

*Status of Women*

constitutional resolution of October 6 and during the consequent committee hearings. I can tell you that as a woman one of the proudest moments I had in the past few years was to hear the presentation these women made before the constitutional committee. It was very well done. In fact, it was brilliantly done. There were people across the country who agreed that it was one of the finest presentations made to the committee. It was a very proud moment for me, and I think it was a very proud moment for most women of this country. Furthermore, the government listened. I listened very carefully and made the changes which the council of women felt were necessary.

**An hon. Member:** What about another meeting?

**Mrs. Erola:** There was no embarrassment about another meeting. I do not buy that line of "embarrassment" at all. Was it a positive meeting? Was it a meeting that was going to be useful in terms of timing since the proposal would be coming back to this House on the sixth? It was a question of timing. It was not a question of embarrassment. We are very proud of the amendments we accepted, amendments about which the women of this country feel very strongly. I do feel—

**An hon. Member:** You should feel strongly.

**Mrs. Erola:** —and should feel strongly about them, I agree. I find it difficult to accept the fact that the council of women was not free to act. The advisory council went into action immediately and made some very profound and good changes to that Constitution. They acted very independently at that time.

When we talk about consultation I might say that during this last couple of months I have had a number of occasions to call upon these women. I asked: Is this the way we feel about it? Tell me what you feel about it. A number of people have been to my office. I feel this relationship is jeopardized to some degree because I feel, as a minister, that I must have freedom to talk to these people and to feel the temper of the women in this country. As ministers we often do not have the opportunity to reach out, to test the waters, so to speak. We must have these advisory councils ready to tell us when we are moving in the right direction and when we are not moving in the right direction. I, for one, very much resent the allegations that have been put forth in this House. I do feel that the cause of women has not been served well by the actions of members opposite.

I suggest to hon. members that they examine what they have done—

**Mr. Nielsen:** What about your seatmate?

**Miss MacDonald:** The minister should examine what he has done.

**Mrs. Erola:** —and that hon. members examine what they think they should be doing in a very positive way.

We are looking to the women of this country for sound advice. We want them to come to these councils to say exactly

what they want to say and up until this time I feel they have been able to do it. All of that is now thrown into question and into doubt. I think it has been a very convenient vehicle for some people to mount what I consider to be unethical campaigns.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Nielsen:** Speak to the minister.

**Mrs. Erola:** The time has come for the women of this country to speak up and say there is something wrong when a number of women, a very few, can manipulate the situation to their advantage and in so doing, cause a great deal of damage along the way.

It is time that we had a second look at where the women of this country are going. We should support the Advisory Council on the Status of Women as fully as we can.

**Miss MacDonald:** And make them independent.

**Mrs. Erola:** They are independent. They are an independent group answering to a minister.

**Miss Jewett:** Answering to him?

**Mrs. Erola:** I will correct that.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mrs. Erola:** I should say talking to a minister.

With regard to the charges of interference on the part of the minister, I am personally satisfied that there was no interference. Indeed, if I may quote directly from the press release of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women for January 13, 1981, the council stated, with respect to the issue at hand, the following:

Sensing that the time of the planned February conference was no longer opportune, and feeling strongly that the conference ought to be rescheduled, the executive committee of the Advisory Council sought a meeting with Mr. Axworthy to discuss the matter with him. Mr. Axworthy agreed that the issues might get a better airing at a later date but stated that the decision was the council's to make and added "we can live with it either way".

That is a direct quote confirmed by the minister. The press release continues:

"It was clear, after speaking with the minister", said Win Gardner, Senior vice-president, "that the issues we wanted to discuss at the conference, such as jurisdiction of divorce and social services, would not be on the government's plate at that time and that therefore attention would be greatly diverted from these important issues".

The release added:

"At no time was cancellation of the conference even considered", said Win Gardner. "The matter of rescheduling is to be brought before the full council meeting next week, and the executive committee will of course abide by its decision".

We now are all aware that the council decided to postpone the conference by a democratic vote of 17 to 10. At no time was there interference from the minister. I am positive that is the way it happened, despite the gossips who said otherwise,