

The Budget—Mr. Stanfield

Mr. Benson: Would you bet on the figures that you use, and that the 6.6 per cent figure will not go down?

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, for his own sake I hope the minister would not bet money. If the minister wants to make an issue on what I have said, I will be very happy to repeat what I have said and stand by it. I said I have not seen any realistic predictions relating to the economy this year which indicate that the seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment will drop—and I will stand by that.

Mr. Benson: May I ask the hon. member a question? I wonder if he would send me a copy of his speeches in the future, because I have been cut off his mailing list and so I really do not know what he says. I do not know why I have been cut off his mailing list.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to get a glimmer of understanding why the minister is following such foolish policies. He has not been getting the benefit of my suggestions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benson: Perhaps I could ask another—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Benson: Could I ask a question?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister may ask questions only when the hon. member who has the floor, in this case the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), allows him to ask questions.

Mr. Stanfield: I would be delighted to have questions.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition why he has cut me off his mailing list. Perhaps he does not want me to know what he says.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the minister did not let me know sooner that he was not getting my speeches. I would have been happy to send them to him and in that way I might have saved the country an awful lot of trouble.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: As I was saying, for his own sake I hope the minister did not bet any money. But whether or not he gambled with money, he has been gambling with human beings and with the economy for far too long. We do not want or need a gambler to run the economy of this country. The Canadian people need someone who knows what he is doing; and without giving any personal offence, we do not have anybody like that today. The Canadian people need someone at the helm who not only knows but is concerned about the results of his policies, their effect on their lives and on the economy. We certainly do not have anybody who fits that description today. Instead we have men who talk coolly about seasonally adjusted figures, and about the economy having turned the corner. Last March the government told us we were beginning to turn the corner.

Mr. Benson: On inflation.

Mr. Stanfield: In December the Minister of Finance told us we were turning the corner. Today we have the highest unemployment figures of the decade. They are the highest both in actual figures and in the seasonally adjusted rate that the government is so fond of talking about. If this is the government's idea of turning a corner, I would hate to see how long it would take to get around a long curve. In fact, there is no indication that in any meaningful sense we have turned any corner at all in terms of reducing unemployment. This is the fourth year in a row that the seasonally adjusted figures have gone down between December and January. In other words, that is a normal development for this period of the year. The difference this year is that they are declining from the highest seasonally adjusted rate of the decade. And that is not the only difference: take a look at the real figures this year and compare them with those of a year ago.

A year ago the real increase in unemployment between December and January was about 102,000 Canadians. I presume that the Minister of Finance was looking at that figure when he made his prediction that there would be an increase of 100,000 between last December and January of this year. Instead, at the very moment when he is being so smoothly reassuring about the future he, as well as the Canadian people, have been whacked hard where it hurts with the knowledge that actually we now have not only 100,000 but 130,000 additional Canadians out of work.

What kind of improvement is this that the government is trying to peddle to the Canadian people? Perhaps in the bureaucratic mind that prevails in this government, the soft sound of seasonal statistics can replace the harsh facts. Perhaps it thinks that by seasonally adjusting the temperature it could even make winter disappear. Well, I for one would not bet on that—and I would not bet, either, that any so-called seasonal decline will convince the Canadian people that there has been any improvement at all. Anybody who looks at the figures of unemployment must realize that there has been a substantial deterioration between December and January. This government in its blindness to reality may be satisfied with the results, but a united opposition on this question is not satisfied with this pitiful culmination of one year of promises. I can assure the government that the Canadian people are not satisfied either.

• (8:30 p.m.)

Mr. Benson: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question? Would he not admit that the percentage of increase in unemployment in the month of January over December is the lowest since 1959? I am talking about the percentage of the labour force that is unemployed.

Mr. Stanfield: Well, if that should happen to be true—

Mr. Benson: It is.