

allowed our party to rank second in Quebec. For us, that is the promise of a great future. It is appropriate, Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of this Thirty-first Parliament, to congratulate the new Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Clark) for his victory at the last May 22 election. It certainly takes an extraordinary capacity to succeed in co-ordinating the forces of that party whose history was too often made of disputes and divisions.

● (1250)

I also thank the former prime minister who is now leader of the loyal opposition of Her Majesty and who unfortunately is not here, for having occupied with dignity and courage during so many years the high functions of government leader. I wish to pay tribute as well to the new Governor General of this country and to his wife for assuming with vigour and integrity the heavy responsibility as ultimate guardian of our traditions and institutions. He will know how to use, I am convinced, his exclusive and reserved right to be advised, to advise and to recommend.

Mr. Speaker, I listened with deep emotion to the reading of the government program for this session. The speech was well drafted, from the handicapped to the youth, from energy to the merchant navy, not to mention the traditional new vision: everything was there. The one thing missing was their undertaking to lower taxes. But in that respect, Mr. Speaker, I suspect the government is keeping this issue for the budget speech. To proceed with a good analysis of that speech, we must compare it with the present economic situation in this country. The actual situation in fact amounts to an understanding of two basic mathematical operations.

During the last ten years, unemployment has doubled. Bureaucrats have doubled and the public debt has quadrupled. We have seen productivity divided by two, same thing for the growth rate, the rate of inflation was multiplied by two as was the number of man-days lost due to strikes, public expenses were multiplied by four and the deficit of our trade balance was multiplied by ten. Whichever way you size up our economic performance, Mr. Speaker, the outlook is bleak. Yet, after having listened to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Trudeau) yesterday and to the questions put by members of the official opposition yesterday and this morning, in my opinion we are forgetting very rapidly that in the last 60 years this country had some 50 years of Liberal government; the last 11 years with the Liberals gave us the bad economic situation we now have. In those 60 years, the Conservative party governed Canada for barely ten years. We have to acknowledge reality, Mr. Speaker, and we should not duck away from it; we will have to work with sincerity and determination. We will have to act with straightforwardness and loyalty, and say things as they are.

In an international economy, characterized by a lack of resources, we have achieved a feat, here in Canada, that is of constantly decreasing the standard of living of our fellow

Canadians, and this, Mr. Speaker, in a country which has the largest reservoir of resources in the world. That is one of the economic aspects which best depicts the present situation.

Considering that Canada is one of the countries with the largest debt in the world, that Canada is the only one among industrialized countries in the international context which has to borrow to pay the interests on its debt, that during the last ten years, the proportion of our exports of raw materials has risen, and that we have to borrow to be able to restore the balance of payments, when one considers all of these things, Mr. Speaker, it is a sign that we live in difficult times. It is not without reason that a few strove to shift the interests of the nation towards other problems, at a time when the national economy is on the brink of bankruptcy.

It is normal to see scapegoats popping up and that is how I consider all those appeals to national unity, particularly when I realize that those who make them did everything they could to create the problems. Divide and rule, they said, and you see the result.

On the political level, we inherit a country that suffered from a slow but progressive erosion of its civil liberties. Newspapers reported peculiar rumours about thefts, illegal entries, property destruction but no one took the trouble to dig up those incidents. A foggy notion of national unity, never defined but supporting an incompetent power, has been used as an excuse. The greatest victory of men, the fact that "those who wield power cannot do so without the assent of their peers" is a famous historic saying. The feeling that "those who wield power cannot do so without the assent of their peers" had simply been thrown away!

Thomas Jefferson said, during the discussions on the drafting of Virginia's statutes: "To force people to contribute their money to the propagation of an ideology which is not theirs is, to me, an act of tyranny".

What is happening? Crown corporations, states monopolies, private monopolies are subscribing enormous amounts for the referendum battle; apparently, a secretariat has been organized with public funds. Nobody protested or worried about it. However, Jefferson was very clear. There was and there still is an erosion of our most basic liberties.

This phenomenon is such, Mr. Speaker, that some hon. members in this House have interpreted—and I do say "interpreted"—our absence from the striking committee as the non-existence of our party, an absence due to a change to the rules of the House following a mere proposal. No parliamentary procedure expert realized that without unanimous consent, a notion which exists in all parliaments—and the federal parliament remains the best guardian of the British parliamentary traditions—that without unanimous consent, the Standing Orders have been contravened, and I refer hon. members to pages 7153 and 7154 of the *Hansard* of June 28, 1977.