

## The 51-Per-Cent Minority

*Doris Anderson is one of Canada's leading advocates of women's rights. After earning her B.A. at the University of Alberta in 1945, she wrote radio scripts, worked in advertising, then in 1951 joined the staff of Chatelaine. As editor in chief from 1957 to 1977, Anderson added to the magazine's family fare articles on the social and economic status of women. In 1981, while she was serving as president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, her sudden resignation, in protest against the government's reluctance to guarantee equality of men and women in the new constitution, sparked a campaign by women that did achieve a constitutional guarantee of their rights. From 1982 to 1984 Anderson was president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, an umbrella group representing millions of women in numerous organizations. Anderson has published novels, Two Women in 1978, Rough Lay-out in 1981 and Affairs of State in 1988. In addition to her many editorials and articles, she has written two nonfiction books, The Unfinished Revolution (on the status of women in 10 European countries as well as Canada and the United States) and an autobiography, Rebel Daughter (1996). Our own selection "The 51-Per-Cent Minority" first appeared in 1980 in Maclean's. Anderson has revised and updated this classic for our present edition.*

**I**n any Canadian election the public will probably be hammered numb with talk of the economy, energy and other current issues. But there will always be some far more startling topics that no one will talk about at all.

No one is going to say to all new Canadians: "Look, we're going through some tough times. Three out of four of you had better face the fact that you're always going to be poor. At 65 more than likely you'll be living below the poverty level."

And no one is going to tell Quebecers: "You will have to get along on less money than the rest of the country. For every \$1 the rest of us earn, you, because you live in Quebec, will earn 70 cents."

I doubt very much that any political party is going to level with the Atlantic provinces and say: "We don't consider people living there serious prime workers. Forget about any special measures to make jobs for

you. In fact in future federal-provincial talks we're not even going to discuss your particular employment problems."

And no politician is going to tell all the left-handed people in the country: "Look, we know it looks like discrimination, but we have to save some money somewhere. So, although you will pay into your company pension plan at the same rate as everyone else, you will collect less when you retire."

And no one is going to say to Canadian doctors: "We know you do one of the most important jobs any citizen can perform, but from now on you're going to have to get along without any support systems. All hospital equipment and help will be drastically reduced. We believe a good doctor should instinctively know what to do — or you're in the wrong job. If you're really dedicated you'll get along."

As for blacks: "Because of the color of your skin, you're going to be paid less than the white person next to you who is doing exactly the same job. It's tough but that's the way it is."

As for Catholics: "You're just going to have to understand that you will be beaten up by people with other religious beliefs quite regularly. Even if your assailant threatens to kill you, you can't do anything about it. After all, we all need some escape valves, don't we?"

Does all of the above sound like some nihilistic nightmare where Orwellian forces have taken over? Well, it's not. It's all happening right now, in Canada.

It's not happening to new Canadians, Quebecers, residents of the Atlantic provinces, left-handed people, doctors, blacks or Indians. If it were, there would be riots in the streets. Civil libertarians would be howling for justice. But all of these discriminatory practices are being inflicted on women today in Canada as a matter of course.

Most women work at two jobs — one inside the home and one outside. Yet three out of four women who become widowed or divorced or have never married live out their old age in poverty.

Women workers earn, on an average, only 70 cents for every \$1 a man gets — even though on an average, women are better educated than men.

And when companies base pension plans on how long people live, women still pay the same rates as men but often collect less.

What politician could possibly tell doctors to train each other and get along without all their high technology and trained help? Yet a more important job than saving lives is surely creating lives. But mothers get no training, no help in the way of a family allowance, inadequate day-care centres, and almost nonexistent after-school programs.

No politician would dream of telling blacks they must automatically earn less than other people. But women sales clerks, waitresses and hospital orderlies often earn less than males doing the same jobs. It

