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Move to political right deplored  
by speakers at Laurier conference

A move in Canada to the political right was deplored by two speakers at the 8th annual conference of the Ontario Association of Sociology and Anthropology, held at Wilfrid Laurier University Thursday night.

Senator Lorna Marsden, a Liberal senator and professor of sociology at the University of Toronto, said the move may well erode the many gains made by women since the 1960s.

And Geoffrey Stevens, managing editor of the Globe and Mail, said his great concern was at the silence of the "moderate majority" as a swing to the right is engineered by an active minority.

In her keynote address at the opening dinner, Sen. Marsden said the threat to women by the new political winds can be seen in these statistics:

"Of the job gains in the past year, the increase in part-time jobs has been the most dramatic. And of the 47,000 new part-time jobs, 45,000 were occupied by women, while full-time employment decreased among women by 24,000."

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The New Right, she said, has been strengthened by union smashing of British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan, who put down the mineworkers and the airline controllers.

Many gains made by women and others, including more liberal laws and attitudes toward abortion, voting and civil rights and other gains, mainly by women, are endangered.

"What the New Right seeks to do," she said, "is to re-privatize many of these issues by rolling back liberal laws, squeezing women and minorities out of sectors of the economy and preventing the continuation of the privileges and rights won by the liberal movement."

Stevens, in his response to Sen. Marsden, said there are several elements in the New Right, including Bay St. conservatism which holds the government can't do anything right, an Elmer Gantry religious fundamentalism and a growing antipathy to big unions.

Another element, he said, was the presence of Toronto Sun lip-readers who hold that government by its very nature is bad and that no government is better.

"Basically, there has been a shift in the public mood and it's not a pretty shift. I liked it better in the 1960s." He was disturbed, too, to find that when he visited campuses and spoke to students, he was the most radical person in the room.