



LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

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Polygamists could find 'family-class' favour

When Immigration Minister Denis Coderre released new regulations in June affecting family-class immigration, he may have got more than he bargained for.

Officially, the regulations expand the definition of "spouse" to include opposite- or same-sex common-law partners. The changes were sought by homosexual activists who demanded that, for the purposes of immigration, foreign-based partners be treated as though they were married. However, the changes also appear to make it easier for the practitioners of a variety of other abnormal practices, including polygamy, to be recognized as worthy of family-class immigration status.

In fact, such cases have already worked their way through the system under a "compassionate grounds" provision of immigration law. Under the loophole, Winston Blackmore, the former leader of about 800 self-described fundamentalist Mormons in Bountiful, B.C., was able to win approval for three of his estimated 30 wives to immigrate to Canada from the U.S. in 1991.

Nevertheless, Mr. Coderre told reporters October 8, "The rules are very clear. An individual can sponsor only one spouse. Polygamy is illegal."

Illegal, perhaps, but the B.C. government refuses to press charges against Mr. Blackmore, on the grounds such a prosecution would not withstand Charter scrutiny. And while the rules allow only a single sponsorship at a time, it is not at all clear Canadians would be limited to sponsoring just one "spouse" in a lifetime.

"It is reasonable to assume from the new regulations that an individual homosexual or heterosexual could sponsor multiple

common-law partners over time," Canada Family Action Coalition president Roy Beyer says, "and that each partner, once landed, could sponsor more themselves. After all, none of the individuals actually has to have a legal relationship with each other anymore. It's blind stupidity, and it violates the intention of the family-class category."

Mr. Beyer continues, "When you try to accommodate every minority, you end up offending the majority, and that's absurd. We have an expectation that when people come to this country, they will respect the majority viewpoint, and that is basically a Judeo-Christian viewpoint which says we don't want a polygamous society here."

Opposition MP Jason Kenney sees a double standard at work. "It is completely inconsistent for secular liberals to argue traditional conceptions of the family have no place in society when it comes to homosexual marriage, but then object to polygamy, using traditional arguments."

The courts are to blame too. "When the Supreme Court invented a constitutional right to sexual orientation, a right based on sexual conduct, they opened the door

for polygamists, advocates of incest and others to claim the same status as homosexuals," Mr. Kenney says. "It was inevitable."

As for whether the government will close the loophole that has allowed such illicit immigration, Mr. Kenney declares, "I don't think they have the moral courage to take a clear position on this issue." ■



TIM ROTHEISLER

In brief

► As heritage minister, Sheila Copps is responsible for doling out hundreds of millions to the arts. But when the Bill Reid Foundation applied for \$500,000 to keep the late B.C. artist's collection in Canada, Ms. Copps bristled to a Liberal Party gathering in Victoria that the foundation has "a board of directors of primarily white Anglo-Saxon people," and, therefore, was not her first choice to maintain the collection.

But Ms. Copps' politically correct posturing (which she based on the fact some of Reid's ancestors were Haida Indians) backfired, and she ended up being labelled a reverse racist. The minister also missed the irony that, in denigrating powerful Caucasians who control ethnic art, she was, in effect, bad-mouthing herself. Ultimately, she changed her tune and approved the funding.

► Liberal backbenchers, perhaps emboldened by news the iron fist of leader Jean

Chretien will rust away shortly, are talking about making parliamentary committees a little more democratic. The election of committee chairmen is currently a matter of a public vote by committee members, meaning the Liberal whip can ensure that Prime Minister Chretien's anointed candidate always gets the job. Instead, the backbenchers propose a secret ballot for the chairman.

Ontario Liberal MP Carolyn Parrish told the *Hill Times*, "It is the one thing that could give