

Oral Questions

minimum insurable hours for unemployment insurance from 20 to 15 hours per week—

Some hon. Members: Order, order.

Mr. Trudeau: The hon. lady opposite knows that 75 per cent of part-time workers are women. He has sponsored a \$1 million national ad campaign on women's employment; and he started a review of the unemployment insurance to, among other things, remove discrimination—

Some hon. Members: Order, order.

Mr. Trudeau: He started a review of immigration to help—

Madam Speaker: Order, order. I do want to remind hon. members that when a question is exceptionally long there is no reason why the answer should not be just as long if it is needed.

Mr. Clark: So much for an impartial Chair.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker: Order. This incident is really of no consequence. Let us resume the Oral Question Period. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has the floor.

● (1420)

[*English*]

ALLEGED MANIPULATION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS BY MINISTER

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, my final question is directed to the minister responsible for the status of women, who could take a look at the example set by Doris Anderson with respect to adherence to principle. The minister stated flatly the other day—it is recorded in *Hansard*—that “at no time was pressure applied”. In a documented chronology of events leading up to this fiasco the minister's assistant, Nancy Connolly, reported to Doris Anderson and to the executive committee on January 7 that the minister was determined that the conference must be changed and regional conferences scheduled instead.

In light of that documentation and in light of that evidence—and there is much more—I would like to ask the minister if he is still trying to weasel out of the charge that pressure has been brought to bear and that members of the council were manipulated by his office and therefore whether this whole matter should require his resignation from that particular responsibility.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, it may be of some interest to the hon. member to know that in reference to that particular document the members of the executive committee who were at that meeting have signed a legal affidavit stating that the document is full of misrepresentations. That affidavit has been deposited with a lawyer. I do not know what the document says. I have not seen it. Obviously, the hon. member was privy

to a confidential document to which no one else is, but I do know that an affidavit was deposited with a lawyer saying that the document was ill prepared.

I simply repeat to hon. members of this House that political pressure was not applied. The meeting referred to was requested by the members of that executive committee. They asked for an opinion; I gave them an opinion. I told them the decision was theirs to make and that we would live with the decision either way. That decision has been made by the executive committee and ratified by the entire council. That is a democratic process, and those who argue for the independence of the council should be reminded that the best way to preserve that would be to respect the decision made by a council of people who are very dedicated to the cause of women in this country.

SUGGESTED RESTRUCTURING OF COUNCIL

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo): Madam Speaker, in the light of the controversy over what has or has not been said in terms of decisions being imposed from above upon the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and in the light of the public reaction personified by Lynn MacDonald, the president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, which represents 150 women's groups across the country, when she said that her group will have to rethink its position regarding a government-appointed advisory council, would the Prime Minister give serious consideration to restructuring the advisory council and widening its representation so that women's groups across the country can rely on the council to be impartial in the opinions it gives?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I would like to answer the hon. member by saying that we would certainly be prepared to examine any improvements to the council which could be made, but I want to suggest that the council has already proved its real value through the work it has done in making major recommendations with respect to the constitution. Those representations were accepted by the government as part of our amendments to the charter. In fact, hon. members on this side of the House are the only ones who have strongly endorsed that particular plank and included it in our charter of rights, with which the opposition is in total disagreement. If anyone defends women's right, it is certainly this party, but we are prepared to meet with members of the council and discuss how their operations and procedures could be improved.

RECOMMENDATION THAT COUNCIL REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo): Madam Speaker, what the minister is saying is that the council will continue as a political tool. My supplementary question is addressed to the Prime Minister, and it is on a matter of policy in relation to the council and to this House. A 1970 recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was that the