

## **Setting the Stake for the Next Century**

*An evaluation of Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality, Ottawa: Status of Women in Canada, August 1995, 83 pages.*

It is impossible to read *Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Equality* without becoming alarmed. It aims for a society without discrimination. The status of women in Canada and around the world must be improved by helping women attain economic well-being and providing security from violence to their health and person. To achieve this end, the federal government assisted Canadian women to attend the 1995 United Nations World Conference of Women in Beijing, China. It also funded 40 Canadian women to attend the non-governmental forum. Women from developing countries also received support for participation in the Conference.

### **Equality**

You might ask, what's wrong with trying to eliminate discrimination? Shouldn't we all favour an equal society? When we analyze the word "equality" as used by the Status of Women in Canada we must conclude that it has changed its original meaning. Webster's Dictionary defines it as "the state or an instance of being equal in number, amount, rank, meaning, etc."

Equality should always be a given in free society. There should always be equality of opportunity with respect to employment, public services, education. But the federal plan for gender equality does not propose equality of opportunity before the law but equality of outcome or results. It is radically egalitarian.

Gender equality - the notion that women and men should enjoy similar benefits and outcomes accruing from their participation in society - and gender equity - the notion of fairness between the sexes - are integral to the kind of society the Government of Canada wishes to support and to build.

Equality of outcome cannot be achieved without coercion. Egalitarianism gives the government and its bureaucrats the rationale for social engineering.

### **Social engineering**

Egalitarians aim to transform, to create a new world and a "new person." The government insists that human nature and society can be transformed by the political process and formal economic activity. It bases its actions on the assumption that average Canadians need a nanny. They are too simple and immature to run their own lives. They need the government to change their perspectives on women.

We are told that feminization of poverty has increasingly become a global phenomenon. Therefore, global security and economic prosperity are dependant "upon addressing gender inequality." Consequently, the promotion of gender equality - as a "human

rights, social justice and development issue" - is considered an important part of Canada's foreign and aid politics. (If this is true, why the refusal by the Prime Minister to tackle human rights issues during his trade tours to China and other parts of Asia?)

### **The role of the government**

In the urge to create a discriminationfree society, the government has turned itself into an all-powerful regulator. It has gone beyond its original mandate - the protection of all citizens before and under the law; now its most important objective has become the establishment of an egalitarian society. The federal government believes that jobs, health care, a safe and sustainable environment, equality for men and women, care for the very young and the aged, and the alleviation of poverty are societal issues that cannot be addressed simply by each individual aggressively pursuing immediate, narrow self-interest.

Although the government talks about fiscal restraint and downsizing the federal bureaucracy, its plan for gender equality will lead to more government interference and control in every aspect of life than ever before. (If the government manages "the new society" as well as the economy, Canada will be in deep trouble for years to come.) To achieve its gender equality goal, the federal government will take measures "as legislator, policy maker, program deliverer and employer." For example, violence prevention committees will be established:

Committee members will be sensitized to gender issues and to differences in culture, ability and **sexual orientation**.

Public awareness programs and codes of conduct for non-violent and respectful behaviour toward employees will be developed, and a mechanism will be set up to provide employees with the opportunity to report **anonymously** problems of workplace violence.

In other words, the government is both the educator and the regulator of sexual ethics in the workplace. And what is worrisome is the anonymous reporting on fellow employees. This can lead to a host of abuses. An employee can use this as a means to destroy a reputation, for his own personal advancement. It can also mean that a Christian, who disapproves of homosexuality, may be disciplined.

The state has become the source of rights. Hence, affirmative action, entitlement programs and the tyranny of political correctness. Special interest groups which can get the ear of government often receive special rights and benefits.

### **Multiculturalism**

The government links gender equality and multiculturalism. Through promoting cross-cultural and intercultural understanding by the public and acceptance of diversity in Canadian society "the roles and contributions of all Canadian women, regardless of

their ethnicity, are recognized and valued." Multicultural programs are supposed to help Canadians understand the challenges of a pluralistic society.

The policy of multiculturalism presumes that there is no objective absolute by which to evaluate culture. It denies the possibility that one culture or moral view is superior to another. All cultures, whether Hottentot or British, are considered to have the same value.

### **Systematic discrimination**

The underlying assumption of the federal government is that women and minority groups are suffering from systematic discrimination in business and public affairs. Women are victims in an oppressive patriarchal society. The premise is that discrimination and unfair treatment can only be overcome by government action.

Discrimination is defined as

not a mere finding or distinction between the treatment of groups or individuals: it must involve a disadvantage. Equality, therefore, is served by government policies that recognize and take account of the specific circumstances of Canadians who, on the basis of an inherent attribute such as colour or gender, are in a position of social, political or legal disadvantage.

### **Group policy**

The fixation on group identity undermines the British common law tradition of individual rights. The policy of "designated groups" focuses on race, sex, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Equality is sought

for life situations of women outside the dominant culture - women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, women from visible minorities, elderly women, lesbians, lone mothers, women in poverty.

But the policy of group identity achieves the opposite of what it intends to abolish. It encourages aggressiveness and intolerance, resulting in a frightful fragmentation of Canadian society. Group is pitted against group.

### **Gender politics and the family**

The pursuit of women's rights in the name of human rights is used to weaken and divide the family. The federal plan for gender equality has no definition of the family, but it does give the impression that the traditional family perpetuates inequality between men and women. Neither the importance of moms staying at home to nurture their children nor the family as a crucial vehicle for the transmission of specific values receive any attention. The greatest achievement for a woman appears to be part of the paid workforce. According to the government, women should be relieved from the burden of rearing their children at home so that they can pursue their careers on the same footing as men. Therefore the cash-strapped government continues to support daycare centers. Its support will lead to the further breakdown of the family. Daycare requires money,

which has to be raised through taxes. Higher taxes mean that moms and dads will see even less of their children than they do now, while the state takes over parental duties.

### **Race and ethnicity politics**

Another field which greatly lends itself to social engineering is the politics of race and ethnicity. The latter reflects the so called "multiculturalism" of our pluralistic society. Women of First Nations on reserves and Inuit communities are frequently mentioned as groups in need of special care, attention and protection. The government will also continue to honour refugee claims based on "gender-related persecution." It will help women refugees in precarious situations where local authorities cannot ensure their safety.

### **Arts**

The government is committed to funding - on a priority basis - women's cultural initiatives and interests. It is also committed to ensuring women's participation in cultural industries and broadcasting. The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has been mandated to ensure that employment equity and policies address the accurate and positive portrayal of women in Canadian broadcasting.

Much more could be said about the federal plan for gender equality. The government's policies are broad, sweeping and numerous.

### **Rousseau the mentor**

Underlying the dry legalese language of the Status of Women document is an utterly pagan world-view, saturated by the ideas propagated by the immensely influential French-Swiss thinker Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). He stands at the origin of the modern effort to use the state to perfect humanity. Rousseau, who deposited each one of his children immediately after birth, unnamed and unbaptized, at a Paris orphanage, argued that the state ought to be responsible for all children, if society was to be improved. The supreme state must construct a good society. It is an instrument of social engineering. Citizens are like children whose upbringing and thought ought to be controlled by the state. Rousseau spoke about the remaking of man, through force if necessary, to conform to the "General Will." Individual rights must give way to the common good as defined by the state. Consequently, rights are now claims or entitlements to be made and delivered by the state. And this is precisely the view expressed in the federal plan for gender equality.

### **Anti-Christian**

The belief that the state is obligated to change human nature and to rewrite the rules of sexual behaviour through the legal process is anti-Christian to the core. It is a radical break with the Biblical doctrine of sin. Men and women are fallen image-bearers of God. Sin disrupted the good order and harmony of God's creation. Human beings, made to

love God, rebelled against Him. Only the saving Gospel can counteract the devastating effects of our spiritual downfall and change human nature. Furthermore, the imperfection of human beings and the sovereignty of God put limits to the role and power of the state.

The federal government views rights as self-derived inalienable rights which people naturally deserve, and freedom as a purely human achievement through political endeavours. But we can neither give ourselves rights nor freedoms. They come from God. And our rights are always inseparably intertwined with a summons to responsibility, duty and obligation toward God. Scripture teaches that we are responsible for others. Others are responsible for us. Together we are responsible to God. The pursuit of rights is not dependent on what people deserve but on what God demands in His Word.

## **Conclusion**

The apostle Paul says that we must "understand the times" (Romans 13:11). To make a meaningful contribution to current political debate we must understand what the issues are all about. And Christians are not only called to discern the spirits of the age but also to oppose them. Therefore, a well-thought-out Christian response to Status of Women document should be high on the priority list. The implications of the document are far reaching. They impact the traditional family structure and freedom of thought and speech. In the name of equality, Canada is rapidly turning into an egalitarian society. Ian Hunter, professor of law at the University of Western Ontario, pointed to the crux of what is at stake:

Why do legislators willingly invest human rights commissions with powers they would entrust to no other agency? Why is no check put on the exercise of discretion by human rights officials? And why do human rights commissions enjoy a virtual exemption from public scrutiny and criticism?

An important part of the answer, I suggest, lies in the essentially theological nature of human rights legislation. To a secular society, the quest for equality fulfills the same yearning as, in centuries past, did the quest for God. The religious vision of heaven, a land beyond time and mortality and very far off, has been replaced by a utopian vision of an egalitarian society, to be obtained through Charters, Commissions, Affirmative Actions and Legislated Codes of Behaviour.

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April, 1996