

*The Address—Mrs. Erola*

Members opposite, implied or otherwise, on a job well done by this Government.

Speaking of congratulations—

[*Translation*]

—I want to offer my sincere congratulations to our new Governor General and welcome her on behalf of the constituents of the riding of Nickel Belt.

[*English*]

Our new Governor General served this House with grace, equanimity and patience during an uncommonly raucous and bitter three and a half years. Her appointment has met with unanimous approval, which speaks volumes about the respect in which Madam Sauvé is held across the country, and in particular in my riding.

I am comforted, if not altogether satisfied, that we have made remarkable progress in the past decade, particularly in the last four years, in the quest for justice for Canadian women. That is all we want, justice. It is at the same time difficult to believe but easy to understand that just over 50 years ago Canadian women were not even viewed as persons in the eyes of the law. I do not have to remind Hon. Members that it took five women, some of my brave Liberal predecessors, backed I must say by a Liberal Government, to challenge this absurdity and win for Canadian women the right to sit in the other place with the same authority as a man. These women paved the way for other women to gain greater access to the circles of power. We have had many, many women Senators since who have served with distinction. I must say with considerable pride that I welcome Senators Anne Cools and Lorna Marsden to the other place. I know that their extremely high degree of commitment to the advancement of women will be an energizing influence on our Chamber of sober second thought.

I must, say, too, that the increasing presence of women is gradually breaking up the tiresome serge and pinstripe uniformity which has characterized our political institutions. I am afraid it happens on both sides. It is important that this process be accelerated. It is here, within these walls and within the walls of the provincial legislatures, where decisions are taken, changes made and new ideas are put into action. We need women in the fora of political debate to make their voices heard and steadily wear down those reactionary attitudes which restrain female human beings from enjoying real equality in this, the twentieth century.

The outrageously low rate of female involvement in our political institutions is an almost direct result of the fundamental obstacle to sexual equality, the lack of economic security and equality in Canadian society. It really is a chicken and egg situation. There are not enough women in politics because not enough women have the independence afforded by economic equality; or women do not enjoy economic equality because the political system does not contain enough women to influence the decisions which can improve economic equality.

“What do women want?” It seems to be the question across the land time and time again. It seems to be the eternal

question. “You have constitutional equality now, what else can we do for you?” We may have equality in the fine calligraphy on the rich manila of the Constitution and we may have equality in the right to vote, but out there in the real world, in the factories, in offices, in homes, in unemployment lines, equality is a long way from lending truth to the constitutional guarantees which, I remind this House every time I have an opportunity, were nearly passed over, had it not been for the unleashed wrath and energy of incensed Canadian women.

We do not have equality when women workers earn on average half of what men do. That applies not just to the trades where one would expect it, but in the professions; lawyers, teachers, administrators. In general, in all jobs, including those requiring at least a university degree, women are substantially underpaid in relation to men.

Why is that? Are women less competent? The reverse is probably true. Are they not worth the same pay as men? Nonsense. The explanation I would venture lies in the continued unwillingness of provincial governments to enact effective equal pay legislation.

The federal Government has only 10 per cent of the Canadian work force under the umbrella of its labour legislation. We have, of course, put in place an equal pay law. It remains the duty of the provincial legislatures to take those steps to correct this grossly unfair situation in the other 90 per cent of the work force. With but a sprinkling of women in the provincial capitals across Canada, one would be well advised not to hold one's breath waiting for male politicians to see this as an important priority.

The other source of economic second-class citizenship status rests with the reality of the majority of women in Canada being entrapped in what we call job ghettos. In fact, over 60 per cent of women work at jobs in the clerical sector as opposed to 26 per cent for men. Women form 72 per cent of all part-time workers who do not enjoy the same pay scales, job benefits or security of full-time positions. This is a matter of great concern to the Government and one which has been addressed in a recent comprehensive study. High technology, the impact of the microchip and the revolution of information processing has further exacerbated the problems of women in the work force. There are conflicting views on the subject. One holds that the advent of high-tech bodes ominously for women presently employed who may face replacement by machines.

The other argument is that high-tech may create enormous new opportunities for both women and men if our training and retraining methods keep pace with emerging requirements. This, too, is a development that we at the federal level are doing something about by providing massive funding for skills training programs. We also established a task force on microtechnology through Labour Canada.

Employment problems and opportunities are the number one concern of women and this Government, but there are many others. Pension reform, for example, while directly related to the situation of women in the workplace, must and will be pursued to remove the indictment to poverty facing so many elderly Canadian women who have little or no means of