

The Address—Miss Bégin

This being said, Mr. Speaker, I shall never be able to "talk a blue streak" like my predecessor just did. I shall speak French, and I have not quite understood whether this means automatically that I shall be speaking poetically.

Within the past 18 months, Mr. Speaker, I have gone through two election campaigns. These will have actually cost the Canadian taxpayers some \$70 million. The day to day administration of this House during that time will have cost them another \$40 million, and I will have experienced not the pleasure but the regret to see some 35 major bills automatically shelved simply because the government was defeated. To sum it up, \$110 million in less than two years and, it must also be pointed out, a remarkable number of pieces of legislation passed by a minority government. That is where lie the strength and the weakness of our form of government.

In my opinion, the paradox of democracy, and in the first days of this third week of sitting of this Parliament, my off-hand reaction is to ask myself how are we going to fulfill the mandate given to us by our voters. Every member is concerned about that. So I prepared notes right on the first day of the session on the urgency of a parliamentary reform. I have since listened with great interest to the speech made by the Prime Minister who chose to give particular emphasis to that problem. I also heard the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) and noted specially what he said about the question period in this House, the broadcasting of the debates of this House and committee work.

Incidentally, I want to stress the great interest I found in the question debated last Thursday night by the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) and the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Reid). I support my colleague from the opposition on the basic principle of freedom of information for members of Parliament as defined by him—the onus of proving confidentiality lying upon the government, which I think is the opposite of current practices. No need to add that I agree with him that nothing is more fundamental than to allow the public to follow the committee proceedings on procedure and organization and on the internal economy of the House. I will add further, at the risk of shocking the experts, that our senior civil servants and other civil servants should attend those discussions so as to better understand the role of members of Parliament and how we need their help and they need ours. I am sure they would be delighted to do so.

I cannot understand, and I beg your pardon, that the opposition and a number of mass media—except a Toronto morning paper that I shall not name—have managed to run down the Prime Minister's speech and to accuse him of lack of substance, of glossing over the real problems of today. Naturally, I would not say that the speech my hon. colleague from across the way has just made strikes me as a model in this regard.

I know full well why I was elected MP by the thousands of electors of the Montreal riding I represent. I know full well what they expect of me and what problems we must solve. But I want the Canadians to know how obsolete and even hypocritical is our way of solving those problems.

The Canadian people have elected us to discuss the price of eggs, to protect them against inflation. That is not hard

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to know. Of course, they want money to keep on circulating, and above else, they want to know they will not lose their jobs. They fail to understand why we do not control the companies that make excessive profits and exploit the consumers. At the same time, they are shocked, which may seem paradoxical but does them credit, by our slowness, our hesitations in helping the starving people of Sahel or Bangladesh, those who lose everything in a hurricane such as in Honduras, or those who lose their freedom such as in Chile, Angola, Rhodesia and South Africa.

What can I answer, Mr. Speaker, when women's groups ask me why the life expectancy of Indian women is 10 years less than theirs or that the life expectancy of Eskimo women is 20 years less than mine for example?

And what can be said, Mr. Speaker, to those who are caught in the infernal trap of usurious credit and who are not protected nor helped by any legislation to get out from under?

And what can an honest member do when he hears the report of the Montreal Diet Dispensary and is aware of the scandalous nutritional deficiencies among pregnant women and generally among poor families in the richest country of the world?

As a full-time member, I can only be particularly ill at ease with the procedure set by the Canadian parliamentary system which prevents me—and I intentionally dwell on that word—which prevents me from performing productive and responsible work. The clumsiness and the legalism—I apologize to my colleagues who have legal training—the clumsiness and legalism of our procedures are, I feel, unacceptable to any parliamentarian conscious of his responsibilities.

In a sense, I say without hesitation and very simply that the exterior forms and the usual practices prevent us from doing the real job, that is resolve the problems I mentioned a few minutes ago, for which 264 Members of Parliament have been elected, they have been delegated to serve the interests of twenty-two and a half million Canadians.

Every member has had the experience of having visitors in the galleries. Often, whole classes of children and teenagers come to discover their Parliament. What is their reaction? Here are some comments we hear: Miss, one would think that ministers are doing their best not to answer questions asked by members. Why do members ask such stupid questions? That was reported in this morning's paper. Why do all members leave the Chamber at three o'clock in the afternoon? How is it that members are reading or writing under the nose of the speaker in the House? It might appear candid to say such things here, but if they reflect the spontaneous reaction of the majority of visitors, they are scandalous for the House.

People who observe from these galleries, maybe once in their lifetime, as they walk through the town, the symbol of their government and our democracy, do not understand what happened and are confounded at the loss of time in our debates. Very often, they see us as children playing in a kindergarten.

I feel this view is absolutely right. I also find that we ourselves get lost in the intricacies of our own game. Clear demonstration of this happened during last Parliament