

league, the minister responsible for housing, a record number of 220,000 starts was forecast for 1971. There was also a significant increase in contract awards for non-residential and engineering construction toward the end of 1970. All this indicates there may well be a marked increase in investment in this field also during the current year.

Let me point out that in his speech to the federal-provincial conference in Ottawa earlier this week the Minister of Finance drew attention to the important point that in addition to these signs of increased activity there has also been a marked improvement in the underlying conditions required to sustain steady economic growth. He said:

Our progress in overcoming inflation, the steady reduction in interest rates and indications that economic expansion has been renewed have all interacted to produce a new sense of confidence in the future by investors, business and consumers.

The minister said in the House that with continued good price performance these figures implied an increase in real output which will be more than sufficient to offset the increase in the labour force and so reduce unemployment progressively during the year. This expression of confidence in the accelerating expansion of our economy and the decline in the percentage of unemployed has continued to be received with scepticism by the opposition.

Mr. Stanfield: Would the hon. minister accept a question?

Mr. Gray: I would be happy to accept questions at the conclusion of my remarks. I think I shall have ample time left.

An hon. Member: Oh, go on. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) allowed many questions.

Mr. Benson: My hon. friend does not have unlimited time.

Mr. Gray: The accelerating trend of the economy has been received with scepticism by the opposition. Perhaps they have difficulty in seeing what is going on around them, although they may deny it, in their blind thrust toward partisan advantage. By way of example I might draw attention to a report which appeared in the *Globe and Mail* some ten days ago of a speech by the Leader of the Opposition. The lead paragraph of this report, dated in Ottawa, read:

Unemployment will not fall below 6.6 per cent this year unless the Trudeau government takes additional steps beyond those outlined in the budget last December.

The hon. gentleman went on to say, in speaking to a men's club here in Ottawa:

The most optimistic forecast of Canada's economic growth for 1971 on the basis of present budget arrangements indicates the highest expected growth rate will make no appreciable reduction in our present rate of unemployment.

It appears the Conservative leader did happen to say something along the lines suggested by the Minister of Finance even though he seems to have forgotten about it. And it appears the Conservative leader does not stand

The Budget—Mr. Gray

alone in the view he expressed in Ottawa a few days ago. Only yesterday we saw the strange spectacle of Conservative, NDP and Cr ditiste parties joining together to condemn the government's economic policies and to forecast economic disaster. I use the word "spectacle" advisedly because it involved these three parties joining to condemn the government's economic policies in spite of the fact that each of them has advocated nostrums and panaceas for dealing with unemployment and inflation which are widely different and often sharply contradictory.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gray: I suggest their gloomy and gloating message does not correspond with the trend of the improvement which is already noticeable in the state of our economy. The Leader of the Opposition may quarrel with the statistics, but these statistics issued by the Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Manpower are those he quotes when it serves his purpose; and this, surely, ought to demonstrate they are valid when they are quoted by the government to illustrate the accelerating trend of the economy and the improvement in the economic picture. Only this morning the Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Immigration—

Mr. Lundrigan: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member is rising on a point of order?

Mr. Lundrigan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The minister has quoted statistics. I wonder if I could ask him a question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The minister has said that if he has time left he will answer questions at the end of his speech.

An hon. Member: He will make sure he has not.

Mr. Gray: I was about to say that the Bureau of Statistics—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan) rising on a point of order?

Mr. Lundrigan: May I ask the hon. gentleman a question? In spite of the fact that the Leader of the Opposition—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Will the hon. member resume his seat? The minister has the floor. He said earlier, in reply to the Leader of the Opposition, that if he had time he would answer questions at the end of his remarks. In these circumstances the Chair invites the minister to continue.

Mr. Lundrigan: I stand to be corrected, but I assumed it was the right of the minister to make the decision as to whether I could ask a question, since he now has the floor.