

of Canadians had women been given the opportunity to play a more influential role? We do not know, but we do know that immense numbers of talented persons have not had a chance to compete and contribute in the fields of their choice, whatever bent their contribution might have disclosed.

Convention, ignorance, fear, lassitude, acquiescence, and even prejudice -- these and other factors have combined for centuries to deny to women equal opportunity to choose without restriction their own careers and to develop without discrimination their own abilities. Society has paid a heavy price for these policies. Part of the price is reflected in the fact that there is still no force strong enough to overcome instantly such an accumulation of attitudes. Yet there is ample force to disclose the heavy toll in unused human potential which is the product of these attitudes. And, fortunately, it is this force which is now being brought to bear in the form of thoughtful studies which reveal the cost of our past and the penalty which we shall pay in the future unless we change, and change rapidly.

It is always easy to talk of change. Talk is often an excuse for inaction. Creating the conditions for change is something that can be accomplished by talk, however. It helps, for example, to recall how iniquitous was the legal position in Canada of women even a few years ago. In 1928, a date well within the lifetime of many in this room, the Supreme Court of Canada was still able to interpret the word "persons" in the British North America Act as not including women for purposes of appointment to the Senate. If ever a reply were needed to the often-voiced male contention that women themselves have chosen their limitations, then this is surely it: that the highest court in the land could decide solemnly in the year 1928 that women are not, under the Constitution of Canada, persons.

Changes have of course come but they have come ever so slowly. It has been 55 years since the franchise was first extended to women in Canada (in Manitoba), yet in that entire interval only two women have served in federal Cabinets, and today, of 264 Members in the House of Commons, only one is a woman. Indeed, in the half-century between 1920 and 1970, only 18 women have been elected to Parliament.

It was in 1916 that Emily Murphy was appointed by the government of Alberta as the first woman to hold judicial office in Canada, yet in the 55 years since that event only one woman has been seated on the bench of a superior court in the entire country (in Quebec in 1969).

In these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that there exists in this country an air approaching unreality in many public discussions of the stature and role of women. Arguments are voiced, on one hand, that women -- all women -- are or should be fulfilled only in the role of mother and homemaker. At the same time, one hears on the other hand allegations that laws regarding women are not to be respected because they are the product of male-dominated legislatures. In extreme instances these opposing views are voiced with considerable vehemence. And, following the pattern of all extremist groups, governments are described as non-representative by persons who claim through some undisclosed authorization to be themselves truly representative of all the members of their generation, or their linguistic group, or their sex. There is nothing new in this respect, it appears. I was