

urgent problems on our agenda, even if in the longer term the problem of keeping Canada together turns out to be the more important problem. But the most urgent item on the Canadian agenda now is economic growth. Achieving it will be one of the principal means, perhaps the principal means, of ensuring that Canadians will live together and grow together as a people.

I want to speak about one or two of the other aspects of the issue now called national unity. I begin by saying, just in case anyone believes the Prime Minister is becoming more flexible on federalism, that we have his appointment of the new Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations (Mr. Lalonde) to prove the opposite. In one move that minister has gone from a position in which 8,000 public servants were reporting to him, to one in which no one else in the government wants to talk to him.

After all, the government has a federal-provincial relations secretariat, a national unity secretariat, and Lord knows what other secretariats. But they all report to the Prime Minister who, as we know, has complete confidence in his Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations. The new minister was described by one government official as "a kind of vice-prime minister", which I am sure is interesting news to the new deputy prime minister who has not been seen in these parts since the designation of the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: He is ill.

Mr. Clark: I did not realize he is ill, and I apologize. I am not going to speculate on the source of his illness, but I will say that we know the deputy prime minister to be a man and a parliamentarian who is hardy enough to withstand even the designation of the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations as vice-prime minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The speech from the throne indicated that a number of proposals would be brought forward later this session. We will be interested in seeing these proposals. We will be interested in seeing the form in which they are brought forward, and in scrutinizing them with care. We hope that in preparing these proposals the Prime Minister and his colleagues will pay particular attention to the agreement that was reached at an historic conference in Kingston in early September, when I had the honour to meet with the four Progressive Conservative premiers of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I would have invited all five, Mr. Speaker, but we had to have the meeting before the latest burst in the fortunes of the NDP.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: I note a little skepticism on the part of the party opposite regarding the pulling together of provincial premiers.

The Address—Mr. Clark

I would advise the Prime Minister to do it quickly while there are still some left, and to call together his two premiers. Someone has pointed out to me that his most westerly premier is the premier of Prince Edward Island.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: More seriously, I think it would be very helpful for the Prime Minister to attach real priority to calling together, on a much more regular basis, the premiers of the various provinces in order to consult with them on a wide range of questions as to the means by which we might work out ways in which to unite the country.

● (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, on top of the irresolution and lack of leadership which characterize them, this government now intends to put before Parliament a number of measures aimed at reforming the constitution. My colleague, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) will delve deeper into that aspect of the speech, but I would nevertheless like to point out two particular items which seem important to me. First of all, it should be obvious to the government that no solution to the Canadian problem will be valid unless it is developed in close cooperation with the provinces. Unfortunately, once again conservative in its habits in this respect, the government seems prepared to act unilaterally, without the provinces' agreement or close cooperation. This government must not lose, for short term political gains, the support and co-operation of its provincial partners.

Finally, the government says that it proposes to clarify the role of the courts, particularly in the interpretation and administration of the Official Languages Act. Although I can understand the embarrassment of the government as a result of legal action taken by one of its own members, my party intends to oppose strongly any restriction in the jurisdiction of the courts concerning the administration and the interpretation of the laws of this House. If the government is not satisfied with this legislation, let it have the courage to present another one to amend it but it ought not, through deviated means, try to preclude its administration.

[*English*]

There is one other matter in the constitutional field with which I want to deal quickly. It relates to the legislation passed by the legislature of Quebec, namely, bill 101. I believe there is every reason for the government of Canada to take the action that only it can take, and to make a direct reference of that bill to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The most important reason for this is that the people affected in Quebec are entitled to know right now, not some years from now, what their constitutional rights are. Last month the government declared that bill 101 will—
adversely affect . . . the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians.