

Status of Women

Mrs. Erola: These shots are at the expense of Canadian women. We talk about principles. There are always the accusations in the business world and in the world at large that women tend to take their marbles home when nobody wants to play any more. I contend that that is part of the issue which is at stake here.

I feel that the innuendo and gossip which have been injected into this entire debate have been, again, at the expense of a number of very credible women. Let us look at some of the women who make up the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Who are they and where do they come from? It is interesting to note that there are four teachers, a speech therapist, a linguist, a professor of sociology, a broadcaster, three communications personnel, an accountant, a city councillor, six nurses, a lawyer, a lay minister, community workers, and women with backgrounds in labour and in government. Are these women who are quickly and easily manipulated? Are these the kind of women, women who represent the women of this country, who would be subjected to manipulation and who would not think independently? I suggest that these are women of great achievement in this country and who act very independently.

Yes, there will be resignations. I expect that there will be at least ten resignations.

Miss Jewett: Are you asking for them?

Mrs. Erola: Certainly no one is asking for resignations, but certainly they are not unexpected. I do not think, as the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) has suggested, that there are thousands of women in this country who uphold the allegations which the hon. member has made. I think that there are a great many women in this country who are asking, "What are the facts?"

Mr. Nielsen: They are in the minutes.

Mrs. Erola: The minutes are in doubt because, as the hon. minister has just mentioned, an affidavit has been filed. I personally resent the way in which this whole case has been presented in this House. I feel that the damage has been devastating and that it will be a long time before the true status of the council is regained.

Mr. Nielsen: Let us have the affidavit.

Mrs. Erola: I think the affidavit can be presented. There are some things which must be said in this House on the role of an advisory council. As a minister I, too, have an advisory council and I too feel that I must meet with these people regularly and that exchanges must be as frank and as open as possible. Never at any time has it entered my mind or the minds of any of the members of that council that I would at any time attempt to manipulate their thinking or their positions. I feel that these councils must be available to us? If we wish to listen or to react positively to the people of this country, then we must be in a position to talk with them regularly and openly.

I would like to add that it was not the minister who requested the meeting. It was the council which requested the meeting in December and he complied with the wishes of the council. It was obvious that at that council meeting there was some frank and open discussion which is now being interpreted as manipulation. I feel that there are many, many instances in which I have met with members of my advisory council and our views have differed, and differed very greatly, but at the same time we have all walked away from that council table saying, "That is the way you see it and this is the way I see it".

I suggest that the minister faced exactly the same situation in the December council meeting. He walked away feeling that the views of all had been expressed frankly and openly, and that they were free to take their decisions based on that discussion. It is obvious that these people made some decisions. It is obvious that they, in fact, followed through and that it was a very democratic process. I feel very strongly that these women should be left free to run their organization with as little intervention as possible from this House.

I suggest to members opposite that the intervention which has taken place in this House has put the role of the council in doubt. I feel that these people must be able to contact and report to a minister very quickly and very easily. I feel that the advisory council which comes to my office regularly reacts very quickly and responsibly and tells me when we are doing something wrong. I can tell you that these women have been very quick to point out to this minister, as I and some of my colleagues in the House have, when something has gone awry.

This government, and particularly this minister who has been very sensitive to the needs of the women of this country, have made such progress. But I suggest that it is this progress which has brought on the attack from members opposite. I am very upset by what has happened, and there are women across this country who agree with my position. The general feeling in my conversations with women who are mostly in the business world and in the political world has been that the damage has been devastating, that we are acting "as women usually do", with petty bickering and arguing, which serves us no good. I suggest that we cease and desist immediately and that we get on with the business of seeing that positive and affirmative programs are put in place, programs which we are free to criticize and, if they are good, which we are free to support. It is time the women of this country began to work together. I thought, and I felt deeply, that we were doing just that. I thought that we were making progress with some of the female members opposite, that we had common causes. We must work together to ensure that we reach the goals that we share, but I suggest that has not happened. This very incident which has been brought to this House is going to do a great deal of damage in the long run to many women who have fought hard to bring their cause to the fore and who have done some positive things.

● (1730)

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women was invaluable to this government with its advice before the proposed