

A WOMEN'S BUREAU

BRIEF

presented to

the HONOURABLE ROBERT BOURASSA

PRIME MINISTER OF QUEBEC

by

LA FEDERATION DES FEMMES DU QUEBEC

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PREAMBLE

AIMS AND NEEDS

AN UPDATING OF STRUCTURE

A CHANGE OF ATTITUDES

TASKS AND DESCRIPTION OF TASKS REGARDING:

THE STUDENT POPULATION

WOMEN AT WORK

WOMEN AT HOME

WOMEN AND THE COMMUNITY

PROPOSED STRUCTURE:

A GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTION

POWERS AND JURISDICTION

BUDGET

P R E A M B L E

When preparing this brief, we spent a great deal of time considering the advisability of creating a Women's Bureau. Would this Bureau become a new symbol of discrimination? Perhaps, but we cannot see a more effective way of obtaining the necessary reforms. We believe that all the present measures aimed at improving the status of women have been conceived independently of the general policies which are being implemented in various fields to accelerate economic and social progress. Certain measures, in particular, have been felt by many people as concession made to placate women, or as instances of an outmoded paternalistic attitude. In every case, the remedies have been only partial, offered too late, inadequate, and incapable of solving the vast problem of women's place in post-industrial society.

Reforms concerning women must have as their aim the complete integration of women in all sectors of society. If not, discrimination, which takes away women's control of their own destinies, may well continue. The extent of the problem as well as the scope of the solutions required demands the establishment of a structure such as the one we propose in the following pages.

The Women's Bureau we envisage would bring a contemporary answer to the needs of Quebec women. We should not, moreover, be alone in taking such action. In the preamble to the U.N. Report on the Status of Women in Sweden (1968), we read:

"Despite its view that in principle measures and reforms in the community must apply to all citizens regardless of sex, the Swedish government recognizes the further necessity of introducing special measures for the benefit of women in the present situation. [A necessity that will continue to exist] in many countries during a long transition period. The community will be obliged to make special efforts to strengthen the position of women until the gap between the sexes is sufficiently narrowed in the day-to-day exercise of human rights."

A I M S

In studying Quebec society, it seemed to us that the real reason for the difference in the social status of men and women is to be found in the traditional division of roles (which thrust on women, as a result of upbringing and customs, the main responsibility of home and children). It is the woman's role, called primary, that places obstacles in the path of true equality in professional training and employment, and in the way of an equitable representation within political and trade-union organizations. The aim of the Bureau is to modify the traditional division of work and responsibilities, which tends to limit women's opportunities for making use of the rights which are legally theirs. We wish to implement a programme of reforms which will enable each woman, by taking an active part in economic and social progress, to attain her particular goals in life.

N E E D S

"What have you got to complain about? Don't you have a privileged position in society? Aren't you sufficiently protected by law?"

Alas, yes. This privileged position and protection are the obsolete relics of an out-dated system of values in which women were limited by the only roles allotted to them - those of wife, mother,

nurse, weaker sex, or objects for men's amusement.

Confronted by this situation inherited from the past, changes in socio-economic structures must be accelerated in order that women may play their full part as citizens and human beings in the same way as all citizens and persons in our society. Efforts to adapt existing structures must be concerted and sanctioned by law. They are of two kinds:

Structures must be brought up to date:

they lag behind the present social situation.

Attitudes must be changed - those of women themselves, as well as those of men.

Any measure that is really effective will have very considerable repercussions on society (e.g. on family life, the organization of work, the social affairs budget). Such measures must be taken within the framework of an overall policy that takes into account the long-term effects on the interests of all citizens.

TASKS AND DESCRIPTION OF TASKS

THE STUDENT POPULATION

Tasks

As regards the student population in the Province, the Bureau's task will be to combat any inculcation, conscious or otherwise, of sex-typing, and to see that the girl who completes a course of studies, is prepared to take advantage of any careers, opportunities for which she is qualified.

Description of tasks

To carry out this task, the Bureau's staff will keep in constant touch with guidance counselling services in educational institutions. The staff will examine, and, if necessary, compile statistics concerning the correlation in Quebec between schooling, academic options, and the subsequent careers of female students. The correlations will then be compared with data from other countries and recommendations will be made.

The staff will see that all girls leaving an educational establishment receive adequate information concerning federal and provincial laws which particularly concern them as women. While insisting on the student's right to receive an education suited to her talents and ambitions, the Bureau's staff will see that girls are also

made to understand their duty as citizens - the corollary of the free education they have received from the state.

The staff will draw the attention of the interested parties and of the public to all forms of sex-typing which may appear in the new professions.

They will be ready to help groups of women (or men) students who wish to pursue studies or to take any reasonable legal action, concerning the promotion of the above-mentioned aims.

WOMEN AT WORK

Tasks

The Bureau will offer its fullest support to all working women. It will use all the means at its disposal to combat the discrimination of which working women are victims in many sectors and levels of employment.

Description of tasks

a) Women and the labour market.

The Bureau will see that the 1964 law against discrimination in employment is better known, and it will support women who bring legal action under

the terms of this law, by helping them prepare their case. It will make recommendations to the Department of Labour concerning necessary improvements in the law (e.g. regarding the reprisals to which women who bring such an action are liable, the very low fines for offenders, etc.). It will study the possibility of organizing a system of spot checks to see whether this law, and others in the Labour Code, are being observed.

It will draw up a list of the obstacles preventing women from acceding to promotion, by industry and type of occupation. It will investigate situations where further training courses are reserved either explicitly or tacitly for men.

It will examine and make available to the public, to voluntary organizations and to teachers, statistics concerning the Quebec female labour force (number and distribution by occupation, salary, labour mobility, absenteeism, education, age, civil status, use of nurseries and domestic help, etc.).

b) Trade-unionism

The trade-union movement has made a significant contribution to the improvement of working conditions, but has not yet obtained equal working conditions for men and women in all sectors.

Through the data it will have in its possession, the Bureau will be a valuable source of information for the trade unions; it will also keep them informed of women's requirements; and since it will be empowered to undertake investigations, it will be able to play a part in denouncing unjust situations in certain sectors of the labour scene.

The Bureau's task will then consist in helping the trade union organizations define with greater precision (following to setting up of the necessary mechanisms) their policy concerning working women and the conditions imposed on them by both employers and the trade unions themselves.

c) Part-time employment

The Bureau will undertake a thorough study based on experience of all aspects of this form of employment (pay, working conditions, union membership, type of occupation, etc.). It will also make a survey of the arguments invoked

against part-time work both by unions and employers.

If it seems desirable, the Bureau's staff will try to bring about a change in attitude towards this form of work by pointing out the advantages offered to both men and women who wish to do part-time work. In any case, the Bureau must promote the necessary reforms in the working conditions of women who do part-time work.

d) Return to the labour market

The Bureau will make sure that information concerning retraining and continuing education courses offered to women by the state is relevant and readily available.

It will make a survey of information concerning guidance counselling services and retraining programmes offered by private institutions and voluntary organizations, and make this more generally available.

It will suggest ways of making these courses more accessible to women (questions of grants, baby-sitting, book loans, transport, etc.). It will compile and study statistics concerning the successes, failures and subsequent careers of women who have taken retraining or continuing education courses. After consultation with experts where

necessary, it will propose appropriate changes. It will see how certain forms of voluntary work may be credited as a preparation for paid work and will make recommendations to public and private authorities.

WOMEN AT HOME

Tasks

The mother's role as both manager and educator is often praised in theory, but in a society where efficiency and professionalism reign, no one knows how to calculate the value of her work. The Bureau will have a difficult and delicate task in helping society and the house-wife herself to make this assessment. It will have to support the house-wife in her struggle for independence (financial and psychological) and see that society gives her the means of using for her own self-fulfillment the freedom that comes from being able to organize one's own work.

Description of tasks

The Bureau will try to find ways of ensuring that women who devote much of their adult lives to their families, obtain a certain financial independence. Generally speaking, the Bureau must consider the case of mothers who, in spite of their indispensable contribution to the economy, find themselves without any resources of their own.

The Bureau will undertake a survey concerning the status and condition of women at home. It will help organize community services which lessen their isolation, such as TV training courses, day-care centers, subsidized family holiday camps, community activities, etc. The staff will also keep in touch with women at home in order to improve communication between them and other social groups.

WOMEN AND THE COMMUNITY

Tasks and description of tasks

One of the Bureau's first tasks will be to make a complete list of voluntary associations, classify the fields in which they work, compile statistics, etc. The Bureau will be an information centre for both the public and private sectors. The programmes of some associations may overlap; if they were aware of this, they could combine their efforts. One has only to think of all the voluntary organizations who have studied the question of day-care centres! Some associations might well decide to abandon a particular field of activity and take up another that has not yet been tackled.

Another task for the Bureau will be to assess the contribution voluntary work makes to the national product.

A third task will be to supply a list of names of competent and experienced women who could sit in an advisory capacity on the different committees or commissions set up by the government, to study questions such as urbanization, housing, transport, etc. This proposition obviously does not exclude the possibility of appointing a woman expert in these matters to an administrative post.

The Bureau will also have an important part to play in political education, first of all, by informing women how to participate in civic and political life at all levels: school boards, municipal affairs, provincial and federal politics, etc., and by circulating more specific information concerning eligibility, procedures, etc.

The Bureau will also speak for women as far as the information media are concerned so that they may be assured of regular participation in political and public affairs programmes, in which their representation is now only occasional, if not nonexistent.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE

A government institution

We must first of all stress the urgency of setting up this proposed structure. It could always be argued that provincial legislation is progressing in such a way that women, as women, have no need of a special spokesman in the government. We reject this argument because we believe that it is necessary to build up a collective conscientiousness among women to ensure that future legislation continues in the right direction.

Another current argument must also be rejected: namely that nothing prevents us from doing anything we believe necessary, at the level of our independent associations to improve the status and condition of women. We reject this further argument because we believe that women's associations as pressure groups represent a force that is necessary but inadequate to accomplish the work which urgently needs to be done and which has been set out objectively and exhaustively in the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.¹

We are not asking for a women's labour office, because we do not want to accentuate the division that already exists between

1 Information Canada, Ottawa, 1970.

women at home and women at work.

However, we wish this Bureau to be a public body instituted according to the following principles:

- a) A Bureau which will be directly responsible to the Prime Minister (possibly via a delegated Minister of State).
- b) A Bureau which will not be attached to any one government department. Only an original structure will be able to respond effectively to existing needs.
- c) A permanent Bureau which will work with all government bodies.
- d) A Bureau which will have a staff and a director, the latter, appointed by the Prime Minister after consultation with women's organizations. (We do not want this Bureau to be one person's responsibility even if that person is supported by an inter-ministerial committee, because experience in other countries has proved that such procedure is ineffective: too heavy a task for a single person, inertia of structures, etc.)

- e) A Bureau in which civil servants and volunteers will work in collaboration (this fits into a general programme of citizen's participation in government administration and could prove effective if job descriptions were clearly defined. La Fédération des Femmes du Québec, through its regional councils, can form the necessary teams to help the Bureau carry out its information policy).
- f) A Bureau which will publish an annual report of its activities to be followed by an annual information session open to the public so that the staff may take into account women's comments and suggestions.
- g) A Bureau subject to review every seven years after consultation with its clientèle. It will disappear as a special organization the day that women's integration into society is an accomplished fact.

The study of an adequate structure for this Bureau cannot be made with the means now at our disposal. Moreover, we believe that it is preferable that the ways and means of setting up this body be worked out in collaboration with the government.

Powers and Jurisdiction

We request that this Bureau should have real authority and that its director be able to appoint his/her own staff. We believe that supervising the application of laws is one of the Bureau's essential tasks. We therefore request that everything be done, as soon as possible, to give the Bureau quasi-judicial powers. As an example, we request legal powers equal to those given to the Women's Bureau of Ontario.

Furthermore we specifically request the government to give the Bureau the following powers:

- The right to require private enterprises to provide information concerning their employment of women.
- The right to make spot checks to make sure that laws governing employment of women are respected.
- The right to refer infringements of the labour laws to the appropriate court, the right to receive a summary of the said court's ruling, and the right to appeal this ruling in a higher court.
- Access to relevant information gathered by the inspectors of the Department of Labour, and the possibility of making use of these inspectors' services.

- Access to all "ordinary" files of Quebec government departments likely to concern the Bureau, eg. female registration in continuing education courses, records of accidents at work, stays in psychiatric hospitals, use of legal aid, etc.
- The registration of all voluntary women's organizations.
- The publication of information booklets, and, after consultation with government bodies concerned, the publication of studies and reports.
- The right to send out questionnaires and undertake public enquiries, hold meetings and commission research.

BUDGET (suggested for the first year of operation)

a) Annual expenditure

Salaries	\$55,000.00
Director	
2 assistants	
2 secretaries	
Lease...600 sq.ft. at \$5.00	3,000.00
per sq.ft. per annum	
Printing and publications	20,000.00

Current expenditure

- Telephone: 4 lines, plus long distance calls	\$2,000.
approx. \$150.00 a month	
- Stationery	1,000.
- Postage	1,000.
- Books and subscriptions	800.
- Copying service	700.
- Travelling expenses	1,000.
- Sundries	1,000.
	<u>7,500.00</u>
TOTAL	85,500.00

b) Initial capital outlay

2 electric typewriters	\$1,400.
Adding machine with multiplier	400.
5 desks and chairs (2 for typists)	800.
4 filing cabinets	400.
2 bookcases	60.
Additional office furniture	1,240.
Sundries	200.

\$ 4,500.00

c) Special projects

\$60,000.00

TOTAL \$150,000.00

This modest budget takes into account the present difficult economic situation of our Province. We believe, however, that the Bureau, working to improve the lot of women in society, will thus be working for the betterment of society as a whole.

We therefore see this Bureau as a necessary investment whose cost cannot be compared with the benefits that will be derived from it by the population as a whole.