

*The Address—Mr. Clark*

rate affairs, eight ministers of national revenue, eight ministers of national defence, and seven postmasters general.

**Mr. Trudeau:** How many leaders of the opposition?

**Mr. Clark:** We have had two leaders of the opposition, and after the next election we shall have a third.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

● (1532)

**Mr. Clark:** The problem with all of this changing that goes on in the shifting of ministerial responsibilities is that it takes years now for ministers to do things that should be done in months, because no one is ever in any job long enough to complete anything. That, sir, is a dangerous feature for Canada. Further to that, it makes a mockery of the fundamental principle of ministerial accountability when ministers are forever shifting to new assignments to escape answering for past actions. That is a remarkable commentary on this government's and this Prime Minister's capacity to manage.

While the government has often been wrong, and too often has been disastrously wrong in particular policies, I suggest that the failure to manage, the treatment of government as a game of musical chairs, has been one of the principal causes for this country losing that sense of unity and that sense of economic momentum which were the gift of this country to this Prime Minister when he first took office in the aftermath of Expo. The fact is that no prime minister came to office with a better opportunity to build Canada and to unite Canadians. Yet whatever was the hope in 1968, the reality today is that after ten years of this administration we are a deeply troubled, deeply divided country.

There is no excuse for this country, which was so united when this government came to office, to be so divided today. There is no excuse for that, but there are a number of reasons, sir, why we have become so divided. One reason—and it is important that these be on the public record—is that it has been the consistent style of the federal government to pick a fight rather than to build a partnership.

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

**Mr. Clark:** Many of us in this chamber remember the era of co-operative federalism. Well, sir, that era was replaced by a government which attacks the provinces, which belittles some premiers personally, which attacks business and labour, and which has come to be seen as a bully and as an adversary in almost every region and every sphere of Canadian life.

A second reason why Canadian unity has broken down under this government is that this government has almost as a matter of ideology concentrated power in Ottawa. It has moved in on urban affairs. It insists on control of cable. It uses the federal fiscal power to bully or blackmail the provinces. Its competition policy builds immense arbitrary power into the bureaucracy. As my colleague from High Park-Humber Valley (Mr. Jelinek) said today, small entrepreneurs are buried in paperwork. This concentration of power has come at

[Mr. Clark.]

a time when most of the world has recognized that many of the functions which this government wants to control for itself are far better exercised by provincial governments or local governments, or in so many cases by private, individual Canadians making their own decisions for themselves.

A third reason why this country is so much more divided now than it was when this government came to office is the reason on which I elaborated in the debate on national unity earlier this year; that is, that this government, whatever the merits of a policy of official bilingualism—as the House knows, I believe there are abundant merits and there is abundant common sense to recognizing the requirement, in a country like Canada, to be able to communicate with the government in both official languages—has made a serious mistake in focusing so narrowly on changes in language law as the means to unite the country.

As the election result in Quebec nearly a year ago demonstrated so clearly, a fourth reason why this country is less united now than it was is that the government has consistently ignored the need for economic growth and economic competence. In ignoring that need it has created unemployment, uncertainty and despair which are the seedbeds of division.

There is no excuse for this country, with all our immense potential, to be facing this kind of economic crisis. Once again, there is no excuse, but there are reasons, and I want to enumerate some of the reasons to the House. The most basic reason is that for the past decade the Canadian economy has been drifting, with no sense of direction. Ministers of finance have produced budgets, made tax changes, and then they have resigned. Not one of them has given us a coherent plan for economic development.

Another reason is this government's failure to spell out and abide by its rules for the Canadian economy. We have been without oil and gas regulations in this country for eight years, and for ten years we have been playing around with redrafts of competition policy. Investors, Mr. Speaker, cannot plan in that kind of uncertainty, so they take their money and go to other countries. The jobs that Canadian money generates are generated in other countries because of this legacy of uncertainty.

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

**Mr. Clark:** A third reason for our economic situation has been this government's utter irresponsibility in spending public funds. Throughout its nine years it has had one simple fiscal stance, and that stance has been to spend, regardless of circumstance, regardless of financial controls and regardless of the long-term cost to Canada. Now, sir, its financial accounts are in a shambles, its deficits grow by the week, and Canadian initiative and enterprise suffer under the sheer weight of government incompetence. We have in the throne speech yet another pious promise of restraint. I simply say to the Prime Minister that a deficit of \$9 billion this year, and \$12 billion next year, is not much restraint.

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