

How society frustrates women

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Although Canadian women got the vote in 1917, the suffragettes did not get all they wanted. Deprivation of the vote is a sign of inequality in a country, but the right to vote does not prove any real equality. The suffragettes thought that with the vote would come changed attitudes towards the role of woman in society, and the women would become active in public life.

Unfortunately it did not work this way and most of the women who had fought for female suffrage were appeased by the passing of the legislation. Only a tiny spark of the frustration caused by social injustice to women remained, and this lay dormant for many years.

In the 1960's this spark rekindled and women again protested - for social-economic equality in this "male-chauvinistic" society. Once again these frustrations were aimed at government, with demands for equal pay for equal work, subsidized day-care centres and the legalization of abortion. In 1967 the Canadian government appointed a Royal Commission to study the feasibility of these demands, and to analyse the status of women in Canada and how it could be improved.

As expected, the Commission is sympathetic to the demands of the "Women's Liberation" movement, but they realize the lesson the suffragettes learned fifty years ago - that improving laws will not necessarily improve conditions. The resulting report is a careful analysis of all social spheres with attempt to change the practice, not just the theory of law.

Perhaps some of the demands are a little extremist,

but in our political system it is only the extreme voices that get heard. This article is an attempt to analyse some of the major recommendations of the Report.

COST \$1.9 MILLION

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, which cost 1.9 million dollars during the three years of its preparation, was presented to the House of Commons in early December.

One hundred and sixty-seven recommendations in the areas of taxation, education, women and the family, public life, poverty, law, economy, and immigration and citizenship, are suggested by the commission to change women's position in Canadian society.

The aim of these recommendations is "to remove as far as possible the barriers to real equality and freedom of choice" for women in present policies and practices of the government and other institutions. These freedoms are recognized in Canada by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1967 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women. In particular, the following five principles are the basis for the recommendations: There should be equality of opportunity to share the responsibilities of society as its privileges and prerogatives.

Women should be free to choose to work inside or outside their homes.

Childcare is the responsibility of both parents and of society.

Special treatment related to maternity will always be necessary.

For an interim period, special treatment for women will be required to overcome the adverse effects of

discriminatory practices.

Ottawa based journalist, Anne Francis (Mrs. Florence Birs) was chairman of the Royal Commission. The other Commissionere were Lola M. Lange, Jeanne Lapointe, Elsie Gregory MacGill, Doris Ogilvie (a New Brunswick judge), Jacques Henripin, and John Humphrey.

John Humphrey declined to sign the report but prepared a minority report of his own. His main disagreement is, "I cannot agree that women have the psychological characteristics of a minority or that they should be treated like a minority."

Mr. Humphrey disagrees with special treatment for women and quota systems, and most particularly with the recommendation that two qualified women from each province be summoned to the Senate as seats become vacant until an equitable balance is achieved.

THE SENATE

This recommendation has been highly publicised - perhaps because there are eleven vacant seats in the Senate now, and the prime minister could immediately follow this suggestion. Only five of the one hundred and two Senators are women. Senators are appointed as recognition for outstanding service to the country, but this too means service to the party in power. Women have not had equal opportunity to rise in political parties, therefore they are not appointed to the Senate as a party reward.

Women party workers are usually in the Women's Association of the party, holding teas and raising funds. The Report suggests Women's Association amalgamate with the larger bodies, and the menial party tasks be shared by men and women. Interviews held by the Commission with women who had been successful at the polls showed that gaining the nomination was more of a hurdle than winning the election. In other words, the party has an unreasonable lack of confidence in a woman being accepted by the voting public.

Only one of the 264 members of the House of Commons is a woman. Perhaps the presence of fifty female Senators or Parliament Hill would give Canadian women the confidence to break the tradition that politics is a man's game.

There is a story in Ottawa,

which may or may not be true, that demonstrates that attitudes women face in politics. The story is that when a capable female member of Parliament was suggested to Prime Minister Pearson as a cabinet member, he replied, "Ridiculous! We already have one woman in the Cabinet."

The commission based recommendations to change the role of women in politics on the premise that no country can make a claim to having equal status for its women when its government lies almost entirely in the hands of men.

JUDICIARY

Judges are often political placements and it is perhaps because of this that there are few women in the judiciary in Canada. The Report on the Status of Women quotes a former Chief Justice of the Ontario Supreme Court, "...there are many women who are practicing at the Bar of Canada who would make better judges than some of the men that have been appointed...only merit should be considered in making an appointment to the bench."

Women lawyers are not uncommon in Canada, but women judges are rare. This is an example of how our society frustrates the ambitious women. Many young women entering university realize that in professions such as law and medicine they must fight for acceptance and so decide on traditional female occupations such as nursing and teaching. It is hypocritical for a society to permit women to study these professions on equal terms with men, but not to give them equal opportunity to use these skills.

The commission recommended that the federal government and the provinces name more women judges to all courts within their jurisdictions. Under the section on Law it was also recommended that women be liable for jury duty on the same terms as men.

Since the early 1960's women in New Brunswick have been allowed to serve jury duty. But if a woman wishes to be a juror she must ask to be put on the Sheriff's Jury List. A man is obligated to serve unless he is employed in one of the exempted occupations such as teaching. In 1970 the NB Bar Association made a formal suggestion that the male-female distinction be dropped from the Jury Act, but this has not yet been done.

The York County cour-

thouse, in Fredericton, and many other courthouses in New Brunswick have only one bathroom and are not considered to provide adequate facilities to have jurors of both sexes. It is also more expensive to provide sleeping quarters in the case of a held-over jury if there are female as well as male jurors. For these reasons, even the women who do volunteer for jury duty are seldom called.

The discrimination in the Jury Bill is intended as a protective measure for women, especially housewives and mothers, from the inconvenience of jury duty. The commission found many instances of "protective legislation", particularly in labor laws, actually working against women in practice - and in principle it is intended to do just the opposite. Women must accept the social and personal responsibilities of men, if they want to be treated equally in the labour market - except in the special case of maternity.

STATUS OF WOMEN

The commission was assigned the task of finding just what the status of women in Canada is today. They revealed that two and a half million women are paid workers. This is roughly one third of the labour force and one third of the female population old enough to work. Over one half of these women are married. One worker in six is a married woman.

Many employers considered married women a poor employment risk and the patterns of married women were put under particular scrutiny by the commission. The peak of female participation in the labour force is in the 20 to 24 age group. A sharp decline follows as many women leave employment to start families, but before the age of 35 begins to rise to a second lower peak in the 45 to 49 age group. After age 50, the female participation rate again declines.

The lower the income of the husband, the more likely it is the wife will work. The more education the wife has, the more likely she is to stay in the labour force or return to it early. There are more men than women with university degrees, but on the whole, women in the labour force are better educated than men. In spite of this, the average earnings of male workers are considerably higher than for female workers in every occupational group.

Flashback

—A glance into the past

This week for Flashback we present a special article run in the January 22, 1971 issue of the Brunswickan. This article analyzed the 1971 Royal Commission Report on the Status of Women in Canada. In the 14 years since the release of this report, how much have things improved?

Part II of this article will be run next week.