

Marie Thérèse Forget Casgrain

1896 - 1981



Born in Montreal, Thérèse Forget was convent educated and married at the age of 19 a Liberal politician, Pierre-François Casgrain, who became a federal MP from 1917 to 1941. They had four children, but despite her busy family life she became passionately engaged in politics and worked tirelessly for women's rights throughout a long career. It began with a bang in the 1921 general election, when she ran the campaign for her husband who was ill. In the same year, she founded the Provincial Committee for

Women's Suffrage. The right of women to vote in Quebec elections was eventually won in 1940, under the Liberal government of Adélard Godbout.

For 14 years from 1928 she led the League for Women's Rights, a successor organization. As its president she appeared before the Dorion Commission set up to examine issues such as a woman's right to her own earnings and the right to bring a law suit without her husband's consent. A major obstacle to win-

ning suffrage in Quebec was the lack of support among rural French women. She became a journalist in the 1930s and was able to reach many women through her popular Radio-Canada show called *Fémina*.

In 1942 Thérèse stood as an Independent Liberal candidate in a federal by-election. She also ran several times after the war in provincial elections without being elected. She joined the CCF in 1946 and led its Quebec wing (1951-7).

Through the party and beyond, she continued her social advocacy, pressing for child protection laws and prison reform.

Thérèse Casgrain once said: “I can’t imagine a woman who has the best interests of her children at heart not taking an interest in politics”.

As an ardent opponent of nuclear weapons, she founded the Quebec wing of the Voice of

Women and she organized aid for the victims of the Vietnam War. In 1970 in recognition of her achievements Pierre Trudeau appointed her to the Senate, even though she had to retire the following year because she was then 75. In 1967 she became an Officer of the Order of Canada and then Companion to the Order in 1974.

She wrote a memoir, *Une Femme chez les Hommes* (1971), translated into English as *A Woman in a Man’s World*. She died in 1981 during the UN Decade for Women, but at its close in 1985 Canada issued a stamp in her honour, and she was recently commemorated on the new \$50 bill.