

equal-pay legislation had done little or nothing to close the gaps between the salaries of women and men who did work of equal value. Many laws and practices concerning women had not kept up with the technical and scientific developments that had, in half a century, changed Canada from an agricultural country into an urbanized, industrialized one.

Royal Commission

In the Sixties, rumblings of the women's liberation movement began to echo in Canada from the United States and young women at all levels of society began to see eye-to-eye with older middle-class women who had hitherto carried the banner. In 1967, there was a major breakthrough when the Federal Government appointed the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. This was a direct response to repeated strong demands from the Ad Hoc Committee on the Equality of Women, representing 33 associations with a membership of two million. The Commission was instructed "to inquire, to report and to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society".

Canadian royal commissions are traditionally free from political interference; they are adequately financed and have great power under the Inquiries Act. It was, therefore, possible for the Commissioners - five women and two men (I was chairman) - to make a study in depth as well as in the wide area designated in the terms of reference. We were determined to make recommendations that would provide the Government with a blueprint for action for at least a decade. We also decided to make recommendations to the provinces as well, since the Canadian Constitution puts civil and property rights, education and about 80 per cent of labour matters under provincial jurisdiction.

In due course, we assembled a secretariat of brilliant, dedicated women, trained in a number of disciplines. We then called for briefs and received 469 from individuals as well as organizations of physicians, nurses, students, universities, unions, bar associations and governments. After analysing these, we held 37 days of public hearings covering every one of the ten provinces. Another commissioner and I spent an additional fortnight in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, visiting small settlements along the coast of Hudson Bay. We also commissioned 40 special studies by authorities in civil and criminal law, penology, history, education, sociology and labour. Our secretariat prepared background papers and unearthed for our consideration the research

material already available. We received opinions from 60 consultants, men and women with exceptional experience and expertise.

Help from abroad

We received valuable help from other countries. The 1968 report to the United Nations, *The Status of Women in Sweden*, was a welcome guide and reference book, since its thinking corresponded so closely to our own. In the same year, the UN conference in Tehran on the rights of women gave international support to our philosophy. The Chairman of the U.S. Status of Women Commission, Esther Peterson, came to Canada at our invitation to discuss the American report delivered in 1963. I went to Washington, where I was given useful information and enthusiastic co-operation from the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Department of Labour.

When the Royal Commission was appointed, the Canadian media as a whole greeted it with scorn, jocosity and often downright opposition. A few editorial writers and commentators believed that there might be discrimination against women, but doubted if a commission largely run by women would ever report and, suggested that, even if it succeeded in doing so, its recommendations - presumably emotional, since so many women were involved - would inevitably be pigeonholed by the Government and soon forgotten. Some influential women also publicly expressed doubts that the Commission was needed.

The public hearings, held a year later, had a remarkable impact, leading, in many instances, to a *volte-face* in these points of view. The Canadian Press sent a reporter, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation sent a camera crew, supervised by the late Ed Reid, an intelligent, sympathetic young producer and interviewer, who travelled with us across the country, even up to the Arctic. The full day-to-day coverage of the often moving, sometimes shocking, revelations at the hearings made governments, the media and the public aware of the discrimination that still existed and the extent of the harm it was doing not only to women but to society as a whole.

In 1970, the report, with 167 recommendations, of which 122 were for the Federal Government and the rest for the provinces and private side, was tabled in the House of Commons. These recommendations were based on the general assumption that everyone was entitled to the rights and freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hard-hitting, unemotional and professional, it was greeted with surprised respect by the media

*Opposition
to Commission
composed
of women*