

Equality Rights

Madam Speaker, the social and legal affairs task force of the United Church of Canada said this in its presentation to the Committee: "Homosexual persons should not be excluded from the protection granted to all other citizens because the Government has neglected or omitted to extend the legislation which would provide such protection. Banning a group of citizens from society is a serious precedent. In a democracy, it is just as dangerous to let the public decide whether to include or exclude from recognition of their human rights any distinct group, whatever the time in history."

Madam Speaker, I wish to point out that the recommendations of the Committee were unanimous, which means that the five Conservative members, the Liberal member and myself, who had the honour of representing the New Democratic Party, shared unanimous views about these recommendations.

[English]

The Government responded to the unanimous recommendations made by the committee on March of this year. In its response, the Government took a courageous and forward-looking approach. It said:

The Government believes that one's sexual orientation is irrelevant to whether one can perform a job or use a service or facility. The Department of Justice is of the view that the courts will find that sexual orientation is encompassed by the guarantees in section 15 of the *Charter*. The Government will take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination in relation to all areas of federal jurisdiction.

The motion which is before the House today calls upon the Government to make that commitment a reality. It calls upon the Government to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

I emphasize that this motion does not seek special rights for any group in society. We are not talking about special rights, we are talking about equal rights. There are those who say that these changes are not necessary in our society. I would like to use the brief time I have to mention a couple of examples of why indeed it is necessary.

I received a letter from the parents of a young woman who live in Priddis, Alberta. That letter reads in part:

Our 24 year old daughter is gay. She is a person of extremely high morals, a beautiful Christian woman—a person who cares greatly about her fellow man. She is currently working in a home for the handicapped . . . but will be returning home in two months to resume studies at the University of Victoria . . . All we are asking of our government is the dignity of including homosexuals under basic human rights protection.

In a further letter submitted to me, these parents said:

Our daughter has been brought up as a moral and responsible Christian woman. The omission in our laws of a protective category for sexual orientation seems to leave her and any other homosexual person in Canada no alternative but to lie about their orientation, or to tell the truth and face the loss of jobs and many other psychological stresses. As parents we see this situation as a grave injustice. We also see the exclusion of sexual orientation as a protected area as a condoning of the present discriminatory attitudes and practices.

That is an important point. It is not only changes in laws which are essential in society but it is changes as well in the

attitudes and values which lead to discrimination and intolerance.

In Toronto recently, a young, deeply respected school librarian was brutally murdered by five teenagers in a park. A psychiatrist who testified at the trial of these teenagers stated that one of the factors that led to that violence was the subtle social permission to victimize homosexuals. This contributed to these people acting like a gang of predators the night the young man was murdered.

Similar social pressures are mounting in some quarters against persons with AIDS. It is important that we as a society and we as a Parliament say clearly that equality must be a reality for all and not just for some.

The Special Committee on Equality Rights heard from an 18-year veteran of the RCMP who told us that he did not have the courage to appear openly before the committee but he wanted the committee to recognize the impact of the present laws which held that a man of distinction who had served his country for many years could lose his job solely on the basis of his sexual orientation. This weekend, I met with a member of the Canadian Armed Forces who told me that he is deeply concerned that the Armed Forces will not in fact move forward to implement the recommendations of the Government and that it will use the excuse of operational effectiveness to deny equality to members of the Canadian Armed Forces. The Armed Forces itself estimates that there are 4 per cent of the members of the forces who are gay or lesbian. How can we tolerate the kind of pain and oppression to which they are being subjected as a result of the current policies? The impact in very real and personal terms of this denial of equality is a stark reality for too many Canadians.

• (1710)

I have received a letter from a young man who wanted to join the Armed Forces. He has pointed out the discrimination to which he was subjected. The letter in part states:

To all those people who oppose Bill C-225 this is who you are killing, not child molesters or prostitutes, but some of our nation's brightest, talented youth. How many more lives? What a shame, what a tragic loss. We are all responsible for their fear and despair.

Being condemned for something I have no choice in is just as evil as discrimination on the basis of colour.

I underline that point as well, Madam Speaker. We are not dealing here with a matter of choice. Some say that these people choose their orientation, therefore, they must not be protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act. The evidence shows clearly and beyond a shadow of doubt that that is not in fact the case at all.

Because my time is limited, and because I know that other Members wish to participate in this debate, I am going to close by calling upon Members to recognize the fundamental importance of equality for all in our society, including equality for gays and lesbians.

I wish to close with some lyrics from a very beautiful song by a song writer and poet named Ferron: