

*The Budget—Mr. Wilson*

country, that \$20 billion projection is probably low. I think anyone who understands estimates knows that when something is put at \$19.8 billion, just below the \$20 billion level, it will rise to that \$20 billion level.

There is no plan in this budget for economic recovery. The minister does not seem to understand that we have a confidence crisis in the country. Canadians are desperate. Canadians are hanging on to small businesses. They are suffering around a 25 per cent or 50 per cent loss of capacity. People are in desperate need of leadership in the country today. Seventy-five per cent of the people are worried that they or the immediate members of their families will lose their jobs over the next year. That is the state we are in today.

The response of the minister is to put the boots to those who are hardest hit in the economy today, the low-income people and the pensioners. We could not even get a straight admission from the minister today that he was putting the boots to the pensioners. Let me quote what this same minister said when he was the minister of national health and welfare. He said:

Clearly, we owe it to our older people, who have borne the burdens of the past half century, to ensure that they have a decent and adequate income for their retirement years.

● (1510)

That is the same minister who just last night took away half of the inflationary increase of their pensions next year. This is the same minister who is desperately looking for help in fighting these problems. Let me just remind you, Mr. Speaker, of a pathetic line in his budget last night. He was looking around for help. Talking about other industrialized countries, he said:

Their governments are unable or have not chosen to design their economic policies to help us get out of the recession.

Is the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) seriously expecting other countries in the world to help us get out of our recession, to design their policies so that he can have his problems solved for him? This man is sitting with his head deeply in the ground wondering where the help is going to come from. He is looking all over the place, except right here at home. That is where we have to start to solve our economic problems, not grasping at straws in other countries of the world, but facing up to the reality at home.

Is it any wonder that Canadians shake their heads in bewilderment when they think of this minister and the total lack of new policies and directions that have been indicated in this budget? The budget was simply tinkering with some of the policies that got us into the problems that we have today. It is too little, too late and many Canadians will suffer as a result of it.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to step back a little and look at this budget in the context of what has happened in the past two and one half years since February, 1980. This is a record of an inept government, a record of failure that is unparalleled in Canadian political history. Let us go through the litany of these failures.

The Constitution, which was declared illegal by the Supreme Court, had to be changed in order to meet the requirements of the provinces and the people of Canada. The National Energy Program was wrong right from the start. It was first changed in September, 1981, changed again in May, 1982 and is still not right.

Let us now come to the Foreign Investment Review Agency. A major change was heralded in the 1982 election. It was going to increase significantly the amount of intervention in the economy by this agency. It has been presided over by the most extreme of the nationalist members of the cabinet. This agency is not working. It has led to an incredible degree of uncertainty on the part of foreign and domestic investors. It has become a symbol of the lack of understanding of the need for job-creating investments in this country on the part of the government. The changes in the budget last night were not enough, but the fact that changes were made recognizes that the directions that were chosen in February, 1980, were wrong for the country.

The budget of last November was a disaster from the start. The economic direction in that budget was all wrong. Since then we have had at least 35 changes in the income tax provisions. That represents a tremendous amount of uncertainty; uncertainty means delay of economic activity, and that means fewer jobs. There are still more changes to come. The minister has not yet put that one to bed and he is on to his next budget.

The energy security act which heralded the introduction of an omnibus bill, which was going to hijack the rights of Parliament, was forced to be changed by the opposition members. This is a consistent pattern of failure. It is a consistent pattern whereby this government is being forced to change the direction it wanted to follow for a direction that this opposition party was pressing for.

The official opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, has been the only entity in this country that has kept the federal government on a reasonable track. Consider the damage that would have been done if there had not been an opposition party fighting for the rights of Canadians and fighting for changes in these policies. Think of the damage that would have been done and the position we would have been in today if that government, with its pattern of failure, had continued on in the same direction. This government cannot continue to lead us in that direction. The country cannot afford to pay the price of the irresponsible and incompetent actions of the government, egged on by the New Democratic Party in many of the directions it is proposing to go. It has only been brought on track by this official opposition. The damage to the country has been too great. The delays in changing these policies have meant a tremendous increase in the amount of unemployment. I will come back to that in a minute.

Divisions have erupted with splits between the east and the west and Quebec and the rest of Canada as a result of the high interest rate policy, the energy program, the Constitution and so on. Why is it that this government continues to take