

*Privilege—Miss MacDonald*

holding of a constitutional conference on women's issues, the minister interferes not only with the council but also with the privilege of members of Parliament to receive and to question the government concerning that advice, as promised in the statement by the then minister responsible for the status of women on May 31, 1973.

I mentioned that the Advisory Council on the Status of Women is comparable to the Economic Council of Canada or the International Joint Commission in the way it proffers advice to government, but it is clear that it is not comparable in that it is the only such body whose recommendations are interfered with by the minister responsible, and whose members are manipulated. The Advisory Council on the Status of Women is subjected to different and, I would say, discriminatory treatment, which is a further affront to members of Parliament and to the privilege of members of Parliament, particularly women members of Parliament.

In reply to questions put by me yesterday concerning the accusation made by the president of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women that the minister and the government were attempting to influence the council into cancelling its proposed constitutional conference, something which I am sure the minister knows the executive committee on its own cannot do, the minister replied that the president's statements were "not accurate or proper". In other words, he refuted her charge. Since then the president has reiterated her stand with charges of manipulation and with the statement that, and I quote:

Mr. Axworthy's attempt at influencing the council marks the first time the government has interfered with the independent government-appointed organization.

We have two entirely contradictory views of what happened in that meeting of last Friday when members of the executive of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women met with the minister. We have the statements of the president of the council and those of the minister. Parliamentary rules dictate that I must accept the word of the minister with respect to his non-interference in this matter, except for his suggestion of regional conferences, but I feel that he is being less than honest with the House in detailing the role he played in this matter, that he has misled the House, and that indeed there is a possibility he may have deliberately misled the House, given the initial and subsequent statements by the president of the council.

● (1510)

This is no mere tempest in a teapot. It is a very serious matter when the president of an extremely prestigious council feels it may be necessary to tender her resignation because of recent manipulation of their organization by a federal cabinet minister. I feel it is a serious question of privilege and of my rights as a member of Parliament that there should be two such contradictory positions on this matter and that we, as parliamentarians, do not have sufficient information on what transpired at the meeting held last Friday with the minister to determine what type of influence the minister exerted. Those of us who are interested in maintaining the integrity and

independence of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women should have the right to be more adequately informed on the nature of the pressure which the minister has been charged with exerting on the council.

If you find, Madam Speaker, that I have a question of privilege in this matter, I would move, seconded by the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker):

That the matter of the statements made in the House on January 12, 1981, by the minister responsible for the status of women respecting directions given by him to the executive of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the significant discrepancy between the minister's assertions and those of the president of the council, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Madam Speaker, I too treat the statement made by the hon. member with a great deal of seriousness. I only wish that she would follow her own advice, that is, to make some effort to obtain the proper facts and information before she makes the kinds of charges she has just been guilty of suggesting. She has asked for third party confirmation as to who is right.

If I might, I should like to read into the record of the House a statement which was issued by the executive committee of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women just today. It states:

The executive committee of the CACSW is appalled by the action of its president, Doris Anderson.

The executive committee in December expressed concern about the timing of the constitutional conference.

Because of the successful presentation before the joint committee and the distribution of research papers on the constitution to the women of Canada, the issue of the entrenchment of rights had been properly and thoroughly dealt with by the advisory council.

Sensing that the timing 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—

**I underline "sought a meeting".**

—to discuss the matter with them.

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".

"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 over 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".

"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".

**An hon. Member: Author?**

**Mr. Axworthy:** That was a statement which was issued by members of the executive committee. The hon. member asked for confirmation. I suggest that unless she is prepared to say that the other members of the executive committee are not telling the truth, she will simply have to say that her statement and her allegations are wrong. I would ask her to withdraw the