

Status of Women

could come from the great broad strata of women in this society and not from the rather narrow social class they now come from. They should be working women, unionist and non-unionist, native women, immigrant women, and housewives. If possible, they should be elected and not appointed.

The minister had an opportunity in the year or so that he has been minister to get a more broad and representative council. He threw it away. For example, at least six recommendations came from the Canadian Labour Congress. Recommendations were made by excellent women such as Mary Eadie. Recommendations came from rights for Indian women, Mary Two-Axe Early. There were representations from Nova Scotia from women such as Alexa McDonough, an excellent woman in the field of social work.

An hon. Member: Now in politics.

Miss Jewett: Now in politics but was not then. Actually, there were a number of people. I could mention Lee Grills from my province.

Mr. Dupras: A Liberal.

Miss Jewett: Actually she is a Liberal.

Mr. Dupras: It is just that you surprised me.

Miss Jewett: She showed on the National Action Committee a greater interest, understanding and concern about women than one might expect with her political affiliation. These names were suggested. They are all active, energetic, intelligent, independent people, and they were all turned down. The cabinet did not accept any of those suggestions. In other words, the minister did have a chance. They put one woman on that council out of 29, one woman from the labour movement who, I understand, has now resigned because the minister refused to accept any of the recommendations from the Canadian Labour Congress.

The minister is not only guilty of downgrading and patronizing women, but of ignoring the women in this country who represent sectors of our society other than the very narrow band from which he made his recommendations to cabinet. Therefore it is important that we urge upon this House, specifically the government, to do those things requested in the motion, in other words, condemn the interference by the minister responsible for the status of women in the plans of the advisory council, persuading 17 of the 27 present to cancel the conference. Cancellation of the conference was basically to slow down the momentum which Anderson was bringing to the discussion, the elucidation of women's issues.

The request for the resignation of the minister goes without saying. We equally support the further recommendation in the motion that the council should report directly to Parliament. The structure of the council must be changed. It must cease to be a patronage body. With a patronage body you cannot always count on independent, spirited people performing the function of an independent council. We believe that is equally

important in order to preserve the strength which the just resigned president gave to the council.

We would make one important addition to the opposition motion. I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mrs. Mitchell):

That the motion be amended by adding, following "1970", the following words:

"and that the membership of the council be appointed or elected by and from the organizations in this country actively involved in women's issues."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): I thank the hon. member for having provided the Chair with a copy of the amendment. The Chair finds the amendment to be in order.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I rise with a degree of interest and anticipation to join in this debate. I very much welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue of the status of women, in this House. I found it somewhat disappointing, having spent almost two full days in this House just before Christmas defending the estimates of my department, that in some 16 hours of debate only 40 minutes were spent discussing women's issues. Therefore I am glad to see that the opposition members have now discovered the fact that women exist in this country and that they are now prepared to bring the issues forward. They obviously intended to bring their motion forward during this period of zeal and interest. Therefore it is important that we have an opportunity both to discuss the issues and to set the record straight.

The tone of the debate was probably set by the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean). When he concluded his remarks he said, "in light of these rumours and allegations". That very much summarizes the exact nature. The basis upon which the case is being made by members of the opposition is exactly that, rumour and allegation, and not much in the way of fact.

I thank the hon. member for Waterloo for clearly defining for us the source of his argument and the arguments his colleagues will be raising. Rumours and allegations are certainly no stranger to politics and no stranger to this House, and certainly no stranger to the issue which has emerged over the past four or five days.

I welcome this opportunity to set the record straight. Perhaps the hon. member for Waterloo, an honoured and respected member of this House, will be prepared to change his mind once we get away from the rumours, allegations, mythologies, innuendos and forms of character assassination which have coloured this debate, and get down to some of the basic facts as to what has taken place, the role of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the objectives, goals and concerns of this government as far as women in this country are concerned.

● (1630)

I am sorry the hon. member for New Westminster-Coquitlam (Miss Jewett) is not able to spend some time to stay with us, because some of my remarks may be addressed to her.

An hon. Member: I am just having a smoke.