

# Federal bill recognizing same-sex spouses defeated

BY ERIN FITZPATRICK

OTTAWA (CUP) -- A private member's bill that would have changed the definition of the word spouse to include same-sex couples in all federal laws died in the House of Commons last week.

The proposed Bill C-239 was introduced by Bloc Québécois member of parliament, Réal Ménard.

"I'm convinced that there's something very discriminatory in our treatment of same-sex partners," Ménard said after the bill died on the House floor last Tuesday.

"The Canadian govern-

ment needs to accept that there are men who love men, women who love women, and that those people are in real, authentic relationships that deserve to be recognized."

In 1995, the government passed Bill C-33, which effectively outlaws discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. However, about 70 federal laws remain that still define spouses as a heterosexual couple.

"We've already recognized that we can't discriminate against gays, so the next step is to recognize their relationships as legitimate," Ménard said.

Because it was a private

member's bill, Ménard's initiative was not voted on, but only debated in the House of Commons for an hour.

Private member's bills are only put to a vote if the MP behind them can convince an all-party committee or the entire House that the issue merits a vote.

Both the Reform and Liberal parties opposed the bill.

Reform MP Eric Lowther defends his party's position.

"We look at the benefits that are there today for couples, and largely those benefits are there in recognition of the social contribution that couples make in procrea-

tion, and the rearing of the next generation of Canadians," he said. "That's in the public interest."

If the government is going to change the word spouse to include same-sex couples, Lowther said, it should first determine how the public interest would be served by such a move.

The effort to have same-sex couples recognized as spouses, however, didn't die with Ménard's bill.

New Democratic Party MP Svend Robinson, who supported the bill, says he plans to re-introduce it himself in the near future.

"It's a question of basic equality and fairness,"

Robinson said. "Gay and lesbian people are involved in committed loving relationships - I myself have had the good fortune of being involved in one for almost five years. And we're saying that our relationship should be recognized as equal, especially when opposite-sex common law relationships are recognized."

But it's about more than just recognition, Robinson says.

"It's also a question of justice. We pay taxes, we pay into benefit plans like the Canada pension plan, and we shouldn't be denied equality."

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