

Jenkins

It is inevitably and rightly with some regret that we mark this occasion and say farewell to many Members who have served this Parliament and the cause of Europe with distinction — in many cases, over many years. But it is, I think, also an occasion for pride and confidence in the future since we stand on the threshold of direct elections. This Parliament should possibly be given the title, enshrined in British seventeenth-century history, of the Long Parliament. There are many differences: the Long Parliament had its deficiencies as well as its qualities, but it was the Parliament of Pym and Hampden, two of the great names in parliamentary history, and you, like that Parliament have survived over 20 years, replenishing your membership, gathering strength, enhancing your reputation and through your work and dedication helping to build to the road to the democratic future of Europe. That road has not always been easy, but the collective resolution and determination of this Parliament has succeeded in overcoming many obstacles and giving sustained support to the democratic process of the Community.

The Community is firmly rooted in the principles of representative democracy. Countries which do not honour such principles could not be considered for membership, and of the three new candidates it may be said that they have returned to such principles, which have immediately led to their applying for membership and of being welcome future members. It is manifestly desirable that these principles of representative democracy should apply directly in the institutions of the Community itself and not merely in those of the Member States alone. Indeed, the treaties establishing the European Communities laid a solid foundation for a true democratic control by proposing that the Parliament should be directly elected. It has taken a substantial time to honour that commitment — over 20 years — but we may compare that with the period, sometimes forgotten, of 160 years, from 1776, which it took the United States to achieve direct elections to the United States Senate. So by that comparison we have not done badly. It should, I believe, be a source of real satisfaction to every Member of this House that they have paved the way for this historic development. The Members of this House have been the pioneers, and direct elections will be the tangible result of your achievements and the crowning of your efforts.

I would also like, if I may, to take this opportunity to say a special word of thanks to you, President Colombo, with whom I have had the great privilege of working closely over the past two-and-a-quarter years. Though it has not been the first time we have worked closely together — we worked together as finance ministers a decade ago — I am very happy that events have brought us back into such close cooperation more recently. Every President of this House has made his own distinctive contribution to parliamen-

tary development in Europe, and I hope the House will understand if I do not pay a tribute to each of your predecessors individually. I would however, like to mention the name of President Georges Spénale who presided over my first appearance before this Parliament, in January 1977 the beginning of my presidency of the Commission, and who will, I know, be much missed from amongst our councils. But you, Mr President, are the President whom I know best, and I would like to record here the debt of gratitude that I believe we all owe to you for the way in which you have presided over our proceedings with calmness, with wisdom, with unfailing good humour and generosity. In two weeks' time, you, Mr President, will be going to Aachen to receive the Charlemagne Prize for the services you have rendered to Europe. That is a great occasion. I will be there to witness the occasion: it will give me great pleasure to see that award conferred upon you and I know that you will take with you there the congratulations and good wishes of this whole House.

(Applause)

Finally, Mr President, I thank this Parliament for the support and encouragement as well as the occasional tail-twisting which it has given the Commission over many years. You have occasionally proved our strongest critics — you tried to explore my capacity for spontaneous answers to questions which I did not have before me this afternoon, but that is in the nature how a Parliament should behave in its relationship with any executive — but you have also in a more fundamental sense been our strongest supporters and advocates, and it is from the benches of this Chamber that the Commission has, on many occasions, drawn courage and encouragement. When the history of this Parliament comes to be written, I have no doubt at all that the developing relationship between Parliament and Commission will come to be regarded as one of the central features in the progress of the Community in the last twenty years and one of its most important benefits. In the next five weeks, the eyes of Europe will inevitably be turned towards the future directly-elected Parliament, but that Parliament will be founded upon the efforts and achievements of this House, a precursor to whom they can look back with pride. As President of the Commission, I thank this Parliament most warmly for its services to Europe.

(Applause)

President. — I have received from Mr Gaston Thorn, Prime Minister of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, the following message addressed to the European Parliament:

Mr President,

On the occasion of the final part-session of your Assembly in its present form, I wish to address this message to you in my capacity as Prime Minister of the country whose guest you are at this time.

President

I am eager to make known to you, Mr President, and through you to the Members of your Assembly, the very high regard I have for the quality of the work accomplished by your institution since the establishment of the European Communities. I had the privilege of being involved in this work, first as a representative of the Luxembourg Parliament and subsequently on three occasions as your opposite number in the regular dialogue with the Council of the European Communities.

At the moment when a new era in the history of the European Parliament is about to begin, sanctioned by the direct elections, we must not forget that the role which your institution currently enjoys is the result of the excellent quality of your work and of your determined efforts for the gradual introduction of democratic supervision of the activities of the Community. I am sure that your successors will also apply themselves to this task with the same regard for the common good, for European union based on the balanced roles of the institutions and for the equal rights of the Member States.

The European Parliament has never allowed partisan interests — which in the final analysis are irrelevant when compared with its historic role — to disturb its cordial relations with the Luxembourg Government. I congratulate you on this, and I am convinced that in the future, as in the past, our honest and mutual cooperation will enable the European Parliament and its Members to work here, and in Strasbourg, in the best of conditions.

I conclude this short message very simply by thanking you for all you have done for the cause of European unity. I look forward to seeing many of you again as Members of the directly elected Parliament.

(Applause)

We have heard with keen interest the statements by the President-in-Office of the Council and the President of the Commission and the message from the Prime Minister of Luxembourg. On behalf of the entire House, I should like to express our gratitude for this appreciation of the work of Parliament.

There are some of us who have been Members of this Parliament for many years, and a few have even been here since 1952 when the Assembly of the Coal and Steel Community met for the first time, although the calls of government have meant that there have been some interruptions to this commitment. There are three sitting Members of this Parliament who have held the office of President: Mr Berkhouwer, Mr Scelba and Mr Spénales.

I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to you all, ladies and gentlemen, and to your predecessors in this House, for the work you have done and especially for the way in which you have all contributed to the work of the European Parliament.

If I were to recount how our Assembly has evolved in the years since 1952, I should need to extend this part-session by several days. I shall spare you that, however.

I just want to mention the outstanding stages of Parliament's development. It came into being as an Assembly with a predominantly consultative role, but over the years Parliament has gradually extended its

powers while respecting the Treaties or, as in the important case of the adoption of the budget, by amending the Treaties with the approval of each of our national parliaments.

Development of this kind is quite natural, I feel. This Parliament, which until now has consisted of Members from the national parliaments and which is very soon to consist of directly elected Members, could not merely sit on the sidelines and watch as the Community developed.

A member of parliament who is elected in a multi-party democracy, and who is thus a true representative of the people, must accept the full responsibility of his election and his role must be more than merely advisory.

Thanks to the budgetary powers that Parliament has acquired and the conciliation procedure that facilitates joint decisions with the Council, and by improving internal procedures and intensifying its powers of supervision and political initiative, Parliament has taken on a role which justifies its title of European Parliament.

On 17 July the directly elected Parliament will sit for the first time. We are convinced that the experience, tradition and powers that Parliament has accumulated in 26 years of fruitful labour will be invaluable after 17 July for a smooth resumption of work which will enable us to continue promoting parliamentary democracy in the Community with undiminished enthusiasm.

We are delighted to be able to pay tribute to the Council — to you, Mr Bernard-Reymond, to Mr François-Poncet, and to all your predecessors — for the cooperation which has developed between our institutions, and especially for the now customary practice whereby, at every part-session, there is a fruitful debate between the Council and Parliament on the important problems of the moment. Also, on behalf of everyone here, I wish to thank the Commission and Mr Jenkins for their constant attendance and for the unceasing exchange of views with the House. In this way our dialogue has been improved and given an increasingly constructive significance. May I also thank Mr Bernard-Reymond and Mr Jenkins for the particularly kind words they addressed to me.

In short, I wish to thank the Council and the Commission for their contribution to the development of the parliamentary institution in the Community.

The elected Parliament will have new problems to tackle, and I am sure that it will be able to rely on the unstinting cooperation of the other institutions of the Community.

I am sure that Parliament will continue to evolve in the fashion which is implicit in the Schuman Declaration which we are commemorating today.

(Applause)