

lenge exists in the province of Quebec where a significant number of French-speaking Canadians believe their culture and community are not sufficiently protected in the present Canadian context. A minority among them is committed to an independent state. A great many others share a concern for the culture but are not persuaded to independence—at least not yet. We in the parliament of Canada, in the public life of Canada, must demonstrate that reforms in the Canadian federal system cannot only encourage that culture but protect it better than in a smaller, more insular, more exposed state.

● (1440)

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

**Mr. Clark:** For our part in this party, Mr. Speaker, we would be prepared as a government to proceed seriously with reforms which would encourage and protect the French culture in Canada through language law, a more flexible communication policy and other administrative jurisdictional changes that frank discussion demonstrates are necessary. But, sir, the second challenge for us all is to recognize that the strains on Canadian unity are not confined to culture; nor are they confined to Quebec. When people cannot find secure work in a rich country like Canada, they are more likely to ask if the system itself works. As I indicated in the House the other day, our failure as a country, and the failure of this government to generate economic growth, feeds two kinds of frustration both of which corrode confidence in the Canadian system. One is the frustration of the disadvantaged when unemployment is high and prospects are few. The other is the frustration of the entrepreneur, most evident in western Canada, where there is a sense that the Canadian system is stacked against that region's instinct to build and to grow.

I want to speak for a moment about western Canada and what is happening there. In geographic terms, while there is no significant cultural concern in western Canada similar to that developing in Quebec, there is a growing sense of grievance in the west which is particularly menacing because that region's sense of connection with this country has always been less secure than in the older parts of Canada. It is tempting to dismiss western anger as being selfish or unjustified, just as once it was tempting to dismiss the early Quebec separatists as eccentric. But it is, in fact, quite justified for the west and for Atlantic and northern Canada to note that national policy, from the construction of seaways through to most transportation and tariff policy, has encouraged growth to concentrate in Canada rather than to disperse in Canada. One of the facts of life in Canada, one of the positive facts, is that we must continually demonstrate the worth of this nation to its parts, and that challenge is alive again today in most parts of the country.

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

**Mr. Clark:** That, sir, is in the nature of a federal state and it is important for us to remember it as we consider some of the practical, political arrangements of our system. Politicians sometimes talk of constitutions and relations between govern-

#### *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements*

ments as though they had some kind of compelling magic of their own. Yet my colleague for Kingston and the Islands posed a good question in Toronto the other day when she asked, "What Canadian explains his feeling for his country in terms of the British North America Act?"

**An hon. Member:** John Diefenbaker.

**Mr. Clark:** The hon. member knows that when the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) expresses his feeling for his country, as he does so eloquently and so effectively, he does it on a much wider range of questions and with a much deeper sense of the country.

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

**Mr. Clark:** The fact is that the arrangements in this bill, important as they are, are not the essence of this country. They are not even the furniture of this country; they are just the plumbing. The plumbing is important; it lets the country work and keeps it comfortable. There are some statutes which express the aspirations and the standards of this country. There was reference to the right hon. member for Prince Albert. Clearly, one of the statutes which does that is the Bill of Rights which was introduced in his day. Some day, sir, aspects of our constitutional documents may attain that status.

It is important to keep some perspective on most of these arrangements. They are simply arrangements. It is not fundamentally important to Canada what level of government controls, for example, cable television in the country, so long as the system works. What has been going wrong in Canada recently, and what has been contributing to the sense of strain in the nation, is that the federal government, this government, has been so preoccupied with the plumbing that it appears to have forgotten the spirit which makes this system work. The challenge particularly for this government now—because it is in office and has been in office through a decade of rigidity—is to change its rigid approach to its relations with the other partners in confederation. It may be that that has begun. None of us knows quite what to make of the speech of absolute reversal of position made by the Prime Minister in Quebec City, outside this House, two or three weeks ago, but I think it is fair to say that we will need more than a speech and a unity secretariat to demonstrate that there has been a fundamental change in the approach of this government to its relations with its partners.

I think it important to trace the two fundamental mistakes which this government made when dealing with the provinces during its tenure of office. The first was, in effect, to ignore the reasons for the federal nature of the country, to ignore the fact that only a federal system can respond to our diversity as reflected in the consistent attempt to impose Ottawa programs uniformly even where they did not fit. The second was always to treat the provinces as adversaries. We had another instance of that today, as recently as the question period, when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald), I suppose doing the best he could with the brief he carried, was actually suggesting