

*The Address—Mr. La Salle*

If you will allow me, Mr. Speaker, I shall take this opportunity to express my personal satisfaction at the fact that the Speech from the Throne refers to certain measures aimed at stimulating the Canadian economy.

In my capacity of a member of the cabinet, I insisted as early as the Jasper meeting that some emphasis be placed on economic revival, and I am pleased to see that my message was understood. The reinforcement of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, the original program, it must be recognized, of tax credits for mortgage interests and property taxes, the development of a national tourist industry development strategy in cooperation with provinces, assistance for small and medium businesses, Mr. Speaker, these are all clear indications of the will of our government to take direct action to put the Canadian economy back on its feet. And I would not want to forget to mention the intention of the government to establish a national assistance program for the handicapped.

Our decision to hold a national conference on economic development with all our partners, that is business, unions, co-operatives and other groups in all the provinces, shows that we intend to consult those involved before deciding on any course of action. This conference, which is a sort of summit meeting of all economic development officers in Canada, reflects the new spirit of co-operation that the right hon. Prime Minister wants to instill in our country.

In this regard, I would like to underline, like the right hon. Prime Minister, that it is no longer a few members of the elite who decide on the direction to give the policies of Canada, but members of parliament elected democratically and representing all the provinces. This is a good illustration, Mr. Speaker, of true federalism which goes from the bottom up instead of what we have suffered for too long, a federalism shaped like an inverted pyramid which suffocates any private initiative. I am also happy to note the open mind with which we intend to conduct federal-provincial relations. This will be our trademark, Mr. Speaker, and not only until the Quebec referendum, but also afterwards.

Personally I have always spoken openly in favour of a renewed and decentralized form of federalism. It is not without regret that I have witnessed for the past ten years this battle waged by the commandos of the former minister in charge of federal-provincial relations and which has only resulted in hardening the positions taken by the provinces, Quebec in particular, toward the federal government. I therefore rejoice at the announcement made by the Prime Minister with regard to this matter wherein he urged all members of the House to adopt a more open minded stance, more directly geared to economic realities and our differences which should be better understood in order to better unite us. This spirit of co-operation pleases me and I for one certainly intend to put it into practice openly, Mr. Speaker. I would like to add right now that in my case this is not a sudden conversion to a new

style because it has been a point of view that I have held ever since I started representing my riding in this House.

However, I understand that the attitude suggested to us by the Prime Minister will not be easy for everyone. Nevertheless I think that the time has come to bury the hatchet. From now on, we shall see the start of a new era. It is the end of fruitless battles, the disappearance of scarecrows that were used to frighten everyone. It is also the end of propaganda. Everything has been said and it is now time for action.

Since May 22, the date of the election of our party, an easing of minds has replaced the stress maintained for too long and deliberately created by our opponents. In the last four months we have tried to emphasize the aspects which draw us closer to the provinces, particularly Quebec, rather than underlining points of divergence. I really believe that we shall have to develop the approach which consists of listening to the desires of other people.

Mr. Speaker, we have witnessed for too long a dialogue of the deaf between the federal government and my province in particular. I think we are going towards more openness. We live in a tremendously rich country with considerable wealth. It will be to our advantage to share all we have at a time when the economic situation invites us to think of our fellow citizens.

The government of which I have the privilege to be a member refused to choose national unity as its platform in the last election and I am happy it did. In fact, on this side of the House, we believe that there are many other priorities requiring immediate intervention and if the re-establishment of an economic climate is achieved, we should not neglect the importance of constitutional changes that would be much easier in a climate more favourable to discussions and negotiations with the provinces.

I have always considered that it would not be very advantageous to create a confrontation with partners which form the Canadian nation. But I still believe we have everything to gain by finding together, in a spontaneous research effort, better ways of living where all Canadians, French and English alike, will live in unison.

Mr. Speaker, our opponents too often demonstrated that a common ground will not be found by accusing others, especially not our Quebec partners. More flexibility, some open-mindedness, less arrogance and intolerance seem to be called for if we are to start on the road to reconciliation, especially on the eve of the forthcoming Quebec referendum to be held next spring.

I noticed that some hon. members opposite were outraged last week—they may still be today—that we put aside what I would call an instrument of confrontation and aggression, the referendum bill, which I fought vigorously last spring. Our party, our government also realized this was not the way to treat people in Quebec. We believe in the maturity of Quebecers. We are confident that, with proposals and above all