

How Society Frustrates Women

Royal Commission Report Analysed

**Special Article by
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Although Canadian women got the vote in 1917, the suffragettes did not get all they wanted. Deprivation of the vote is a sign of inequality in a country, but the right to vote does not prove any real equality. The suffragettes thought that with the vote would come changed attitudes towards the role of woman in society, and the women would become active in public life.

Unfortunately it did not work this way and most of the women who had fought for female suffrage were appeased by the passing of the legislation. Only a tiny spark of the frustration caused by social injustice to women remained, and this lay dormant for many years.

In the 1960's this spark rekindled and women again protested - for social-economic equality in this "male-chauvinistic" society. Once again these frustrations were aimed at government, with demands for equal pay for equal work, subsidized day-care centres and the legalization of abortion. In 1967 the Canadian government appointed a Royal Commission to study the feasibility of these demands, and to analyse the status of women in Canada and how it could be improved.

As expected, the Commission is sympathetic to the demands of the "Women's Liberation" movement, but they realize the lesson the suffragettes learned fifty years ago - that improving laws will not necessarily improve conditions. The resulting report is a careful analysis of all social spheres with attempts to change the practice, not just the theory of law.

Perhaps some of the demands are a little extremist, but in our political system it is only the extreme voices that get heard. This article is an attempt to analyse some of the major recommendations of the Report.

COST \$1.9 MILLION

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, which cost 1.9 million dollars during the three years of its preparation, was presented to the House of Commons in early December.

One hundred and sixty-seven recommendations in the areas of taxation, education, women and the family, public life, poverty, law, economy, and immigration and citizenship, are suggested by the commission to change women's position in Canadian society.

The aim of these recommendations is "to remove as far as possible the barriers to real equality and freedom of choice" for women in present policies and prac-

tices of the government and other institutions. These freedoms are recognized in Canada by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1967 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women. In particular, the following five principles are the basis for the recommendations: There should be equality of opportunity to share the responsibilities of society as its privileges and prerogatives.

Women should be free to choose to work inside or outside their homes.

Childcare is the responsibility of both parents and of society.

Special treatment related to maternity will always be necessary.

For an interim period, special treatment for women will be required to overcome the adverse effects of discriminatory practices.

Ottawa based journalist, Anne Francis (Mrs. Florence Bird) was chairman of the Royal Commission. The other Commissioners were Lola M. Lange, Jeanne Lapointe, Elsie Gregory MacGill, Doris Ogilvie (a New Brunswick judge), Jacques Henripin, and John Humphrey.

John Humphrey declined to sign the report but prepared a minority report of his own. His main disagreement is, "I cannot agree that women have the psychological characteristics of a minority or that they should be treated like a minority."

Mr. Humphrey disagrees with special treatment for women and quota systems, and most particularly with the recommendation that two qualified women from each province be summoned to the Senate as seats become vacant until an equitable balance is achieved.

-THE SENATE

This recommendation has been highly publicized - perhaps because there are eleven vacant seats in the Senate now, and the prime minister could immediately follow this suggestion. Only five of the one hundred and two Senators are women. Senators are appointed as recognition for outstanding service to the country, but this too often means service to the party in power. Women have not had equal opportunity to rise in political parties, therefore they are not appointed to the Senate as a party reward.

Women party workers are usually in the Women's Association of the party, holding teas and raising funds. The Report suggests Women's Association amalgamate with the larger bodies, and

the menial party tasks be shared by men and women. Interviews held by the Commission with women who had been successful at the polls showed that gaining the nomination was more of a hurdle than winning the election. In other words, the party has an unreasonable lack of confidence in a woman being accepted by the voting public.

Only one of the 264 members of the House of Commons is a woman. Perhaps the presence of fifty female Senators or Parliament Hill would give Canadian women the confidence to break the tradition that politics is a man's game.

There is a story in Ottawa, which may or may not be true, that demonstrates that attitudes women face in politics. The story is that when a capable female member of Parliament was suggested to Prime minister Pearson as a cabinet member, he replied, "Ridiculous! We already have one woman in the Cabinet."

The commission based recommendations to change the role of woman in politics on the premise that no country can make a claim to having equal status for its women when its government lies almost entirely in the hands of men.

-JUDICIARY

Judges are often political placements and it is perhaps because of this that there are few women in the judiciary in Canada. The Report on the Status of Women quotes a former Chief Justice of the Ontario Supreme Court, "...there are many women who are practicing at the Bar of Canada who would make better judges than some of the men that have been appointed ... only merit should be considered in making an appointment to the bench."

Women lawyers are not uncommon in Canada, but women judges are rare. This is an example of how our society frustrates the ambitions of women. Many young women entering university realize that in professions such as law and medicine they must fight for acceptance and so decide on traditional female occupations such as nursing and teaching. It is hypocritical for a society to permit women to study these professions on equal terms with men, but not to give them equal opportunity to use these skills.

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NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF WOMEN IN LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL OFFICES IN 1969.

	Total	Number	Percentage
House of Commons	264	1	0.4
Provincial Legislatures	634	14	2.2
Senate	102	4	3.9
Federal, Provincial and Municipal Courts	889	14	1.5