités de production. *Which is which? We would like to know, Mr Speaker, Sir.*

As regards the non-sugar agricultural sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to note that after criticising the former Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Agro Industry is moving in the same direction indicated so clearly and comprehensively in the Strategic Plan 2003-08. At least, Mr Speaker, Sir, he recognises that the sector had been given a proper orientation with emphasis on new technology and agro industry. I am also happy, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Minister of Agro Industry is now speaking favourably on the National Agricultural Biotechnology Institute project which has been initiated by the MSM/MMM Government.

I wish here to quote what the hon. Minister of Agro Industry said in March last year on the setting up of the National Agricultural Biotechnology Institute when the GMO Bill was being debated in this very House. I quote what he said -

"The Minister has mentioned the setting up of a National Biotechnology Centre under the circumstances, I ask the question: Do you know what is the capital expenditure of this National Biotechnology Centre? The project will cost Rs350 m. Do you know what is the recurrent expenditure? Rs127 m.! Why is it that you don't use the resources judiciously? Earmark funds to build up the capacity at the University of Mauritius; run courses to prepare our graduates to respond to changing needs in the agricultural field. Why is it that you don't earmark funds for the MSIRI? As of now, they have already acquired expertise."

And he goes on to say –

“This is very, very important because we are not only going to talk of identifying gene in genome. It is very important of moving forward, of looking at cellular and molecular biology.”

This is what Government has failed to do and this is what he said on the National Biotechnology Institute and I am really happy that now that he is in Government, he has come to better terms on this issue.

M. le président, dans le cas du *South Eastern Highway Project*, en passant par Ferney, c'est la confusion totale encore une fois. Le Premier ministre a même désavoué son vice Premier ministre qui s'était prononcé en faveur du maintien du tracé original après une visite des lieux en compagnie des ministres Bunwaree, Jeetah, Boolell et Bachoo. Et à ce jour, M. le président, on ne sait pas encore ce qu'advindra du projet.

M. le président, il est clair que le gouvernement du jour a très mal démarré son mandat. La persécution dont sont victimes des personnes intègres et compétentes comme Jyoti Jeetun, Vijay Makhan et tant d'autres témoignent de cette culture de chasse aux sorcières, surtout contre ceux et celles qui ont donné tout leur temps et leur énergie pour travailler pour le pays.

The Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is continuously saying that it is putting people first, but, in fact, they are putting their people first.

Je termine, M. le président, en réitérant notre volonté et notre détermination au sein de l'opposition de veiller à ce que le changement, tant promis par l'alliance sociale, ne se transforme pas en cauchemar pour la population. Nous serons un rempart contre tous les excès du gouvernement. Nous allons défendre le peuple bec et ongle et nous n'allons pas permettre à ce que tout le travail de reconstruction accompli de septembre 2000 à juin 2005 soit jeté à l'eau.

Merci, M. le président.

Debate No. 7 of 06.09.2005

PUBLIC BILL

**THE NATIONAL PENSIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL
(NO. XXVI OF 2005)**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the National Pensions
(Amendment) Bill (No. XXVI of 2005).
Question again proposed.*

Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River):

M. le président, nous venons d'entendre un discours passéiste Meade et Titmuss, cela fait déjà plus de 40 ans de cela!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in spite of what the Government side is saying, many people have acknowledged that the targeting approach for basic retirement pension, as had been started by the previous Government, was a step in the right direction in the interest of this country. Even today when amendments are being proposed on the National Pensions Act, I have doubts as to whether all Ministers and MPs on the other side of the House, totally concur with the decision of Government. I wish here to quote what Dr. Chady said when he was an hon. Member in this House and was intervening on the pension issue in the 2004/2005 Appropriation Bill. This is what he said then, I quote -

"Every Government would have liked to do what this Government, (...)"

He meant the previous Government.

"(...) has done, but it is not an easy task."

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, it was not an easy task, but there was a choice to be made and the previous Government was bold enough to come up with measures which would benefit the poor, measures the needy and the most vulnerable. It was never the intention of the previous Government to dismantle the Welfare State as some have been saying. In fact, when the previous Government adopted the targeted approach, it was to strengthen and consolidate the Welfare State. The decision aimed at putting the Welfare State on a more sustainable basis so as to ensure that a decent and meaningful support is given to the most needy beneficiaries. What the previous Government wanted to do is to orient resources to those who are most in need.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are less than 3% of the total number of elderly persons who have income exceeding Rs20,000 a month and, as the Minister of Social Security has herself stated, it accounts to about Rs55 m. in the

budget of the Government, but the previous Government had judiciously re-diverted this money to some 120,000 old age pensioners in a spirit of solidarity with those who are most vulnerable. This had enabled the previous Government to increase the monthly pension from Rs1,900 to Rs2,200 for those aged between 60 and under 75 years and from Rs2,000 to Rs2,250 for those aged between 75 and under 90 years.

Pourquoi, M. le président, faut-il, dans le long terme, pénaliser ceux qui sont dans le besoin? We all know that the present system of universal non-contributory pension is unsustainable. Everybody knows that it is unsustainable, mais cet amendement au National Pensions Act est fait dans le cadre des promesses faites pendant la campagne électorale, et, aujourd'hui, le gouvernement est pris à son propre piège. Le gouvernement est aujourd'hui prisonnier de ses promesses farfelues et il vient dire qu'avec de telles mesures, ils changeront la vie de nos citoyens. Mais ils changent la vie de qui? Qui profitent de ces mesures? Ceux qui ont un revenu de plus de R 20,000 par mois, M. le président! Est-ce qu'on peut catégoriser ces gens dans la classe des pauvres? Est-ce qu'on peut catégoriser ces gens dans la classe des plus démunis? Et le gouvernement vient ici dire qu'il travaille pour les plus démunis! Rien de plus faux quand nous savons qu'il y a, aujourd'hui, des gens, des femmes et des enfants qui sont encore sous des tentes, sans eau, ni électricité et qui attendent un toit. Is that putting people first, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? Au contraire, c'est un gouvernement qui oeuvre pour que les riches deviennent plus riches et les pauvres plus pauvres. Le précédent gouvernement avait fait cinq pas en avant et, aujourd'hui, le présent gouvernement fait dix pas en arrière.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stated earlier that many Ministers and MPs on the other side of the House do not totally concur with the amendments being brought today to the National Pensions Act. Let me refer to what the present Minister of Finance, hon. Rama Sithanen, stated on his concept of the Welfare State. Let me quote what he said on the concept of Welfare State when he was presenting the 1993/1994 Budget -

"As the House will have noted, there is right now considerable re-think taking place in many countries on the subject. It is the general view now that the best way to preserve the Welfare State is to make it more effective. This is necessary because maintaining such a system is becoming increasingly costly in most countries."

And he goes on to say -

"Many countries are bringing major modifications to their welfare system in order to make them more equitable and also to avoid waste. Even Sweden, the cradle of the Welfare State, has found it necessary to reform its system so as to reduce its cost to the national budget. It is now recognised that an effective and equitable welfare system should give adequate protection to those in need rather than extending a lower level of protection to all including the rich."

And he goes on to say -

"There is, on the other hand, the growing body of opinion worldwide favouring the targeted approach, that is, giving more protection to the needy."

The Minister of Finance, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some ten years back, admitted publicly that the BRP is not sustainable, yet he has blindly given his consent to return to the old system.

Let me now come to what another previous Minister of Finance, Dr. Bunwaree said in his Budget Speech of 1997/1998. In his Budget Speech of 1997/98, hon. Dr. Bunwaree also advocated that benefits of the Welfare State should go to those who really need it. I quote what he stated then –

“(...)the present approach to social welfare must be reviewed if we are to ensure that those who are really deserving get adequate support. It is not fair and equitable for the materially wealthy to benefit from transfers that are meant, in the first place, to provide relief to the poor and the under-privileged. This situation must be corrected.

In this context, an in-depth scientific study will be carried out to come up with the most appropriate way to better cater to the needs of the most vulnerable groups of our society. In the meantime, a Pensioners' Welfare Trust will be set up, to which pensioners may voluntarily donate their basic retirement pensions”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Pensioners' Welfare Trust was never created. The fact is that it was never created! Yet, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the idea is a trustworthy one, we must admit, and I hope that pensioners who are not in need of this additional money will voluntarily donate their basic retirement pensions to those who are in dire need of this money.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I say it again, the reform in the BRP by the previous Government was done in an *élan de solidarité* to those elderly who really needed more. That measure had enabled the previous Government to take a series of measures to help *les plus démunis de notre société*. I will enumerate some of the measures that were taken by the previous Government in the same vein.

First, the increase in the pension rates in the 2005/2006 Budget for those earning less than Rs20,000.

Second, the provision to our elderly who are bedridden and aged 75 and above, with domiciliary medical visits.

Third, the raising of the benefits payable to widows, orphans, disabled and inmates of charitable institutions.

Fourth, the provision of a one-off grant of Rs2,000 to the elderly in need of dentures.

Fifth, the doubling of the deduction ceiling in respect of donations to charitable institutions.

This is what may be termed as taking from those who have and giving to those who do not have. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these initiatives reveal that the Government was right in bringing the reforms, so as to ensure that such an important pillar of our welfare system becomes financially sustainable in the years to come.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the number of beneficiaries of the BRP stands at around 125,000, and it is expected that this figure will almost treble in some 40 years' time, as rightly pointed out by hon. Lauthan in reply to a PNQ in 2004, and I quote –

“If the present situation is to continue, the share of Basic Retirement Pension on Gross Domestic Product will increase from around 2% to more than 11% in around 2040. 11% of Gross Domestic Product for payment of only one item of pension is, in any circumstance, unsustainable for any country”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I understand that, at the Ministry of Finance, a pension reform secretariat had been set up, and if that committee is still in place, then I would suggest that the Minister of Social Security gives due consideration to the recommendations of this committee. I do hope also that a sense of reasonableness prevails and that, in the interest of this country, priorities of the country are set right, that the Minister of Social Security gives much more consideration to those who need this money to buy food and basic necessities, instead of thinking in terms of those who need this money to pay a housemaid.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the non-contributory pension system has a long history. In fact, my hon. friend, the Attorney-General, has gone back into History as far as 1937, but one thing he has forgotten to state, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that right from those days, after the Social Insurance Committee was set up by the then colonial Government in 1950, the pension scheme was a targeted one. I will quote from the paper presented by Larry Wilmore of the United Nations during the International Research Conference on social security presented in 2003 in Belgium on our pension system. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I quote -

“The Social Insurance Committee recommended a compulsory system of flat contribution, 6 cents per day of work divided equally, 2 cents each among the worker, the employer and the Government which benefits strictly proportional to contributions paid. The programme targeted the poor, so would exclude those with an annual income of Rs600 or more.”

So, even in those days, in 1950, it was already a targeted approach. Even at a particular point in time, the non-contributory system also was questioned. Had it not been the strong pledge from certain hon. Members of the House at that particular time, the non-contributory approach also would have been removed.

Let me further quote from the same document, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - “Non-contributory basic pensions were popular and functioned smoothly, yet Government never abandoned its dream of replacing them with a contributory system. The Governor appointed a Committee of Ministers that

recommended in September of 1957 implementation of a system that will be a flat rate contributory and compulsory.”

Fortunately, the Minister responsible for pension in question did not apply that measure that was recommended, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. So, you see that the targeted approach is not a new issue, it has gone long back into history. Why is this approach important? We have seen successively different Ministers of Finance who have tried to adopt this system, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Why is it important? Firstly, because we are having an ageing population. As a result of our successful economic development and human development, we are having a population that is ageing in the sense that birth rate has fallen and people are living longer. On reaching 60 years, a man is expected to live 15 years more and a woman 20 years more, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, which means that the ratio of the population of working age to the population of pension age, which is normally known as the pensioner support ratio, is falling. With these demographics, sustainability may become very difficult in the future.

The second reason has already been pointed out, but I would like to stress on it, it is the number of beneficiaries. As at now, figures show that there are about 121,000 people that are the beneficiaries of this BRP, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the year 2040, it has been forecasted that the number of beneficiaries will be trebled. So, we imagine the amount of beneficiaries that we will have on our hands in 30 or 35 years ahead.

The third reason, I would like to stress again is the pressure that this will have on our GDP. Actually, when it was put into practice in 1950, it represented 1 per cent of our GDP. Now, I am called to understand that it is around 2 per cent of our GDP, but in 35 years ahead it will represent 11 per cent of our GDP. This will be only sustainable if we have the GDP growth per capita to continue to grow and we cannot eventually work on what we call uncertainty factors, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to project certain figures that will give an amplitude of what we are discussing in the House today.

In the year 1993/1994, the amount paid as BRP was only Rs859 m. Ten years later, in 2004, the Budget for BRP cost about Rs4.8 billion, an increase of Rs4 billion over a lapse of time of 10 years. It is forecasted that by the year 2040, the amount to be paid will reach nearly Rs8 billion.

Is that sustainable, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

After hearing and reading these figures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, no responsible Government could not think of reviewing the actual system of BRP, and successively we have heard that different Ministers came with different projects. Unlikely to what the hon. Minister has quoted in her speech, allow me to quote -

"Few diseased minds were at work in July 2004."

I am afraid, hon. Minister, that serious matters on this issue started well before that. It started in 1994, we've heard about it, but I would like to point out that in that same year, even a delegation headed by the then Minister of Social Security visited four countries, namely, England, Germany, Italy and Sweden to look about the different system on reform of pension. Things started in 1994, not in 2004, as it was pointed out. Even the former Prime Minister who is actually the Prime Minister, during his last mandate between 1996 and 2000, had commissioned a report from Alan Walters on this specific subject. So, the targeted approach was on the agenda of each and every Minister of Finance successively and even on each and every Government. It is sad today that we are moving away from this particular aspect of things, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Since 1994 when serious things started on these matters, no one dared to implement it, no one had the courage to do it and our former Minister of Finance did it through the Budget he presented in year 2005, Sir. It was high time to review this type of Government expenditure through implementation of targeting. Targeting has led us to the reallocation of Government expenditure to the needy and the poor while removing from the list the rich who do not need State assistance. This is what we did, in fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It has been stated that we have saved only Rs55 m. Fair enough! But the question is not the amount that we are saving, the question is the long-term sustainability of it. Maybe now we are saving just Rs55 m, but in 30-40 years ahead, what will be our situation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

So, again, I pledge that we are going in the wrong direction. What we've stated, Sir, is that only 3% of the pensioners are eventually removed from the list, it's about 3,357. But those 3,357 pensioners who were deprived

of this Rs2,000 pension were those people who were having an income of more than Rs20,000 a month. So, what is the harm of depriving these people from this sum? They are the rich people earning more than Rs20,000 a month. Who were the targeted ones? We were removing from the rich to give to the poor and the needy. Is this wrong? Where is the harm? They are doing the contrary now, they are sustaining the life expenditure of those who are rich '*sur le dos des pauvres*'. We targeted only those earning more than Rs20,000 a month. What were the criticisms of the then Opposition? It is that we are dismantling the Welfare State. I have argued on this topic, Sir. Welfare State means before all, to cater for the poorer sections of the population, targeting means providing more meaningful support to them. This is what we were doing. The threshold income of Rs20,000 also was not chosen haphazardly, but after going for poverty testing, Sir, that is, the means testing and the affluence testing.

I may agree that eventually, during the implementation stages, the proper means have not been used, and the Leader of the Opposition also has agreed on that. On that issue also, corrective measures and a more human approach can be taken. If a tyre of your car is punctured, you do not sell your car, you find corrective measures to repair it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I pledge that Government reconsiders seriously its position on the BRP in the light of the long sustainability and, especially, in redirecting the sum obtained to the poor and the needy people instead of giving pension to those earning more than Rs20,000 a month which, according to us, are those people who are well off and do not need this sum.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Debate No. 08 of 09.09.05

PUBLIC BILL

First Reading

On motion made and seconded the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill (No. XXVIII of 2005) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION (AMENDMENT)

BILL (NO. XXVIII OF 2005)

Order for Second Reading read

Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there seems to be a consensus in the House. There seems to be the national political will, because we know that corruption is not a scourge only in Mauritius, but has also become an international phenomenon which is very complex, with many ramifications. We just have to see the last report about the United Nations Oil for Food Programme in Irak to have an idea of how billions of dollars are spent and how far corruption can, in fact, undermine institutions as prestigious as the United Nations and other mechanisms that we have internationally and nationally.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise a certain number of points. The Leader of the Opposition has addressed most of the key issues. As far as the Corruption Perception Index is concerned, there has been a comment that he fell from 37th to 43rd place. In fact, the word which is important there is ‘perception’, because we cannot measure the degree of how corrupt the society is. The perception is calculated after a certain number of criteria are taken into consideration, where people in different communities, the business community, the political class and other opinion leaders have given their impressions. And I would like to say what Transparency International, itself, says about this perception. In his Report of 2000, the Executive Director said –

“These rankings are very important, but the exact placements of countries should not be given undue weight. Comparing the ranking of countries from one year to the next demands care and Transparency International encourages people to review fully the even more detailed data from the sources that are available under the Transparency International website.”

The perception is very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because of the stigma that goes with corruption and the fact that it involves the moral integrity of the individual, of the political class, of the economic community. If you ask somebody about it, he will say this society is corrupt in most

cases because of how we define corruptibility. *Est-ce qu'il peut être corrompu, corrupteur or corruptible? Et beaucoup dépend de ses expériences dans la vie, que ce soit en tant que professionnel, en tant que parlementaire ou en tant que d'homme d'affaires. Et si on lui demande si, lui-même, il est corrompu, corrupteur ou corruptible Il dira, bien sûr, non.* But this stigma which goes with corruption is very important, that is why I agree with the hon. Members here when they raised the issue of power of arrest. The hon. Leader of the Opposition raised this issue too. The Courts have pronounced themselves on this, but I think it should be clear at what point in time of the investigation the power of arrest can be exercised and by whom. Because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have seen some high profile cases abroad insofar as white crime is concerned. We have also seen the impact of some very high profile cases in Mauritius. And the hon. Attorney-General raised the whole issue of number of cases, which was investigated upon, and the number of provisional charges, which were laid, and the number of cases brought before the Courts. Some hon. Members here as well as myself were Members of the Select Committee on Fraud and Corruption, which produced a report, and later we came with the legislation and the institution of the ICAC.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the persons whom I think gave a very interesting experience was Mr Bernard de Spéville who was the Director of the ICAC in Hong Kong for many years. He said a certain number of things which are very interesting. First of all, he said that it took Hong Kong more than 20 years to come with an institution which has authority and the trust of the people and the efficacy that today we would like to have. He said that in Hong Kong only 10% of cases end up in Court. And this raises another issue: that of 'whistle blowing', where we said in the law that in order to encourage people to come forward with a certain number of complaints and cases, they can send anonymous letters, they can also send any document and the ICAC has a duty to investigate upon it. But, depending on societies, we can understand the efficacy of 'whistle blowing', because you can end up *avec une culture de délation, de dénonciation qui ne pourrait que pourrir notre société.* And, in the case of Hong Kong, even there, only 10% of cases are brought before the Court and, in Mauritius, the hon. Attorney-General raised this issue, saying that here, as well, there are very few cases, because the role of the public, the trust they have in the authority, is very important to be able to have this efficacy that we are looking for today.

Mrs Rosalyn White, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, who was the Director of the Serious Fraud Office in London, also raised this issue of ‘whistle blowing, of the stigma, which goes on with the corruption cases and the way it should be handled, the confidentiality it requires and, as I raised, the whole issue of the power of arrest. She says –

“Although some of our investigations are public knowledge, many are not. Not every case under investigation will necessarily result in proceedings by us. There are sound reasons for confidentiality such as the duty not to cause undue or unnecessary reputational and financial risks to individuals, to companies and to institutions.”

And we have to do this. We need the efficacy, but we should do away with everything which can put in jeopardy the reputation and the integrity of our fellow citizens. So, you have three actors, in fact, in our fight against corruption. You have the public and their role, I raised the whole issue of ‘whistle blowing’ and we have the role of the institution itself. I am not going to comment on the institution since a lot has been commented upon - the fact that we see the results today. What I would like to say on this side of the House is that the former Government has been working on a certain

number of changes to be brought so that we can have this efficacy that we need, because Mauritius has a reputation, we want to be a model, to show that our democracy is alive and we want to show that we are a place where people can invest and that there is a sound business environment in this country. We have a reputation. We are an offshore centre with about 18,000 offshore companies operating here, so we have to do this.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the institution has exercised its powers. There was a certain number of problems, but I am not going to address those issues. Let me come to the Appointments Committee. I fully agree with the Leader of the Opposition. During a meeting of the Select Committee, we talked to Mr De Spéville and we tried to see how the institution was given its figurehead. We raised a certain number of issues and we came to the conclusion that the former Government would send a very strong signal that the three topmost personalities in this country, namely, the Head of State, the Head of Government and the Leader of the Opposition, should be the Members of the Appointments Committee and should see to it that the appointment and removal of the figurehead of the ICAC becomes a question of national interest above politics. It has not worked and I think that the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition that when it comes to the removal of the figurehead any of the two top personalities believe in the

national interest that the committee should be recalled, it can be done. I think that would be the way forward and it would send a very good signal to the international community, because we want to be seen as a country having the political will, the efficacy as far as the institution is concerned and the involvement of the population to fight the scourge of corruption.

Let me come now to the Parliamentary Committee. What we are doing now is that the accountability of ICAC is at the level of Parliament. We have changed the total from 8, that is, 5/3 to 5/4, but the Chairperson is still nominated by the Prime Minister. In the former scenario, the Members of the Committee nominated the Chairman, and I think, another way forward would be to leave the Members of the Committee to choose the Chairperson. I don't have the number for the quorum of the meeting, because that was another issue when the former Parliamentary Committee met in the past. I think the quorum then was 4. I don't know what is the quorum in this case, because we have 5/4.

(Interruptions)

It is 5. I am not saying that the Government has any sinister political motive...

(Interruptions)

... but it also means that Government Members can run the show if the Opposition is not there. So, I think that is another point which should be taken on board, because the Parliamentary Committee is being given the power of removal. But we believe that the appointment and the removal should rest with the Appointments Committee, with the three personalities I mentioned before.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise two other points. One is about the audit trail, because after the investigation and after the conviction, ICAC was supposed to continue its work in that particular case with an audit trail. From memory, I think there was only one case where an audit trail was

on and there were numerous difficulties to be able, in fact, to find the crucial data for a right audit trail to be carried out, because, at the end of the day, this is ill-gotten money. I think that we should also take care of this aspect in the new legislation. I understand that we are bringing a certain number of amendments today and we will be able to bring other amendments as we move on in our fight. So, this audit trail is a very important issue, because it relates to ill-gotten gains. And you can also have an audit trail at the level of the investigation so that it can bring evidence to the fact that there has been a corrupt practice in some cases. But, then, when can you carry out this audit trail? Who will carry it out as far as banking secrecy is concerned? How far can you move on as far as financial institutions are concerned? This is another issue we will have to take care of in the future.

The other issue I wanted to address, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is about, what we call, the constructive trust. This was also addressed when we brought the law of Trusts, that is, relating to money which has been ill-gotten. Who takes care of that money and what do we do with that money? Because at the end of the day, it is money that relates to ill-gotten funds, it is what we call unjust enrichment and money which you have had from unjust enrichment has to go to some sort of fund and we should be able to make use of that money as well. So, I think that "*on avait donné une dernière chance, je pense qu'on est en train de donner, avec le nouveau Parlement et le nouveau gouvernement, une nouvelle chance.*" We all believe that a corrupt-free society for Mauritius is important because it gives to our citizens a hope for a better future and we have to work with the people, with the institution and with the authority, that is, Government and the Opposition. I think it is a good thing today for Mauritius that we have been able to bring some amendments and I hope that we are going to bring some major amendments in the future.

To conclude, I would like to say that the idea is to have a more effective, a more economic and efficient functioning of the ICAC. But the most important thing again is the image of Mauritius and the image of the people of Mauritius as a honest people and a people who believe in democracy and in our institutions.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.