

The Address—Mr. Clark

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Nor is it any surprise that the decisions which are taken by an isolated, appointed elite fail to address the real needs of the nation.

That analysis of what has gone wrong would be the basis of the changes we would have introduced if yesterday's throne speech had been ours to write. The purpose of our throne speech would have been to demonstrate trust in the other partners of the Canadian community. The priorities or places we would start would include institutional reform to return to control of policy by cabinet and by parliament. There would have been economic stimulus by restraining the public sector and encouraging the initiative of private citizens, whether they want to start a small business, expand a large one, or want to buy a home in Canada.

There would be constitutional change by sitting down with the provinces to find areas in respect of which we could all agree on immediate changes in the status quo that this Prime Minister has established. Naturally in that process we would begin with the agreement I reached with Progressive Conservative premiers at the Kingston conference a year ago. There were four Progressive Conservative governments then. There are six today, and there will probably be seven before the month is out.

● (1532)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: We would also use the time of this parliament to continue the process of consultation with labour, business, the provinces, and the other partners in the Canadian economy, the process of getting agreement to the economic development strategy which this rich nation has to have to guide it toward the development it can achieve in the 1980s. We in this party began that process this summer in a conference at Montebello, Quebec, under the excellent direction of Bob de Cotret, whose decision to seek election to parliament indicates that this institution can still attract some of the most able Canadians in the land.

[Translation]

Let me deal precisely with the changes we would put forward beginning with the constitution. Our constitutional challenge is twofold: first, we must put an end to the deadlock in which Ottawa is opposed to all the provinces on the matter of the sharing of powers. This Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has had ten years to design the constitution he wants. He has changed the constitution and he did so in reserving more and more powers for Ottawa.

That is how he sees it. He is a centralist who cannot even trust the provinces when they use their traditional and legitimate powers. My party and myself see Canada from a totally different point of view. We believe Canada is based upon respect for the provinces and upon recognition of the fact that the nation's welfare depends on a feeling of close co-operation

[Mr. Clark.]

between a strong government in Ottawa and strong governments in the provinces.

What is needed from the outset is to restore respect for this kind of partnership. This is no time for theorizing. It is high time to come to practical agreements in order to find solutions to problems of a practical nature. I am the national leader of a party which is in power in six of the ten provinces and I have already started using this common denominator to come to practical agreements with the provincial governments on actual issues. During the meeting which was held in Saskatchewan in August last, all provinces unanimously rejected the constitutional proposals of the Trudeau government. In September last year, in Kingston, the premiers of Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Alberta agreed with me on certain specific changes in the constitution. The Manitoba premier signed that agreement later on, while the new premier of Nova Scotia approved it in principle and will soon be discussing it with his cabinet.

I spoke of the contents of that agreement with each one of the premiers, including that of Quebec, and I am convinced that a new national government would be able to reach an agreement with all the provinces on the majority of those reforms. Among them, Mr. Speaker, there is the enshrining in the constitution of the forbidding that federal spending powers be used to interfere in fields of provincial jurisdiction without the consent of the provinces concerned. That provision would have spared us the sale tax fiasco in Quebec. Those reforms also include a constitutional guarantee with regard to the equalization principle that is essential to the maintenance of national levels in a country like Canada. They recognize officially the role of the provinces in matters concerning cultural policies; they recognize that off-shore and underground resources are a provincial jurisdiction. They provide for the participation of the two levels of government in the composition of federal bodies. Those then are the subjects on which an agreement was reached by the provinces and myself. I am sure that we will follow through on this agreement in less than six months after we are elected. Naturally, the process of constitutional changes will not be limited to that; it will be no more than a beginning in the right direction, thanks to concrete agreements on concrete problems, and the cause of federalism will be better off because we will have proved that a new federal government is not committed to maintaining the *status quo* of the last ten years.

[English]

That is the necessary first step, sir, to constitutional reform, to prove that governments can agree on specific, concrete reform. That would change the atmosphere of the last ten years where Ottawa and the provinces seem to meet only to fight. Of course there are going to be disagreements among governments. There will be times when I am going to have to assert national interests in ways that will not at all please the provinces.