

Unemployment Insurance

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker, I will take my 40 minutes and then the hon. gentleman can ask his question.

The minister said in the course of his remarks that the previous government had been warned in 1957 that the unemployment situation was coming. The minister chose to refer to this subject and I am sure Your Honour will not restrict me from doing the same. I asked him when the government had received that warning and he dodged the question. I know very well why he dodged it: because he remembered that on December 10, 1957, just six months after he came into office he said that there is hardly an economist or a student of the situation who does not feel that the unemployment situation is merely temporary and that, given a brief breathing pause, the natural buoyancy of the economy will assert itself. That is what the minister had to say on December 10. Was the minister that inept or blind?

Both Mr. Harris and the leader of the opposition had been warned in June that the unemployment situation was coming, but what did this collection of brilliant statesmen who had been in office six months have to say about this? After six months in office they had this to say, and I think it is worth repeating; "There is hardly an economist or a student of the situation who does not feel that the unemployment situation is merely temporary and that, given a brief breathing pause, the natural buoyancy of the economy will assert itself". A month and ten days later the Prime Minister had that apocalyptic vision in this house on January 20, 1958 and put forward carefully selected extracts from a document which, by all the conventions of our British parliamentary institution should never have been used in the way he used it, and created an impression which was totally out of accord with the facts, and out of accord with what the Minister of Labour had said a month before.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): Is it still hurting?

Mr. Pickersgill: I am not suggesting the unemployment situation is hurting the Liberal party today, but it is hurting that party which has been in power for four of the longest years we have experienced in Canada in recent times.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think I should remind the hon. member that I do not object to his answering arguments or statements made by the minister or other speakers, but I suggest that his answer should be short rather than of a type which would detract from the subject of the amendment. I indicated before it is my view that the unemployment situation cannot be the subject matter of the

[Mr. MacInnis.]

amendment because there is reference only to the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

Mr. Pickersgill: I promise you, sir, that I will not take any longer in respect of any of these themes than did the minister himself.

The minister complained in the same vein as did the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mr. Browne) and the parliamentary secretary. I will not take as much time as they did.

An hon. Member: It will seem like it though.

Mr. Pickersgill: Yes, it will seem like a lot longer to the hon. member before I am finished, though it will not take me longer.

I should like to ask the minister what he means by gloom and doom. I am going to ask him whether he means by gloom and doom that which is indicated in this statement:

We on this side of the house hope that the government will act because there is no depression in other countries of the world. In Britain there is no such thing as serious unemployment today, the unemployment in Britain being less than half of our unemployment with a population several times greater than ours. The same condition prevails in West Germany and in other private enterprise countries.

Is that doom and gloom?

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): There is no word there decrying the Canadian conditions.

Mr. Pickersgill: Oh, yes, the statement is that there is no other country in the world with such serious unemployment as we have in Canada. That is what is said here. I continue:

We do not believe in preaching pessimism; we do not want to see the condition of affairs brought about which will create panic; but we are asking the government to act now—

—this is not something new that has come to the attention of the government. It has been mounting for the last several years.

Is that, or is it not, doom and gloom?

Mr. Ricard: No.

Mr. Pickersgill: Let me read this:

The government does not even recognize that there is serious unemployment. Unless they do recognize that fact they cannot achieve in their minds any actuality of a solution for the problem.

What a wonderfully accurate description of this government that is. I continue:

I was reading Edmund Burke the other night and I saw something that is quite fitting. He said: We can never walk surely but by being sensible of our blindness.

Is this government sensible of its own blindness? I read further:

How applicable that is to this government which is so insensible to its blindness, to its own postponing and procrastinating. It is ready to promise action some time in the future.