

*The Address—Mr. Clark*

our constant obligation here is to be the one place where the whole nation comes together, speaks frankly together and acts together.

In my view, this Parliament is not now as strong as it needs to be because too much power rests with the executive of Parliament and with the executives of political parties; too many limits are placed on the right of private members to know, to inquire, to propose and to be responsible for their own actions and for their own decisions. In particular, the historic right of Parliament to control the public purse was eroded by guillotine rules which meant that each year billions of dollars of public spending went unscrutinized and unchallenged. Parliamentary committees were denied the authority and the resources to have a positive influence on public policy. Members of this House of Commons, people sent here to represent their constituents and the interests of all of Canada, were denied information which should have been made public. As a result of that, great numbers of our fellow citizens have been turning away from Parliament and have ceased to regard this as the vital, national institution which it must be seen to be.

Parliament is the only institution we have which can rightly claim to represent this whole nation. This Parliament is in danger of losing its constituency, and one of the solemn obligations upon those of us who are fortunate enough to be members of the Thirty-first Parliament of Canada is that that is a trend which we must change and reverse. That will require change in some of our rules and some of our practices, but more has to change than just the rules of Parliament. There must be a change in the attitude toward the institution on the part of all members, not just those who are ministers of the Crown.

I am confident that that will occur because there are so many members here in all parties who came to this House of Commons—and I quote the words of the hon. member for Cardigan (Mr. MacDonald)—“to make Parliament work”.

The government will be introducing proposals for rule changes and has already indicated changes in attitude which, in effect, will provide a latitude to private members of the House of Commons which can be used, if members choose, to obstruct all progress here. That will be one capacity. That will be one consequence which could flow from the latitude we intend to give to private members of the House of Commons. Or it can be used to make the House of Commons the vital centre of discussion and decision in this land.

I hope that this Parliament might be characterized by very open inquiry. Naturally, on some questions some members have their minds made up already. So do some parties, and I am not looking particularly at the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent). However, on many of the most important questions we face there are no easy answers, yet there is an obligation to act and, indeed, in many cases an urgent obligation to act. As a government we cheerfully accept the responsibility to put forward answers when we think we have them.

[Mr. Clark.]

What is more important is that we cheerfully accept the responsibility to initiate unfettered inquiry where that might yield better answers than the ones we propose or the ones we have. I give the commitment now as we start this session in the House of Commons that this government will welcome amendments to legislation from whatever part of the House they come if their proposers can persuade us of their merits.

I hope that attitude of openness will extend throughout this Parliament and to most major questions, and that this will be a Parliament where decisions are based on evidence and not on ideology. The government itself is proposing action which questions certain long-held assumptions concerning, for example, the notion that Crown corporations, once established, must stay in the public domain forever, or the attempt to keep public information secret, or concerning the nature of relations between the central and the provincial governments. We do not expect that everyone will agree, but we hope it will not become the habit of any party in this House to resist reform just because it is new.

*[Translation]*

There is an obvious fact about the forthcoming decade: it is that a substantial part of the old formulas has become worthless. We must reconsider our procedure to develop policies in several areas and it rests with Parliament to undertake openly such a task. The drafting of the following reports is almost completed and they will be submitted to the standing committees well before Christmas: to wit, the report of the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Miss MacDonald) on foreign policy; the report of the Secretary of State (Mr. MacDonald) on cultural policy; the report of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Baker) on parliamentary reform; the report of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Crombie) on pensions and that of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. McGrath) on fisheries. A joint committee will be set up next week to consider the matter of atomic energy. Moreover, we want to complement the proceedings of standing committees by setting up select committees that will deal with specific matters. The first select committees were announced in the Speech from the Throne and I add today that we intend to suggest that the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) be appointed chairman of the select committee on the specific needs of the handicapped and disabled; the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman), chairman of the select committee on the voluntary sector; the hon. member for Mississauga North (Mr. Jupp), chairman of the select committee on foreign ownership, and the hon. member for Calgary South (Mr. Thomson), chairman of the select committee on measures necessary to prevent recurring cost overruns. We hope that those committees will be entirely set up and active next week and that they will submit their reports for the consideration of Parliament and government at the beginning of 1980.