

Canada Weekly

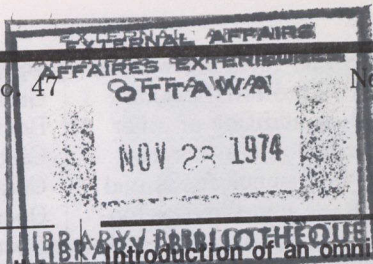
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Introduction of an omnibus bill on the status of women

Health and Welfare Minister Marc Lalonde recently introduced in the House of Commons an omnibus bill designed to provide equality for men and women under federal statutes. The bill, which is entitled the Statute Law (Status of Women) Amendment Act, 1974, received first reading last May, but Parliament was dissolved before legislation could be processed.

Following recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and of many organizations and individuals, the Government has undertaken to eradicate provisions of a number of acts that discriminate against, or are prejudicial to, women.

The omnibus bill amends eight pieces of legislation. The changes are:

Canada Elections Act

At present a number of rules exist for the listing of female electors which do not apply to males. The amendments provide for only one set of rules that apply equally to men and women and will require only sufficient information to be descriptive of the elector, i.e. name, address, occupation and sex.

Electors will be registered under the name by which they are known in the polling division and no occupation will be required after the name of the second spouse, if the second spouse does not request that the occupation be specified.

Criminal Code

Two changes to the Criminal Code will be made. Section 23 (3), which will be repealed, currently provides that a married woman whose husband has been a party to an offence is not an accessory after the fact to that offence, if, in his presence or under his authority, she assists any other person who has been a party to the offence to escape. It is believed that the presumption of coercion upon which this section is based is no longer applicable.

In addition, Section 197 will be amended to extend to a married woman

the obligation to provide necessities of life for her spouse, thus putting both spouses on the same footing.

Immigration Act

The omnibus bill will remove the term "head of family" from the act. While the present definition of this term strictly interpreted is neutral in its wording, it is almost invariably taken to mean the husband.

The amendments also provide that dependent members of a family may no longer be included in a deportation order against the "head of family", if they are Canadian citizens, or if they are landed immigrants and over the age of 18.

Public Service

Under the Public Service Employment Act a house-keeping amendment adds marital status and age to the prohibited grounds of discrimination. Sex is already a prohibited ground, but it was realized that women could also be discriminated against on the basis of marital status and, of course, discrimination on the basis of age is unacceptable.

Veterans and dependants

Under the Pension Act and the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, amendments dealing with veterans are in line with the bill to be introduced to amend the Canada Pension Plan. They will provide the same benefits in respect of husbands and children of female disability pensioners as are now paid in respect of the dependants of male pensioners. They will also provide pensions for widowers as well as widows. Pension benefits will be available to children up to 17 years of age for both boys and girls, and to age 25, in cases of children undergoing continuous education.

National Defence Act

The omnibus bill will permit girls as well as boys to belong to military cadet organizations. Every summer the Government receives complaints from