

regulations and red tape, tying up small businesses and large. That is why the Prime Minister started the new year of 1976 by publicly casting doubt on the enterprise system, and why the government's approach to controls, its approach to the northern land regulations, and its approach to the advice of the private sector have been marked by a suspicion of the entrepreneur and a determination to centralize economic decisions with government planners.

This government's pattern of centralizing control goes well beyond the economy. This government has raided the provinces, moving Ottawa into fields where local governments make better decisions. The government set up a new Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. It used DREE to impose Ottawa's plans on less wealthy provinces. Until very recently the government tried to exclude provinces absolutely from jurisdiction over communications, in spite of the primary impact of that field upon education and upon community life.

This government used the spending power of the federal government to invade provincial jurisdiction over resources, over lotteries and, most recently, in the case concerning sales tax. The government tried to change unilaterally fundamental national institutions like the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the monarchy, institutions which do not belong to one level of government alone in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The premiers of the four western provinces presented a long, long list of different instances of federal interference in provincial jurisdiction because this government does not trust the provinces to do what the constitution empowers the provinces to do.

Less evident, but just as dangerous, has been the steady draining of influence away from voluntary groups in Canada and the concentration in Ottawa of power over things that used to be done by Canadian volunteers. For example, local service clubs across this country used to play a very major role in helping develop low-income housing projects. Now the government has stopped funding them and has forced many of those volunteer agencies out.

Again, the funding practices of Sports Canada reduced the autonomy of volunteer sporting groups. The Opportunities for Youth program had a condition which discouraged support of programs that were approved by local governments. The Department of the Secretary of State set up its own hostelling program to compete with the Canadian Youth Hostel Association. The list goes on, sir, and the pattern is clear.

This government does not trust ordinary Canadians and so has developed government programs to push volunteers aside. As we, sadly, in this institution know, that distrust extends particularly to parliament. The government denies parliament basic information such as the figures on which it bases economic policy. It refuses to answer questions about the role of ministers in security matters or about the mysterious commissions paid by AECL, or government participation in uranium cartels which break the laws of Canada, or the facts of Skyshops or phone calls to judges.

The Address—Mr. Clark

Indeed, one of its first acts in office was to strip away from parliament the effective power to control spending. The Prime Minister has said, of course, that once they get off this Hill members of parliament are mere nobodies. The pattern of this government's decade in office has been to reduce the ability of this parliament to hold the government accountable.

What is as dangerous to our system of government is that this Prime Minister appears to distrust cabinet as much as he distrusts parliament. The very essence of our system of government is that policy decisions are taken by those elected members who sit in cabinet. That does not happen any more in Canada. The real decisions are taken by an isolated, appointed elite in the Privy Council office and in the Prime Minister's office.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I suppose, sir, the most dramatic proof of that change came this summer when the Prime Minister went on television to announce a so-called new economic policy, and he went on apparently without consulting his economic ministers. He called them in after he made the announcement, or he called some of them in. He sent the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce to Japan.

An hon. Member: A good safe place for him.

Mr. Clark: I now ask nothing more, Mr. Speaker, than whether a real minister such as C. D. Howe would have put up for a moment with that kind of behaviour?

One columnist, and I know the Prime Minister's abiding respect for the press, reports that even the Deputy Minister of Finance knew nothing of the new economic program until he heard the television address.

There has been abundant other evidence of the displacement of the cabinet as a place to decide. That, after all, was why Paul Hellyer left, and that is why John Turner resisted the establishment of a little nest of the Prime Minister's private economists to second guess the Department of Finance. That, indeed, is why the government is so lacking in sensitivity to regional issues or to the real life concerns that can come only from ministers who have to deal with political realities and not just with theories.

One reason this cabinet has so little talent is that it has so little power, so the strong ministers leave, and by leaving they reduce the ability of ministers to resist the dictation of the Prime Minister's little elite.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Power has passed in Canada from the cabinet and from, indeed, the regular public service to a little elite appointed by and loyal to the Prime Minister, an elite whose chief officer, Mr. Pitfield, refuses to appear before parliamentary committees. That is the final and perhaps most dangerous symbol that this government does not trust the people it is elected to serve. It is no surprise then that the people do not trust the government.