

discrimination in our immigration laws. I found it incredible that in the old immigration act there was a provision that an individual who was epileptic was considered by some to be mentally deficient or to have something terribly wrong or terribly catching. In our immigration law there was still a prohibition against someone coming into the country who suffered from epilepsy. Happily that provision was ignored by most officers in the field and officers at the border. They, in effect, were breaking the law by allowing these people to enter. Fortunately, we were in a position to change that law. We must change the thinking of Canadians. As recently as the second last immigration act we had that kind of provision in our legislation. So we cannot say that we are Simon Pure in this particular area. Much remains to be done.

Native people are another disadvantaged group. In order to give effect to a statement made in 1971 by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) that the government would assist all cultural groups to overcome barriers to full participation in society, the commission has devoted a considerable amount of attention and effort toward increasing the amount of native participation in the public service. Similarly, the commission has sought, in line with a government commitment, to foster the employment and advancement of women in the federal public service.

The commission is also aware that groups might be disadvantaged on a regional basis. In 1973 the black employment program was set up in the Atlantic region. This began a long term effort to reduce the historically rooted disadvantages of the black community in Nova Scotia.

I mention these efforts, Mr. Speaker, to indicate that probably there is more genuine support and sympathy for that kind of change in our legislation than there will be for the kind of legislation and ideas proposed by the hon. member for Vancouver Centre today. I commend her for raising this subject. It is a delicate and difficult one, but it is one which must be aired in the House of Commons if we are really to do our duty as members of Parliament.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the bill presently before the House and to commend the hon. member for Vancouver Centre (Miss Carney) for her initiative in introducing this important bill, as well as to commend the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Kilgour).

I hope to be not too long, because, of course, I have no intention of taking part in any attempt to talk this bill out. Naturally, I commend the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen) on his remarks. I will be looking with great interest at the response of Liberal members opposite to ensure they put their money where their mouths are and that they do not talk this important bill out. If they are serious about the principles underlying this bill, even though they may have different views in terms of the specific details of it, I know they would not for a moment seriously consider talking this bill out. I know that at the very least they would want to see the subject matter of this bill referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

Human Rights

As has been pointed out by the previous speakers, this is a subject which has been addressed by the Canadian Human Rights Commission in its last two annual reports, those of 1979 and 1980. The Canadian Human Rights Commission recommended that all legislation at the federal level in Canada should prohibit any discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. This was not a recommendation which was made just on the spur of the moment. In fact, it was a very detailed study which was conducted before this recommendation was made.

Why was it felt that this particular subject should be considered? In 1978, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), in response to a letter from a gentleman who was active in the gay community in Ottawa, stated that this was a subject which should be discussed before it was included within the context of the Canadian human rights act. He indicated he believed that the appropriate means of dealing with this issue was to have the Canadian Human Rights Commission study the question and, following that, the commission could make recommendations for government action. I would like to quote from a letter which the Prime Minister wrote in February, 1978. He said that it was necessary that there be "further comprehensive examination of the problems which might be involved. It is for these reasons that the Minister of Justice has proposed that the question be examined by the Canadian Human Rights Commission which could then make recommendations for further government action".

That study was completed, of course, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission made its recommendations on two separate occasions. They have been met with silence. No action has been taken by this government to implement that very important, very basic recommendation.

What is the purpose of the bill before the House this afternoon? Essentially, as the title indicates, it seeks to prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation wherever that might occur within the federal jurisdiction in Canada. I noted with some interest, Mr. Speaker, that the first clause of the bill would seek to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights to prohibit discrimination in the bill on the grounds of sexual orientation. There was an opportunity for the Conservative party and the Liberal party, if they were serious about including prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, to act. That opportunity came when, at the constitutional I moved committee hearings on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I moved an amendment which would have prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in clause 15 of the charter of fundamental rights and freedoms. That would not have applied just at the federal level but, of course, would have applied at all levels—federal, provincial and municipal.

What was the response of the Conservative party and the Liberal party to my amendment? The vote was 22 to 2 against the amendment. While I commend the hon. member for Vancouver Centre for her personal initiative in introducing this bill before the House today, I must say that I wish her