Much more to be done for women, says Advisory Council

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women held an open forum in Ottawa recently to assess the Government's record in implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and to suggest issues that must still be addressed.

Two reports were released at the session – one, a report on women and aging and the other an assessment of the Government's actions in carrying out the Royal Commission on the Status of Women's recommendations.

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1967, "to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of the Canadian society...". In its final report submitted in 1970, the Commission provided the Government with 167 recommendations of which 122 were within federal jurisdiction. The Advisory Council's report, entitled *Ten Years Later,* says that of the 122 recommendations only 42 have been implemented, 53 have been partially implemented, 24 have not been effected and two are no longer applicable.

As the world focused on International Women's Year in the mid-1970s, a number of laws affecting women's citizenship were passed, according to the report. Women could retain their citizenship if they married an alien and were given equal rights to confer Canadian citizenship on their children. An omnibus bill in 1976 allowed females to join the cadets and men to be beneficiaries of their wives' pensions.

But recommendations on pensions for housewives, relaxing of the divorce and abortion laws, women in all trades in the armed forces and the right of native women to retain their Indian status when they marry non-native men, are questions that remain to be tackled, says the report.

Council president Doris Anderson says in the introduction to the report that, while the Royal Commission was valuable in identifying women's issues, many new and pressing issues of concern to women were not evident in 1970. Of prime importance today, she says, is the whole question of employment for women, including the special needs of women in employment, and the worsening situation of economic security for women, which makes wage gaps and lack of pensions even more important than before.

The Council's report on women and aging states that four out of five single, separated or divorced women over 65 receive no income from private pension plans, and as many as 33,000 women in this age group exist on incomes below the poverty line.

Women living alone

One out of four women over 70 lives alone in a rooming house; and less than half the Canadian women can count on living with husbands, children or even relatives when they are over 64, according to the report. Although one of two Canadian workers belongs to company pension plans, less than half have a pension that goes to the family if the worker dies after retirement. Even then it is usually halved for the widow, says the report.

Integrated government policies on aging are urgently required to provide old people – particularly women who live longer – with adequate guaranteed annual incomes and health and social services, says the Council. "Since women make up 55 per cent of the over 65 population in Canada, their needs must not be ignored," says Doris Anderson.

Canadian technology goes south

Using a system originally developed in Canada, a reactor water clean-up system at the Vermont Yankee reactor in Vernon, Vermont, U.S.A. was successfully decontaminated recently.

The CAN-DECON system was developed by scientists and engineers from Atomic Energy of Canada's Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories (CRNL) and Ontario Hydro, to remove radioactive contaminants from the heavy water coolant of CANDU reactors.

London Nuclear Decontamination Limited, which is licensed by Atomic Energy of Canada Limited to adapt the system to other reactors on a world-wide basis, redesigned and rebuilt some of the equipment for use on the 500 MW boiling light-water reactor.

The total operation was carried out October 8-13, although the actual decontamination only took 24 hours.

Contracts have been signed with utilities in Japan to evaluate the applicability of CAN-DECON to reactors there and further proposals are being prepared for work in Europe and the U.S.

New homoglobin model aids in teaching students

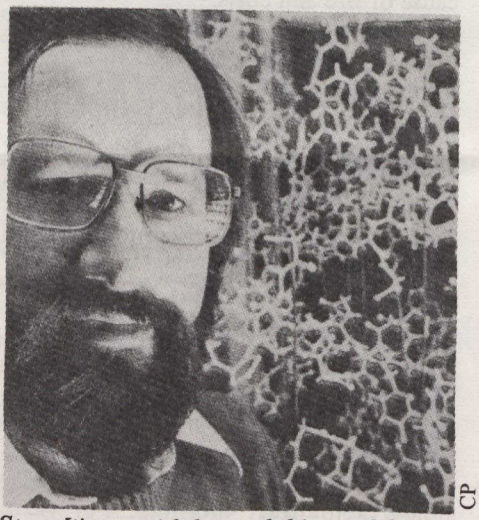
Winnipeg biochemist Steve Wuerz has produced what is believed to be one of the first hemoglobin models of manageable proportions. It is composed of plastic parts representing the 12,000 interconnected atoms within the hemoglobin molecule, and takes him just over three hours to assemble.

The model measures about 60 centimetres by 60 centimetres by 1.2 metres – vastly larger than the real thing. Placed end to end it would take 1.5 million hemoglobin molecules to cover a distance of one millimetre.

"In rough outline, science has known the structure of the hemoglobin for about 15 years," says Mr. Wuerz. "In this detail, we've only known it for five. Two decades ago, for example, we really only knew how big the thing was and that its main function was to transport oxygen to the tissues."

Now, he says, it will be easier to explain a number of molecular disorders to students in the classroom.

"We can show the exact reasons for any of these diseases. Also, this is an excellent system to understand other proteins involved in other diseases."



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Steve Wuerz with hemoglobin model.

Mr. Wuerz, together with a Winnipeg plastics manufacturer, produces models of about 50 body proteins, but the hemoglobin model has been the most important. Nearly 50 have been sold to educational institutions at $450 each.