

*The Address—Miss Bégin*

to her was a young student in accounting at Laval University who had just won the Athlete of the Year medal.

At the Montreal Forum where 15,000 women met on April 7, I recognized a woman of 68 years of age who came with friends in a school bus from a community 55 miles from Montreal. I know of a woman doctor, a cafeteria employee and so-called housewives who were in the audience. None of these women belong to the Liberal party. I think it is important to say that they were ordinary Quebec people who knew what they wanted but do not necessarily work through a political party. They suddenly had a way to express their No to separation with pride and enthusiasm.

What they achieved is of great importance. For instance, they untangled a very dirty trick of the Péquiste government by breaking the isolation in which they had confined the ethnic votes and the votes of Anglo-Quebeckers.

*[Translation]*

In speaking out in favour of a No vote, without self-consciousness, without hesitation, the "Yvettes" have already played a significant role in the referendum debate. For instance, do they realize they have burst open the psychological ghetto in which our ethnic and Anglophone groups were trapped when the PQ government attempted to make them feel guilty about the future No to the referendum? Now, the Quebec-Italians, the Anglophones of Montreal, the Canadian-Haitians know that they do not have to say yes to prove their fellowship with French Canadians because thousands of women whose roots have long since been in Quebec have opposed separation; now, those groups know they do not stand alone, that they can vote No without being bad Quebeckers, false Quebeckers, bad pennies, and express their views about the future of our country. In other words, the "Yvettes" should know, must know, that what they gave back to thousands of ordinary people, of every day people, is their pride, and their loyalty, the right to be true to themselves. Today, on the occasion of the throne speech debate which follows the election of February 18 last, I should like to tell other ordinary Canadians that the government of this country has served them well and will continue to do so.

Today, I should like to find the word to convince those Quebeckers who hesitate, and are unsure about the answer to be given in the referendum, those who have been manipulated, who are sensitive to the PQ propaganda for separation that, overlooking the power struggle of their politicians, the truth, pure and simple, is that federalism has served them well. I would even go farther: nothing can better serve the interests of the humble people, the mass of ordinary Canadians, than Canadian federalism. I want to say this to Quebeckers: do not slip into facility by voting Yes to the question. Keeping federalism, renewing it, improving it, is far more difficult than separating, but it is far more advantageous, and well worth the trouble.

● (1250)

*[English]*

Why do I say that federalism is the best political system we can have, and that federalism has best served—and will continue to do so—the interest of average Canadians, especially those faced with sickness, unemployment or poverty? How can I say this when Canadians so often have difficulty finding their way through the different levels of government which they find, really, a puzzle?

A few years ago Gordon Fairweather, then one of our colleagues in the House and now chairman of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, told the following story about the complexities of our work as federal politicians. One Friday evening when he arrived home in New Brunswick around 10 p.m. a constituent phoned to say: "There is a bear in our backyard. What can you do about it?" Telling this story, Mr. Fairweather turned to his audience and asked, facetiously: "Now, is a bear municipal, provincial or federal?" What does one do when there is a bear in a backyard, and in a city, on top of it all? I am sure Mr. Fairweather managed to find a solution which was good for the man and for the bear because he is aware of the complexities of different levels of government in a country like ours.

We are all at the service of the people and we must bridge these gaps and find our way through the puzzle. It is because our system is complex and power is shared between provincial, municipal and federal governments that we have the best in protection of freedoms and rights and the best in redistribution of income.

*[Translation]*

This is the subject I would like to speak on today, Mr. Speaker. Canadians have now been living under a federal system for 113 years. Historically, our federation is the third oldest in the world, coming after the American federation, established in 1787, and the Swiss federation established in 1848. Half of the global population now lives under a federal system. This proves that the viability of the system, its success as a type of political organization that allows for diversity and unity, that is unity in diversity, has long since been demonstrated.

After the United States, Switzerland, Canada and Australia, the Federal Republic of Germany more recently divided its powers between two levels of government. These federations met with such success that other nations chose to take on at least the appearances. Unfortunately, they have not always applied the major principle of federalism. And countries that may not necessarily appear to us to be worthy from the standpoint of human rights, welfare and freedom of the people happen to be federations and the party now in power in Quebec tell the people: Look at such and such a country, naming a few, we must always see whether such nations are truly applying federalism. Federalism means that there are at least two levels of government, each with specific and strong powers, that check each other, in order that neither can exert