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Mounties, public differ on role of gays

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A Human Rights Commission poll which shows the public favors the hiring of homosexuals by the country's security service, is not being welcomed by the RCMP.

The survey, released yesterday, found 68 per cent of respondents thought self-acknowledged homosexuals with superior qualifications should be admitted to the service.

But Canada's security chief, Michael Dare, said last night there are no plans whatsoever to change the service's longtime policy of barring homosexuals.

Though domestic moods have apparently changed, the service's international flavor makes the use of homosexual agents risky, Dare said.

"It's not really a surprise (the poll results) . . . but attitudes may be different in other countries in which our people work."

Gays too vulnerable

Wherever they operate, Dare said, homosexual officers would be vulnerable to retaliation from the sorts of people they deal with in their work - retaliation that could be personally or professionally damaging.

"This particular job," he said, "demands the ability to be totally secure."

As far as the RCMP is concerned, the same holds for the force's other branches.

"A self-acknowledged homosexual is barred from the RCMP, period," Supt. John Bentham, the force's public relations chief, said last night.

The force views homosexuality as a "character weakness," Bentham said.

Public image to uphold

"Generally, the public expects the police to be free of . . . the entire range of character deviations."

Despite the poll results that indicate otherwise, Bentham said "to this point, we haven't found any overwhelming public support for the hiring of homosexuals."

Nonetheless, he said, the force would take a close look at the survey.

Only 25 per cent of those polled by the commission disagreed with the admission of homosexuals to the

RCMP; seven per cent were indifferent.

In fact, the survey showed, tolerance of homosexuality is more widespread in Canada than is tolerance of different political opinion.

Asked if a woman should be refused a government job because she belongs to an extremist party, 47 per cent of those polled agreed, 44 per cent disagreed and nine per cent were indifferent.

Limited rights

The federally-appointed human rights commission has no authority to halt discrimination based on political persuasion or homosexuality. Its power covers discrimination on

grounds of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, marital status and pardoned criminal convictions.

Among the 2,000 Canadians interviewed in 116 communities, seven per cent said they were victims of discrimination at least once in the past year.

Seventeen per cent of those cases were the result of social status, including income and educational levels. Other grounds for discrimination: 13 per cent age; 12 per cent female sex; nine per cent official language; six per cent handicap; five per cent race or color; four per cent ethnic origin; and less than one per cent homosexuality.

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