

In the spring of this year, the annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission recommended that these grounds of prohibited discrimination should be extended. They did this after careful research and study and after discussing the subject with many people—witnesses, academic experts and others in Canada. They recommended that the presently proscribed grounds of discrimination be expanded to include the following: previous history of mental illness and previous history of dependence on alcohol and/or all other drugs; mental illness; mental handicap or retardation; sexual orientation and political belief. In addition, they recommended the extension of the presently limited protection for the physically handicapped to include all grounds presently covered in the Human Rights Act. At this point the prohibition of discrimination against the physically handicapped relates merely to employment. As I say, after studying this matter, it was recommended that this be extended.

We fully support this recommendation and urge the government to implement it at the earliest possible time and end these insidious forms of discrimination. We would go further and urge that if the government is serious about its commitment to human rights in 1980, these grounds of discrimination which are presently proscribed in the Canadian Human Rights Act should be included within the proposed charter of rights. Not only the nine grounds which are presently proscribed by the Human Rights Act, but in addition, those grounds which have been recommended after careful study and deliberation by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. In other words, section 15 of the proposed charter of rights would be expanded to include the grounds presently proscribed as well as the grounds I outlined earlier which were proposed as additions.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, I hope the federal government will ensure that, at last, all Canadians at all levels of government, whether federal, provincial or municipal, will not be discriminated against on the bases outlined not only in the existing Canadian Human Rights Act but the proposed bases which would be added to it.

I should like to dwell for a moment on the question of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. As members of this House know, for far too long Canadian men and women have been discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation. This discrimination has resulted in too many "gay" persons silently suffering humiliation and harassment. As the Canadian Human Rights Commission stated in the most recent report as follows:

Although moral or religious convictions about homosexuality are relevant to the private lives of individuals, when it comes to job performance or access to services sexual orientation is irrelevant. Whatever one's views are on the propriety of certain forms of sexual preference, therefore, it must still be acknowledged that persons who are denied quality of opportunity on the basis of their sexual orientation are being discriminated against.

Surely it is time Canadians recognized that this form of discrimination must come to an end wherever it occurs in Canadian society. It is for this reason that we welcome the recommendation of the Canadian Human Rights Commission in this respect and urge the government not only to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination on the

basis of sexual orientation but to change other federal laws which presently discriminate on this basis. I would point out that the Quebec government has recently done this.

● (2225)

In conclusion, I urge that the government give serious consideration to the recommendations of the Canadian Human Rights Commission for expanding the proposed grounds of discrimination. I urge also that it establish a special committee, as suggested, as I said earlier, by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and myself. If members of the government are serious in their commitment to human rights in this country—and I hope that they are and I hope that the expressions in the charter of rights are indicative of that, although we have some concerns about the present form of the charter—not only will they implement their recommendations but they will augment the resources which have been presently granted to the Canadian Human Rights Commission in order to educate the Canadian public and carry out the mandate which was given to them by the Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Ron Irwin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) for his very cogent remarks. It is a reminder to this House that all too often we think the only direction in which this country should go is the direction which the government sets. It is a reminder that there are many directions in which a country can go, all of which are reasonable.

The role of the government vis-à-vis human rights in many forms is to step in and even out the odds to prevent those who cannot help themselves, or who have difficulty helping themselves, from being oppressed by others and by society as a whole. I often hear the question in this House, "Are you serious?", as though the one who asks the question is the only one who is serious. I assure the hon. member for Burnaby that we on this side of the House have been serious for many years. We have spent many years protecting individuals who could not help themselves. We have a proud history of protecting individuals who could not help themselves.

In 1940 we brought in unemployment insurance. In the fifties we brought in laws protecting workers from exploitation. In 1961, we brought in schemes for adult occupational training and, in 1945, family allowances, all designed to help people who could not help themselves. In 1966 we brought in the guaranteed income supplement, in 1957 hospital insurance, in 1965 the Canada Pension Plan and, in 1966, medicare.

We have helped the senior citizens and in most cases received no credit. The provinces said that they did it all. We helped those who could not afford their own housing. All these people are handicapped in an economic sense. But for this we receive little credit. I am pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that we have a history of bringing in social legislation and bringing it in with a sense of reasonableness.

My good friend has brought in four or five different items as though they were one recommendation. I think the report is