

That is the constitutional conference sponsored by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women to be held in mid-February. The press release on which the minister based his remarks was authored, I understand, by a member of the executive committee of the advisory council, Win Gardner. By the way, Win Gardner happens to be a constituent of the minister's, but I dare say that the statement itself was dictated in the office of the minister. The point is that the minister claims now that the concern about the timing of the constitutional conference was expressed last December. Since he made that claim last Tuesday, his remarks have been challenged by the president of the advisory council, Doris Anderson, who, in an interview on "Canada AM" last Wednesday morning, made this statement:

There is nothing in the December minutes of the council that could substantiate that statement.

In other words, she was expressing a view which is quite contrary not only to what the minister claimed but to what was claimed by Win Gardner, a person who just the previous week had sent out a notice to some 3,000 women in Manitoba stating that the conference was still on in February. Her statement, which appeared in the Manitoba ACSW newsletter of January, made this comment:

The conference on women and the constitution, sponsored by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, will take place in Ottawa on February 13 and 14.

My question of privilege is that since my original question was raised last Tuesday, with which you dealt, Madam Speaker, the minister's statements have been questioned even more, and even directly refuted. The minister claims, and of course the House is asked to accept his claim, that the question about the timing of the constitutional conference which was scheduled for February was raised last December, that it came to his attention and to the attention of the council last December. But that is not reported in the minutes of the meeting of last December. A leading public servant, the president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, who is responsible to the minister and to this House, says that there is no truth to the minister's statement and nothing which would substantiate his claim that the conference was called into question last December, that the plans of last December were that the conference was to go ahead.

In fact, the plan, as recently as early this month, was to go ahead with the conference. Surely it is up to the minister to provide such proof, if indeed he can do so, that the conference was called into question last December. As members of Parliament we are entitled to that proof, if the minister can produce it, which I very much doubt.

Both the minister and the president of the advisory council must answer to Parliament. We are being asked to look at a question on which two points of view are being put forward and in which the positions which have been taken are increasingly divergent. That divergence of difference of view is being further developed and exploited by one of the members of the advisory committee to the council, a Miss Hellie Wilson. I will refer to her in the same manner as the member from New Westminster did because she has been acting, unofficially, as

liaison between the minister and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

I learned within the last few days that Miss Wilson has taken upon herself, perhaps at the urging of the minister, to phone members of the advisory council and to tell them before their meeting later this week that, in the words of one of the members of the advisory council who had been told by Miss Wilson, "Doris Anderson must go." That is the kind of comment which this woman, who is acting as unofficial liaison between the minister's office and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, is making.

What is really at stake, in a matter of growing importance to a great many women across this country, is the credibility, integrity and independence of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. If the minister continues to attack the council and its president irresponsibly, as he has been doing, then he runs the risk, unfortunately, of bringing about the resignation of a valued public servant, and the risk of undermining, for all time, the credibility of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women as an independent body.

Therefore I would ask that this question of privilege, because of this new conflict which has arisen since Madam Speaker's ruling, between the minister and the president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, be considered in the light of the president's probable resignation if this kind of attack continues, in the light that we do not have full information as to the arguments on both sides of this case, in the light that we as members of Parliament are becoming increasingly involved in this spectacle which this minister is creating, and that, therefore, the whole matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Madam Speaker, the question of privilege raised by the hon. member does not deserve a very lengthy reply as there is one basic flaw in her argument. The question of privilege seems to be based upon a statement which I made in the House with regard to a meeting in December. I was quoting from a statement which was issued by the entire executive committee of the advisory council. It is not my assertion, but an assertion which was written in the statement which was released publicly, not by one person but by the entire executive committee.

I was simply repeating that statement in the House. I was very careful to make sure that the statement was put in quotation marks so that hon. members would understand clearly that I was simply substantiating my remarks to this House. If there is a question of validity about the accuracy of that statement, I would simply reiterate what I said before, that it is a matter which should be resolved between the president of the advisory council and the executive committee. It is the executive committee which decided against the proposal and which took its decision, and it is the president of the advisory council who raised an objection to that decision and who made the charges, not me.