

Status of Women

On January 6 Doris Anderson returned and found out what the minister suggested. The chronology indicates:

Doris Anderson phones Nancy Connolly, the minister's assistant, and explains that cancelling for a second time would be extremely damaging to the credibility of the council. Nancy Connolly says the minister seems determined. Doris Anderson asks to meet him.

In fact, it was decided that the whole executive committee would meet with the minister. They asked to meet with him not because they wanted his advice which they could subserviently follow—do not put them in such a patronizing position—at least that was not the expectation at the outset. Rather, they wanted an explanation as to why the minister should have unexpectedly interjected his determined and different course of action into an already planned conference. After all, at least some of them were mature, could make up their own minds and were used to operating in an independent council up until then. It was only natural that they should ask for a meeting with the minister. The documented chronology bears that out.

On January 9 the chronology indicates:

The executive all agree to listen to the minister present his position. They will point out the problems for the council if the conference is postponed again. Then after the meeting they will decide what action to take.

● (1710)

So, they met with the minister on January 9. And what was the result? I think the minutes of that executive meeting speak for themselves, as do the results. I wish to read from the minutes of that meeting on January 9. I read from the unedited, unrevised transcript of the proceedings of the executive committee of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I quoted from it in part yesterday, where the minister strongly suggested to the advisory council members that the conference on women and the Constitution be cancelled because the timing was bad, because the conference was being held at the same time that the charter of rights would be tabled in the House.

Second, he said, it would be an embarrassment to the government. That was at this meeting. And the members decided after these suggestions, this determined effort by the minister, that they would poll the members of the executive committee to find out how they reacted to his suggestion that the conference be postponed. I will read the statements of each of the members. Win Gardner, a member of the executive committee, said:

My reasons for voting for cancelling the conference on women and the Constitution has nothing to do with the fact that the minister is a dear and close personal friend of mine. I am voting for cancelling the conference because we looked like fools the last time and I am not ready to look like one again and put our minister in an embarrassing situation toward his government.

Joanne Linzey stated:

I agree with Win and vote for cancelling the conference.

Florence Ievers stated:

I say that it's about time that we start playing games the same way the government plays games. We should start being nice to them. So if this conference is going to be an embarrassment to them, let's play it their way and cancel it. I vote for cancelling the conference.

Hellie Wilson stated:

I don't wish to embarrass our minister so I vote for cancelling the conference.

Lucie Pépin, at some length, stated:

I thought we are doing what we are told. I think it is about time that we learn how to do things. This is my personal way of thinking. We have a minister. We are supposed to advise him. We try to do things our way. The way we are doing things was not very effective. We have to take into consideration we have made mistakes and we have to make compromise and start to listen.

Further on in her statement she said:

I am voting against having our meeting in February. We must keep our mouths shut, no press releases until we definitely know something.

Those statements are from the minutes of the meeting. They are exact quotes from the people who spoke at the executive committee meeting after they had met with the minister and listened to what he had to say.

Mr. Axworthy: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is asserting that this is a record from which she is reading these alleged comments. It is not as she states, since these statements have been challenged by a legal affidavit which claims false statements and misrepresentations have been introduced into those minutes. I think it would be proper for the hon. member to recognize that her so-called statement of record is not a statement of record but one which is substantially challenged by five of the six members who were at that meeting. They have filed an affidavit to that effect.

Mr. Nielsen: Why did you not produce it when you spoke?

Miss MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I know that anyone can produce an affidavit. I have not seen it. I could take out an affidavit saying that I jumped off the top of the Peace Tower this morning, but it would not be true. I am not sure just what to attribute to that affidavit.

It is quite true that, if the minister was so interested in the affidavit, and so interested in trying to discredit the document from which I spoke, why did he not address himself to it and produce any affidavit, if he could do so? I know that the minister gave advice. The people who gave in to that advice, who kowtowed to the minister, have now probably taken out an affidavit. They kowtowed once and they will probably do it again. That is what I have been trying to point out—people will give in to pressure.

What is truly disturbing about these events is how easily some of these people were manipulated. They reneged on their commitment to the women of Canada to hold a constitutional conference. That is what happened. Fortunately, there was one who would not renege, one who put principle ahead of political partisanship. That person is Doris Anderson. She assumed her role, her responsibilities, and adhered to principle in the face of pressure. That is what the minister has not addressed.

As I said yesterday, what is at stake here is not individuals, whether it be the president, the minister or the members of the council, but the future of the council itself. At stake is the existence of the council, its right to exist as an independent body, free from political manipulation. The problems we are trying to address in this debate are more far-reaching than this