

*Status of Women***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLYALLOTTED DAY S.O. 58—ALLEGED INTERFERENCE WITH
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. McLean.

That this House condemns the blatant interference by the minister responsible for the status of women in the plans of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women to hold a constitutional conference, demands the resignation of the minister, and urges that the mandate of the advisory council be changed to enable it to report directly to Parliament, as recommended by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970.

And of the amendment—(Miss Jewett) (p. 6464).

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, first I say to the hon. member for New Westminster-Coquitlam (Miss Jewett) on behalf of my party that indeed we accept the amendment to our motion which she put forward. In fact we are glad to see it incorporated in the motion.

Then I should like to turn my attention to the minister who finished his remarks by saying that he did not want to run the advisory council into the ground. May I say to him that he certainly made a good beginning at doing so. He certainly has caused a great deal of concern in the country among men and women as to what his actions have perpetrated in the last number of days.

The minister tried to defuse the issue by referring to a questionable list of achievements. I would say they fell more into the category of rumour and allegation than anything I have heard here this afternoon. Perhaps the achievement for which he will be longest remembered by women across the country is the fact that he pressured the advisory council into a position where the chairman of the council was forced to resign. That is the achievement for which he will be most noted; that is the achievement which has caused anger up and down the country. Certainly I for one am angry, and I do not think I am the only woman in the country who is angry about it. If the minister has not felt or heard that anger, then he is more insensitive than I thought.

Seldom have so many women been united in their condemnation of a minister of the Crown and in their support for a highly-respected public servant. Seldom, if ever, has a so-called independent advisory body been dealt such a devastating blow to its credibility. We see events pile on events. Today we have seen the resignation of three more members of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women—

An hon. Member: Name them.

Miss MacDonald: They are members of the research staff, members involved with the advisory council. The reason was that they can no longer stomach the minister's interference with their activities or the government intimidation which is also part of the whole fiasco of recent days.

Today, yesterday, and all this week, we have seen hundreds and thousands of letters, telegrams and telephone calls pouring into Ottawa from women and some men all across the country offering their support for Doris Anderson, and condemning the minister. Members have referred to these, and in case the minister has any question I will give him an example of some already received from hundreds of women, and from organizations representing hundreds of thousands of women who have been appalled and angered by what has taken place. He will be pleased to know that there is even one from the vice-president of the Willowdale Federal Liberal Association.

Miss Jewett: Good.

Miss MacDonald: They will be coming in the thousands. I warn the minister that the response from women has only begun. The minister attempted to put up a defence. Since this issue broke all he has been doing is seeking to defend himself, because he has no other role but to try to defend himself from something in which he has committed a very grievous error. The minister knows that he has interfered with the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. He knows he had jeopardized the very *raison d'être* of the council or its very mandate for existence, that of proffering independent advice on issues related to women.

The proof of this can be seen clearly in the chronology of events which led up to the final cancellation of the advisory council conference on the Constitution. It was scheduled for last September and postponed because of the translators' strike; then rescheduled for February 12 and 13. On December 12 the minister agreed to host the reception and luncheon at that conference. He was well aware of the conference dates at that time, and he did not seem to think then that the conference needed to be cancelled or would be embarrassing. Even if there was any doubt in the minister's mind, certainly there was no doubt in the minds of council members, not even on the part of the executive committee.

According to the documented chronology, it was full speed ahead and all systems go, until, of course, the minister decided to lower the boom. The council members were "advised" to revise the already well-advanced plans for its constitutional conference. But this advice did not come from the minister or his office until January 5 after almost a month of preparation had elapsed. What is more, the advice was not sought; it was given in that special way that ministers have of giving advice. It originated in the minister's office. It was not requested by the chairman or the council. It was tossed out like a spanner in the works from the powers on high.

On January 5, the chronology indicates the following:

Doris Anderson is away. Hellie Wilson speaks with the minister's office and reports that the minister wants regional conferences instead of a national conference. Hellie Wilson stops the press releases and letters from going out as scheduled.

There was no meeting, no vote, not even the courtesy of a telephone call to the chairman; only quick and total obedience expected by members of the council—follow along. Perhaps obedience is a sad word to use, but that is what transpired.