

Supply

Ms. Jewett: What a dreamer!

Mrs. Landry: We will see. Mr. Speaker, I think that we should trust the present Government which has taken a position. As I said, if we realize in the years to come that our plan was not firm enough, it will always be possible to take further decisions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The period for questions and comments has expired. Debate. The Hon. Member for Saint-Michel-Ahuntsic (Mrs. Killens).

● (1210)

Mrs. Thérèse Killens (Saint-Michel-Ahuntsic): Mr. Speaker, the subject before the House today is very aptly chosen, since it gives us an opportunity to ask the Government to consider the needs of women in its Budget next Thursday, especially after the meeting that parliamentarians from all three political parties had this morning with the National Action Committee.

This group, with its membership of three million women, represents 350 women's groups across the country. Varied though its membership may be, the group is unanimous in its recommendations. As is customary, we had a chance to meet them this morning, and I am very pleased to be able to take part in this debate because I want to draw the attention of the Government to the pressing problems of women in 1985.

First, however, I shall go back, if I may, to 1940, when I was still at school and unaware of the fact that my mother, like all Quebec women, did not have the right to vote. Still in 1940, the first woman to study law in Quebec had to pass her bar examination in New Brunswick, because Quebec would not let her do so, and not until 1971 did women in Quebec have the right to sit on a jury.

Mr. Speaker, this means we have had a lot of catching up to do, and before speaking to the matter before the House today, I would like to emphasize the major contribution made by the late Senator, the Hon. Thérèse Casgrain, and pay tribute to the tremendous zeal with which she motivated the women of Quebec to follow in her footsteps. She was one of the pioneers of the women's rights movement in Canada. Throughout her life she stood up for the disadvantaged in society, denouncing social injustice and speaking up for those who were not able to make themselves heard. A native Montrealer, Mrs. Casgrain was the driving force behind a number of social reforms in Canada aimed at promoting justice and equality. She was active in various provincial, national and international organizations.

Mr. Speaker, although like many of my colleagues in this House, I would have preferred to live in a world where the old basic values gave a certain stability to the family unit, as a Member of Parliament I tend to encounter some of the real problems in our society, a society that is daily faced with problems that affect women especially. Three out of five

marriages end in divorce. Fifty-two per cent of women in Canada are on the labour market. Most of them are obliged to work, either because they are sole breadwinner or because their salary is needed to bring the family income above the poverty level.

The number one problem in this country is unemployment, everyone will agree to that. However, although last Friday the Prime Minister was proclaiming loudly that he had brought down the rate of unemployment in this country, the fact remains that according to last Saturday's *Gazette*, 17 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed. Seventeen per cent! A parallel can be drawn between women and young people. However, we cannot take the same approach to dealing with women's unemployment, because women must overcome a number of obstacles that do not exist for men.

The Government therefore has a duty to legislate in accordance with today's reality and needs. For women, it is quite clear there is only one solution: financial autonomy. This means they must have the tool to achieve that autonomy. It is like building a house. We must have tools. Women are very ingenious, and once they have the resources they will manage. To deal with the problem as quickly as possible, the Government should make this a priority. It should have the political will to do so. The Prime Minister, and this is urgent, should take another look at his election promises, and the men and women on the backbenches should be more outspoken in their caucuses than they are now in the House.

This list of problems and obstacles is unending. First of all, supplementary grants for training and upgrading programs are available only to women who have been on unemployment insurance or welfare. Thousands of women in Canada who want or have to work are being denied access to these supplementary grants because they do not meet these two criteria.

Second, the lack of services in daycare centers. If they are to take courses or enter the labour market, women must have the assurance that their children are safe and secure. Incidentally, I might point out that daycare is not a problem exclusive to women; these days, lots of men are responsible for their children, so it has to be considered as a problem for society as a whole.

Third, problems related to part time work, particularly with respect to fringe benefits and pensions. Pensions are a problem primarily for women. Even those who earn an income cannot be sure their retirement benefits will be sufficient. Their wages are low to begin with and, for various reasons, employers do not offer them private pension plans.

The Task Force on Pension Reform made several good recommendations. Some of them were implemented by the previous Government, but everything has been at a standstill since September 4.