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Women in Canada

In February 1967 the Canadian government appointed a royal commission to inquire into the status of women in Canada. The commission was to "recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all respects of Canadian society."

It found plenty to recommend.

When it began the commission called for briefs from organizations and individuals. Half a million copies of a brochure, *"What Do You Have To Say About the Status of Women?"* were distributed across the country in supermarkets, libraries, associations, and through the mass media.

In April 1968 the seven commissioners, headed by Mrs. Florence Bird (also known as Anne Francis in her career as a broadcaster on national and international affairs), began a series of public hearings that took them to all the provinces and territories of Canada to try to get the picture of problems facing women. Hearings were held day and night, and in several cities hotlines were set up so women could talk directly to a

commissioner. Camera crews filmed the proceedings for television, an unusual occurrence for royal commissions. The commission's work cost close to \$2 million, including 40 studies by experts in labor, economics, sociology, taxation, law, and other fields.

While the national policy may be no distinction in rights and freedoms between men and women, the national practice, like that of the U.S., is crushing discrimination. In the economic sector, the educational, the psychological — at all levels of activity the norm is discrimination. The monu-

mental research of the commission speaks eloquently about this:

One out of every five Canadians is poor; a large percentage of the poor are women.

Women still do not have control over their own bodies.

Fewer than five per cent of the graduates of law schools are women.

Women receive only twenty per cent of the national income.

Neither the Federal Government nor any provincial government has passed legislation giving working women maternity leave with pay. Only the Federal public service and two provincial governments provide maternity leave without pay.

These are just a few of the facts that leap off the report's 488 pages. Added together, the effect is staggering.

A clear and vivid picture of the situation is drawn by Mrs. Bird, interviewed late last month.

Mrs. Bird, do you think the status of women is different in Canada than here in the U.S.?

No, not really, although American women have

slightly more job opportunities than Canadian women.

Do you think the appointment of the commission was a response to the newly emergent Canadian women's liberation movement?

The interesting thing is that it wasn't a response to the newest wave of feminism. There has always been a women's movement in Canada of one kind or another. Years before the recent development in the struggle for women's rights, over 30 women's groups had asked the government to appoint a commission. It was ap-

