

not for the purpose of embarrassing the minister—the Lord knows he does enough to embarrass himself—but I should like to read the conclusion of this particular editorial:

In many ways, Manitobans are fortunate that their sole representative in the federal cabinet is an active and ambitious man. There is reason for concern, however, that if Mr. Axworthy keeps puffing himself up at his present rate, one day he will simply burst.

This is the minister's home town paper, a paper of long-standing Liberal persuasion. I am concerned about the minister, so I am trying to explain the error of his ways and to put him on the right track. Hopefully, after this debate he will stand in his place and do the right thing. I will tell him what he should do. What we have today is a situation where the minister is attempting somehow to answer this very precise and specific accusation. I think it is fair to say that it is, in a sense, an accusation that he has manipulated the Advisory Council on the Status of Women contrary to the best interests of that body and of women in Canada today. As the minister responsible for that council he has taken an unprecedented step by this manipulation.

In his defence he does not deal with the particular topic. No, he has decided he will take another tack. He will rise in his place and recite for this House his many accomplishments in this government with respect to women's rights and women's issues in Canada.

● (2030)

When the question period started yesterday, or possibly the day before yesterday, the minister must have been thinking that maybe there would be a few questions asked of himself and the Prime Minister with respect to this issue. So, before question period, down the steps trundled the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the minister responsible to the Prime Minister for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. He handed the Prime Minister an envelope which contained a list. The list, if we can believe, Mr. Speaker, was the list the Prime Minister tried to read into the record yesterday of all the great accomplishments of this minister. It was a self-serving document which was presented to the Prime Minister to defend the minister. The Prime Minister read it. Of course, it broke the place up. The place went into chaos. There was thigh-slapping and laughing and the Prime Minister was not able to finish reading it. I am sure if he wants to present us with copies we are prepared to have a look at it. But that is not what is at issue here.

I do not doubt the sincerity and the ambition of the minister. He wants to get ahead in Liberal circles. He wants to do a job which will lead to him being perceived as a Liberal leadership candidate. We want to ensure that he moves on and succeeds, since we think there is political advantage in it for us.

I want to say to the minister that the issue here is purely and simply: What has he done to the Advisory Council on the Status of Women? What has he done to the position of women across Canada through the action he has taken? I think these actions were taken foolishly and without serious consideration being given to the implications of women's interests in our

country. The speakers on the government side have stood in their places and complained because we are now in this debate. Somehow we in the opposition are to be held responsible for this whole mess. What an amazing proposition that is, Mr. Speaker.

I was not aware of the fact that the president of the advisory council was a paid-up member of the Liberal Party. I was not aware that she had been a candidate for the Liberal Party in the federal election. It certainly could not be said that the president was a person who was a political partisan in opposition to the government. This woman has said in public pronouncements that there was political interference with the operation of the advisory council. This is according to the record we now have, the minutes of the meeting of the advisory council.

They can flim-flam all they want about this issue. The advisory council was intended to be independent. The royal commission recommended that it report directly to Parliament, as opposed to a minister, but in its wisdom the government decided it should report to a minister. The underlying principle was that it would be independent.

The minister has broken the trust that he had with the women of Canada by interfering with a decision to hold a conference on the constitution of our country. The minister tries to answer the criticism by saying, "Well, of course, it really is a matter of timing, since now it would not serve any useful purpose for the advisory council to have a national conference on the constitution. Really, these issues are not on the plate of the government now. The issues have all been decided and the constitutional committee will now deal with these matters."

The fact of the matter is that while the advisory council made an admirable submission to the constitutional committee this conference would have been an opportunity for the council to have the benefit of a wide-ranging point of view from a number of women and women's organizations. And what is wrong with that? What is wrong with giving that kind of opportunity to the council, even though, as a result of the arbitrary time limit imposed by the government, it was obliged to make its submission before having had the chance to hear from the women of Canada?

The chronology will indicate that the planning went ahead as early as June of last year, with the minister's concurrence. The minister was to host a reception in September of 1980 when he would speak to the conference. Elaborate plans were made to hold this convention but it apparently had to be called off because of the translators' strike. Ostensibly, that is the reason why the meeting did not go ahead in September. That premise has been challenged by many women who were involved. They said there was an understanding with the translators that the conference would not be picketed. But be that as it may, it was decided to postpone the conference until February of this year. That was all done in the knowledge of the minister at the time.

Arrangements went ahead to hold the conference and Sheila Zimmerman was hired to organize it. Lucie Pépin undertook