

Status of Women

to phone the Quebec speakers. The members of the advisory council were all set to hold this conference. The minister says he was then consulted about what his view was with respect to the conference. Mr. Speaker, I challenge the minister's version of the circumstances which took place. I now have information that prior to the time the minister says he was first apprised of these circumstances, namely, on January 5, 1981, a memorandum was sent to Doris Anderson from Hellie Wilson. It said, "Talked to Nancy Connolly—". Before I read the memo I must explain who Nancy Connolly is. She is the minister's assistant who speaks on his behalf. The memo reads:

Talked to Nancy Connolly yesterday. Minister wants regional conferences instead of national conference. Phoned Win.

I will deal with Win in a moment.

She thinks executive should discuss.

This memorandum indicates the minister's office initiated the discussion with respect to this matter prior to any discussion or any request for a discussion with the minister. If I am mistaken—and I do not believe I am—then the minister should bring forward facts to show I am wrong. He says he has an affidavit as to what happened at the meeting of the executive. He says there are these phantom documents which are somewhere in the possession of some unnamed lawyer. His defence relies on that premise.

Yesterday, in question period, I suggested to the minister that the honourable thing to do would be to stand in his place and suggest the whole matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. Then the affidavit could be produced. Evidence under oath could be given, as was done the last time that committee met. At that time we were able to get to the bottom of the issues, something which we will not be able to do here.

The fact of the matter is the minister has nothing but weak defences. He attempts to suggest that somehow these are affidavits which he is not prepared to disclose to this House. He is not prepared to table them. He is not prepared to give evidence under oath. There is only one conclusion that can be drawn when it comes to the question of who is telling the truth. That is that Doris Anderson's version is the correct one. The minister's version is incorrect.

This matter is causing serious concern to many women's organizations in Canada. The question of the credibility of the advisory council is of great concern to members on this side of the House. We want to see the minister produce the affidavit he talks about. We want him to bring it into the House.

● (2040)

Does the minister have the courage to table the affidavit in the House, or will this phantom affidavit be kept in his possession and in secret, undisclosed to anyone? When will the minister gain the courage to table this document in the House and to come before a committee of this House so that witnesses may be called and so that we may get to the bottom of what has exactly transpired. A very crucial issue is involved.

I have been informed that the secretary who took the minutes of this meeting of the executive which is the source of the dispute has been prohibited from speaking to anyone with respect to the taking of those minutes. She has been rendered incommunicado by the council members who remain. The council is disintegrating. Women's issues are suffering because of the serious damage done to the credibility of the council by the actions of this minister.

Miss MacDonald: It is intimidation.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: My colleague is quite right when she says that it is intimidation. The whole affair amounts to a scandalous interference into the affairs of an advisory council which represents women's interests in Canada. Why does the government not take the very reasonable suggestion put forward by our party, which is the basis of the recommendations of the royal commission chaired by Senator Florence Bird, who was appointed by the Prime Minister, try to restore some credibility to this group and have the council report directly to Parliament?

Why does the government not take the suggestions of the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean) and have a wide consultation with women's groups across this country to ensure that it cannot be said that an appointment is political or that appointments are made on the basis of political persuasion. Of what is the government and the minister afraid? Why do we have this situation where the minister, the Joe Btfsplk of this cabinet, is responsible for women's affairs in the course of cabinet deliberations? Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that you did not take out of my time the spurious and specious points of order raised by the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

In conclusion, I would like to help the minister do a good job. Unfortunately, we face a majority Liberal government which has been known in the past for its arrogance and for moving ahead without sensitivity. If the minister persists with his present attitude, with attacking the president, as he did on the CBC program at six o'clock this evening, and with his single-minded determination to wheel control over this advisory council, then he has only seen the beginning of a fight. We in the opposition will stand for the interests of women in Canada and we will fight hard for their interests.

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for flattering me when you called me Madam MacInnis this afternoon. It would be very appropriate tonight if Grace MacInnis, a champion of women and disadvantaged people, were here tonight. I know that she would speak eloquently on the subject and probably raise the quality of the debate somewhat. I would like to commend Doris Anderson, the past president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the staff and members of the council for their work. All of us should recognize that this group has made a considerable contribution, particularly in the areas of research and constitutional reform.