

*The Address—Mr. Gérin*

This very large riding—130 miles long by 50 miles wide—borders on six other federal ridings. To give Hon. Members an idea where my riding is located, to the west and north it borders on the ridings of Brome-Missisquoi, Shefford, Sherbrooke, Richmond-Wolfe, Frontenac and Beauce, while to the south and east, it borders on three U.S. states, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. Obviously, a riding of this size can be a problem, especially where travelling is concerned. It takes me longer to travel across to the other end of my riding than to go to Montreal, which is already a fair distance. It is easier for me to go skiing in the Laurentians than to go to Woburn. My predecessor weathered these problems as well as he could, and he also gave me a few tips for dealing with them after I was elected. I now realize that the entire country has the same problems. In Canada, these are problems we have to live with. It is so often a matter of distance, whether we are thinking in the geographic sense, and that of course is clear to everyone, or about economic and political “distances”.

● (1620)

For instance, when the previous Government had a majority in the House, but hardly any Members from the West, it could not govern the country in a way that would be accepted by all Canadians. Only a truly national Government, a Government representing all parts of Canada, can govern this country. It is the only way to overcome the political distances that separate Canadians and tell Canadians: All parties in Canada are represented . . . The only way to avoid friction, to avoid the problems we have had for years, the only way to prevent the West from saying: I am not represented. Or Quebec from saying: We were not there when the decisions were being made. The distance problem is also present in the economic sphere. We have cities like Toronto and Montreal that are economically far stronger than the towns in my riding. We must constantly try to overcome these distances and do so in any way we can. We have to live with it, but we also have to overcome it, in the same way we live with and overcome the rigours of winter. If we refuse to overcome these distances, we might as well all go south and live where the sun shines all year. This is important. Within each government program, there should be room for the most sparsely populated areas or those furthest from the urban centres, such as my riding, across the border from Maine. These areas should be considered a part of Canada on the same basis as other areas and be given the same opportunities enjoyed by Canadians in Montreal or Toronto. However, I am confident that the Progressive Conservative Government will give us programs that will overcome these differences, that will help small municipalities like Lac-Mégantic or Woburn or Lac-Drolet to overcome the problems facing them every day. Industries located 100, 150 or 200 miles from Montreal, far from the markets, are going to find it harder to provide jobs for local people. If we do not make an effort to provide those jobs, to give them that extra opportunity, those people are going to

react like some Quebecers and some people in Western Canada have reacted, to express their disappointment and frustration. Today, however, the same people are encouraged by the fact that a Progressive Conservative Government is in power, and by the new programs the Government wants to introduce. These people have confidence once again, and I believe they have reason to be confident.

My riding, which has a population of a little over 80,000 is 15 per cent English-speaking, reflecting a duality that has always existed in Canada. In the Eastern Townships, the two communities have always lived in harmony. The riding has always had a number of English-speaking citizens, like my birthplace, Coaticook, where at one time, there were as many Anglophones as Francophones. We live quite happily together, sharing each other's culture and enjoying the best of both worlds.

Because of the riding's excellent geographical location, we have made representations to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) asking him to restore the VIA Rail link, not in order to give one specific community its own rail service but to restore the Halifax-Montreal route, the Atlantic route, which would be a tremendous importance to the development of our area, the Beauce, Mégantic, Frontenac and Sherbrooke. We also made representations aimed at upgrading the Sherbrooke airport, not to make it possible for the Member for Mégantic-Compton-Stanstead to fly instead of driving his car to be in attendance in the House, but to spur real regional development.

We certainly hope that the government will react positively, if only because those measures were promised during the election campaign. We are quite confident that they will be translated into specific projects in the coming months. That would help the region fight against an unemployment rate of 14.4 per cent and go a long way toward convincing those Canadian citizens that they are not as far removed from the decision centres as geographical distances might at first lead them to believe. I think that the people of Mégantic-Compton-Stanstead did get the message we gave them during the election campaign, a message of hope and a message of renewal.

Last Saturday, two days ago, I attended a meeting of a group of people from my riding and I explained to them the economic problems with which the government has to cope.

I am referring to the rather difficult problems left behind by the previous government. Those problems would surely have created more unemployment and might even have led the country to bankruptcy.

Last week, I listened to the remarks made by the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) about the Speech from the Throne, when he said that he had nothing against it and that, much to his surprise, he agreed with it. I commend him for saying that because it does him credit. He has been a Member of this House for