

# John Turner has a delicate job

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VANCOUVER — British Columbians often describe themselves as a race apart from other Canadians. But last week they found themselves in the turbulent mainstream of a national election campaign that is moving inexorably and more and more swiftly toward the brink of decision.

This province, where luxury incomes and high unemployment have existed side-by-side for years, is now a perfect microcosm of the Canadian scene.

The electoral dilemma faced by British Columbians today vividly expresses the difficult choice that confronts both the Trudeau government and the voters across Canada who are in the process of deciding its fate.

## Heat on Turner

Last week this Pacific province was visited by Prime Minister Trudeau and no less than three touring members of his cabinet: John Munro of health, Bryce Mackasey of manpower, and John Turner of finance.

It was John Turner, campaigning for three days in Vancouver, Victoria and small communities in the interior of British Columbia, who found himself at the heart of the economic debate that seems destined to override all others in the last stage of the campaign.

It is Turner who is now identified in the public mind, perhaps more closely than Trudeau is, with the economic policies that have brought Can-

ada to unprecedented prosperity but that have failed to liberate Canadians from the fear of unemployment and inflation.

While the Prime Minister has talked of "national integrity," Turner already has fought his way through more than 30 constituencies, his schedule compressed to accommodate a 10-day absence last month at international monetary and financial conferences in London and Washington.

By the end of the campaign, he will have filled engagements in 53 ridings across the country. It is already evident that none of them will be easy.

Turner is where the action is in this campaign.

This was never more apparent than in British Columbia, when he was hit on successive days by announcements of a seasonally adjusted September unemployment rate of 7.1 per cent, and the steepest monthly climb in the cost of living in more than a decade.

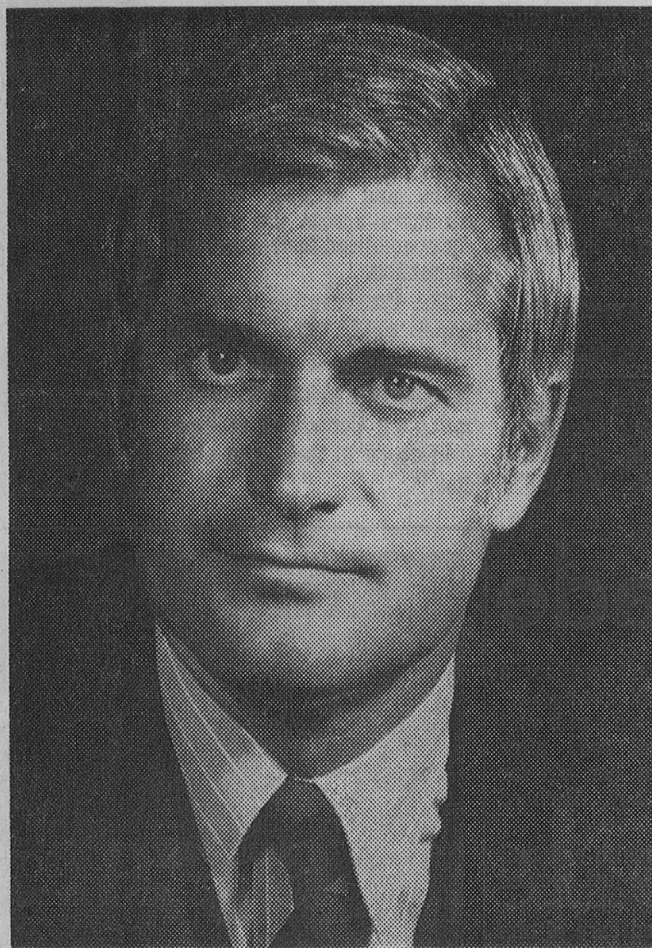
At every meeting, every press conference and almost every man-in-the-street encounter, the same question was thrown at him. At the airport in Penticton, almost before he had stepped from his chartered executive jet, there was a microphone in front of his face, and a radio reporter was asking: "If our economy is so good, why do we have unemployment at 7.1 per cent?"

## Crucial question

It's a crucial question not only for the government but for Turner himself.

In his first budget as finance minister earlier this year, he promised that the creation of jobs would be his main objective.

If the voters decide that he has failed, Turner could well become the most recent and one of the most prominent additions to the long line of Canadians whose political



**FINANCE MINISTER JOHN TURNER**  
... defending Liberal policies that have brought prosperity along with unemployment and inflation.

careers came to a dead stop in the finance portfolio.

Turner is meeting the challenge the only way he knows how: head-on.

The speeches that he is making in this campaign will never be collected and published by the University of Toronto Press, as the Prime Minister's have been. By no stretch of the imagination could they be called "conversations with Canadians."

They are blunt, fighting monologues, bristling with statistics. "I'm going to try to explain to

you what the problem is," is the way he usually starts.

"Here we've got one of the strongest economies in the world, and we've still got unemployment."

Everyone has now become familiar with the main argument: The extraordinary growth in Canada's labor force have overtaxed the job-creating capacity of a booming economy.

## Sticks to guns

Turner's central problem is also clear to his listeners: How can he further increase jobs

without triggering another dangerous cycle of inflation?

His response so far has been to maintain his course. He has rejected the proposals for temporary wage and price controls if required and the tax cuts offered by the other parties.

Predicting that Canada's special labor situation will start to moderate "in two, three or four years," Turner has been asking Canadians to side with him in the short run for a stable economy in the long term.

One of the reasons for Turner's dogged defence is that, in fact, he has little room for manoeuvre. The man who is largely responsible for this was also in British Columbia last week, reminding other audiences that the government has skimmed some of the fat from an expanding economy to provide for the unemployed.

Turner praises Mackasey's unemployment insurance scheme in public, if not at length, but it is no secret that the funds required by the scheme this year have left the government with little surplus cash for vote-getting new programs or tax reductions.

Turner ends every speech with the frank admission that the government's economic record and not its campaign speeches will be decisive.

At Williams Lake in the interior of British Columbia, where the early-morning temperature was already only 8 degrees above zero this week, he told a breakfast meeting: "On the basis of our economic performance, you are entitled to judge our future."

British Columbia's response on Oct. 30 could well be Canada's response.

Most people here say that the campaign is very quiet. They were saying the same thing last summer before the provincial election. The silence now, as then, is probably the sound of thinking.