

● (1620)

*[English]*

If the House accepts the challenge that we are placing before it, I believe that we can make this again an instrument which is strong enough and respected enough to reflect the diversity of an exciting country. Instead of talking about the instruments of national action and national unity, we can become an instrument of national unity and of national action, and that is the purpose of the reforms that we propose.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** The Leader of the Opposition made reference to the phrase I had used during the election campaign, a phrase concerning communities. That is a matter of great concern to me. The concept is of great concern to me because in recent years the sense of community in Canada, despite the best intentions of the hon. gentlemen opposite, has become unravelled. That was evidenced most dramatically by the election in Quebec of a government explicitly committed to dismembering the country.

But that erosion of common purpose has grown in other ways as well, such as in the decision of the Canadian Labour Congress that they could not trust government enough to continue in consultation; the mutual suspicion that has clouded relations between the federal and provincial governments; the growing gulf between Canadians working in the private sector and Canadians working in the public sector; a sense among private citizens that their government and their Parliament was ignoring their interests and their views. More was happening in recent years than just the development of interest groups and narrow movements which arise occasionally in every country. There was a pattern of things coming apart in Canada, of the centre being literally unable to hold, and the irony was that every assertion by the centre of its authority weakened that authority. The lesson is that this nation cannot be ordered together. This nation must be brought together, and the starting step must be to establish a basis of mutual trust, of goals that emerge from the community of Canada rather than being imposed upon the community of Canada.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** As a new government we have believed that the way we should begin to knit the nation together was to establish a climate of calm and of co-operation. My ministers have travelled and consulted widely with the provinces, labour, business, co-operatives and a multitude of groups and individuals, sometimes concluding agreements, more often establishing the basis for future agreement. The fact is that the central government can lead the nation in resolving difficult problems only when the central government is seen again as a leader which itself respects the other partners of the Canadian confederation.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

*The Address—Mr. Clark*

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Clark:** Mr. Speaker, it had been obvious for several years that continuous confrontation had become a rule, a kind of system for federal-provincial relations.

As a new government, we have set a first immediate objective: the easing of the climate of federal-provincial relations. This is what we did. Action has been taken in that perspective. I think, for instance, of the agreement signed as regards Loto Canada. An agreement in principle has also been reached between the new government and some coastal provinces concerning offshore mineral resources. In the same spirit, we have decided not to reintroduce in the Commons the bill on the referendum as proposed by the former government. This measure was perceived in Quebec as an act of aggression and it is precisely the kind of attitude that my government intends to change.

So, my government has the firm intention of altering the atmosphere of federal-provincial relations. Concrete measures have been taken in recent weeks and others will be in the future. We believe that it is possible to solve several problems without any constitutional amendment and without revising the constitutional tool we now have at our disposal.

This is not a one-way process. In some cases, the answers we will choose might imply a jurisdictional transfer from the federal government to the provinces, whereas in others it might be a transfer from provincial jurisdictions to the federal authority.

Of course, there are skeptics in this House. It is quite possible, however, with a will, with a determination to chase partners rather than conflicts, for a Canadian government to get co-operation, understanding and agreements.

During this parliament, the issue of federal-provincial relations will still lead to controversy and intense debate. It is my hope there will be indeed outspoken debates. It is my hope that every member in this House will share a determination to contribute fully and outspokenly, with deep conviction but without prejudice, because, Mr. Speaker, no party can hope to have all the wisdom needed, or all the answers. The government will listen to members on this side and members opposite who may have different perspectives and priorities. It is this government's view that all hon. members, wherever they sit in this House, want to have a strong Canada and maintain our confederation.

*[English]*

**Mr. Olivier:** Say that to René Lévesque.

**Mr. Clark:** Someone asked me to tell that to René Lévesque. In my judgment, it is the duty of all members of the House of Commons to tell that to René Lévesque.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!