

The Budget—Mr. Benidickson

impressive unemployment rolls but the minister said the unemployment would not be a burden or a worry once the snow departed. I know that hindsight is easy, and that it is a proper criticism to those who say "You should have known better" to tell them it is easy to be right by hindsight. But I said in December and the other night, and I am prepared to establish, that at that time, on March 31, 1960, there was again undue complacency and an inadequate appreciation of economic facts.

I gave one illustration Tuesday night. I showed that it was obvious to the Canadian Press, that three weeks before the presentation of the budget it reported there was a radical difference of opinion between the official opposition and the government as to whether adequate steps were being taken to cope with some clouds which were threatening on the horizon. The minister asserts to be always right in these matters, but I do say it was only 12 days later that there were quoted to him from this side forecasts which have proven reliable in the past and which have since proven as reliable as any I have seen. The minister was not prepared to do anything except assail the opposition for presenting these forecasts, including one from a very distinguished economic adviser to the government, Dr. Firestone, in one of the senior departments of the government. The minister pooh-poohed this and said he was not prepared to listen to gloom and doom.

This attitude continued. My challenge is not only that the minister may have ignored some of the facts which were obvious to others, but that he continued to ignore them and continued to neglect to impose policies which might have reduced the impact of a recession. Indeed, as I said the other night it was the Minister of Finance apparently—and this charge comes from a cabinet colleague, not from me—who turned off the tap with respect to housing. Housing is one of the economic factors so directly and quickly related to the provision of employment.

However, to take another source, I am quite confident that most hon. members of this house receive in their morning reading material here in the city of Ottawa the *Montreal Gazette*. It is well known that a very distinguished writer's articles, those of Mr. John Meyer, appear on the financial page of that newspaper. Three days after the budget was introduced last year Mr. Meyer stated that the budget, as a stand-pat budget, was an inadequate budget, saying this should have been obvious to the government. However, the government went blindly on with it. I recall that the Minister of Finance went to Winnipeg in the middle of May and stated there that things were wonderful and that

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he had no time nor patience for people of doom and gloom. He shut his ears to all warnings.

Perhaps the next senior minister of the government whose activities might be related to the business and employment situation is the then minister of trade and commerce, the present Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Churchill). He went to Winnipeg as late as the first week in July 1960, and there could not have been much ministerial consultation in regard to the economic field because the phrase he used at that time, which was a striking one. It was that the economy of Canada was going up like a rocket. This blindness, stubbornness and persistence on the part of the government continued.

The Prime Minister, during a very important speech made in October, 1960 said that we had been experiencing the three best years in Canada's history, which I suggest indicates that he was no more concerned than the other two economic ministers about those individuals in very great numbers who were not enjoying three best years in Canada's history.

Shortly after that the government decided to have the session commence earlier than most sessions do. It was called for the middle of November. At that time a program was presented, part of which was included in the speech from the throne, involving legislation of various departments. In addition it was intimated that we perhaps would have an amending budget.

It is the Minister of Finance I am concerned about. How worried has he been about the growth of the Canadian economy during 1960 which we are now reviewing in this budget debate? We met in November. The opposition complied very readily, with much alacrity, to anything that appeared to have an employment content, and several bills were passed before Christmas. I was shocked since to find that although we passed the legislation in December before adjourning for Christmas, in many cases where the cabinet, in view of the emergency, asked us to grant to it quickly executive powers it did not even have the orders in council ready until well after the new year.

I can cite one illustration in this regard, the small businesses loans bill, to which the Minister of Finance referred the other night with some satisfaction. There was here a familiar pattern which can be easily followed because there was a similar law in respect to the Farm Improvement Loans Act. If this administration had been sharp and anxious to see an upturn in the economy of this country, the \$65 million of likely loans, about which they spoke in that debate, should have been put to work immediately.