

for the creation of additional jobs. It is for these reasons that, to my mind, the thrust of the Speech from the Throne is not reassuring; it looks like another Liberal interventionist government in power at a time when the economy is crying out for less government, less by way of controls and lower taxes, all of them desirable concepts which appear impossible under present conditions.

[Translation]

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the throne speech debate. However, I would have liked to discuss and emphasize the exceptional legislative program put forward by our government, a program designed to improve the situation of the Canadian people, to take a positive approach to various economic problems and to enable us obviously to assume our responsibilities under the serious and difficult conditions both at the national and the international levels referred to in the Speech from the Throne. However, in our present situation, there is a priority, the preservation of a united and indivisible Canada which I believe is, for all Canadians, and especially for Quebecers a matter of national survival, because the possibility of a disastrous fragmentation of the finest and most prosperous country in the world is a real threat.

Therefore allow me to speak on behalf of the great majority of Quebecers who sent 74 members from Quebec to represent them in the Parliament of Canada and who have given us the mandate to protect the interests of Quebec and Canada in this House and in our ridings. We have already begun and intend to continue, to put our energies, our capabilities and our heart at their service in order to defend this country and Quebec against those who are trying in a vicious and intellectually dishonest way to brainwash, as never before, the people of Quebec. They do so with a view to taking power under the camouflage of a narrow and biased nationalism by promoting a sense of pride in Quebec which, they claim, only separatists possess. I can assure you that even if Péquistes have the monopoly on ambiguity and confusion, they certainly do not have one when it comes to the pride of being true Quebecers. They may have temporarily appropriated the flag of Quebec and the fleur-de-lis and are using them as political instruments, but they are not going to take away from us, the members of this House who come from Quebec, our pride of being Quebecers.

● (1240)

Mr. Speaker, as a veteran let me now point out a fact which irritates me very much, even though I am trying to stay calm. According to communications I received from all quarters, it also irritates thousands of women and men who have served and who still serve their country in the armed forces. I think of thousands of veterans, of their families, of our dead, of former prisoners of war and of so many other unknown victims.

In a Radio-Québec interview, Premier Lévesque compared the Canadian army to a comic opera with more chiefs than

The Address—Mr. Lamontagne

Indians. He stated that the Canadian army included 1,600 generals, adding that this was costly for the taxpayers. First, let me tell you, Madam Speaker, that we are getting used to these unfounded allegations, because there are not 1,600, but exactly 107 generals in the Canadian armed forces. He went on, and I quote: "A sovereign Quebec would have its army which would play a more effective role within NATO than does now the Canadian army". In my mind, this is an unjustifiable insult from one of our fellow citizens, an insult that we would have never thought possible. To this, General Richard, commander of the Valcartier base, gave a very adequate answer: "The army to which you belong has earned and deserved the respect of the international community in all the tasks that have been entrusted to it—" He then explained the various roles assumed by the Canadian army both at the international and national levels.

Does Mr. Lévesque realize that this insult is directed to thousands of Quebecers, men and women? I hope they will express their disagreement during the referendum campaign and on their ballot. I consider this statement as an act of extreme cowardice, when it is well known that members of the Canadian forces are not allowed to appear on the political scene in order to protect their reputation and even that of thousands of others who are no longer here to do so. This is why I speak in their name and it is my duty to set the record straight.

The armed forces that some are trying to denigrate must necessarily be composed of professionals to fulfil the multiple roles assigned to them. In order to defend North America, we need interceptors whose crews are constantly on the alert, always ready to detect, to intercept, to identify and if need be to destroy enemy aircraft which would violate our air space. In order to fulfil its commitments towards NATO Canada must have outstanding airmen, very competent seamen, perfectly trained soldiers who will implement our measures of collective defence. We need impartial and professional servicemen with whom to entrust the peacekeeping operations designed to prevent the outbreak of war in tension zones.

Those servicemen are necessary to the national well-being. They are ever ready to intervene to assist Canadians when all hell breaks loose, when forest fires are raging, when floods threaten our property or even our lives. Those servicemen are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to come to the rescue of victims of maritime tragedies or plane crashes.

In order to defend the territorial integrity of an independent Quebec, Mr. Lévesque thinks of, and I quote:

—a small army, modest in size but efficient.

But he forgets about air defence or the absolute necessity of ensuring air support to a field army. Nor does he say anything about the naval forces that are essential to the security of a maritime state. He seems to think that a minimum contribution to the Atlantic Alliance would be sufficient to solve all these problems and that it will not cost him anything. Indeed,