

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale): Mr. Speaker, we are talking in this House today about a bill which was provoked by comments made in this House by two members.

In the past there have been comments, terrible, offensive, that have been made by other members. It is too bad that a bill was provoked and has to be brought forward to deal with this type of issue.

I wonder whether through legislation dealing with the rules of conduct in this House we can really deal with the underlying causes of what is happening.

I am going to be very personal. A lot of discrimination is based on just sheer ignorance. A lot of this ignorance is generational. It was only 45 years ago that we had signs in Toronto saying: "No Jews or dogs allowed in parks". It was only in the 1950s that the Supreme Court of the United States said that blacks could ride on buses.

In the United States we still do not have an equal rights amendment. In Canada today we get very upset when people bring different customs to Canada from foreign lands. Be they simple customs of dress based on religion, people get upset because they cannot cope with these differences.

The history of our country has been one of discrimination; discrimination against our aboriginal peoples when we came here, many fights and bitterness based on language, religion. We have not come a long way in learning to understand one another.

In a world that is becoming increasingly smaller, where we are closer through communications, through transport and travel, to people of diverse backgrounds, we have not yet learned that the diversity or the differences are not a source of challenge or confrontation, but can be a source of richness through our intellectual, cultural and to our spiritual beings.

• (1440)

Discrimination against women, is nothing new to our culture. In other cultures we have seen examples of it which are rampant. In some other cultures there is far less discrimination, less equality. In some there is more.

In my own personal case, I believe that was a certain generation of Canadians who grew up with the belief that a woman's place was in the home, and that was probably her only place, that she did not have to be

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involved in important decisions, involved in financed, involved in earning a living, involved in voting, involved in politics. You see part of the hangover of that today. There are so few women actually in this House of Commons. We are getting better. We are improving. We are working at it. We are trying to introduce positive measures to ensure that women are truly fully equal partners in the Canadian scene.

In terms of incomes, women are still at about 61 or 62 per cent of their male counterparts in Canada.

We have an awfully long way to go. We should look at our record and how we have treated so many people who are different from us, different from the male white majority. We are no longer the majority, which is probably good. We have to look at the record of discrimination, and I say it is not based on malevolence, it is based totally on ignorance.

I know that the younger generations that have come along have had a better opportunity by going to school, for example, where you are in an engineering class and maybe 50 per cent of the class is women. Now, that is a positive experience, and it is a learning experience for any male, and it is a better experience than when they went through engineering and there was not one woman in the class. I am not that old, but I went through a class where there was only one woman in our class at law school. That has changed dramatically.

Things are getting better. I guess the point I am trying to make is that no matter what we legislate here, it is not going to do much. Maybe it will be a small portion of educating ourselves, the 295 people selected by Canadians to represent their wishes in the highest court of the land. I mean, isn't it a shame that we have had to come to this, that we have had to admit that ignorance abides so much among us that we have to pass laws saying "Thou shall not be sexist, thou shall not be racist, thou shall not discriminate". My God, that is part of what we should all be about.

To me to have to admit that we are bringing in laws to deal with what should be the fundamental essence of being a human being in Canada, that has to be legislated or has to codified, is a sad day. I hope that through the efforts that are being made, maybe we as representatives of the people can be more conscious of just how ignorant we have been and how badly we as a body have served