

Status of Women

Communications in support of office automation. Letters have been sent to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) soliciting his support for the implications of this action on women in the work force, most of whom are in clerical positions and who see an end of their employment. There was an acknowledgment today that a letter was received, one month and one week since its writing.

I mention these facts in support of the motion today which calls for a change, and to suggest that there are many things to indicate that there is not the caring or commitment there is in the words and speeches made by the minister from time to time since assuming this responsibility. The resignation of the president of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Doris Anderson, and the resignation in these last days of several members of the board, members of the staff, and the questioning across the country of the allegations that the minister has applied undue political pressure to the council, instead of encouraging women to voice their views on the constitution, regardless of what may be the cost in terms of immediate political deadlines, suggest that the current crisis will undermine the confidence that women's groups have had in the past in the council, and that the issues which the council seeks to serve will be undermined.

Women's groups across Canada have lost confidence in the minister who is supposed to have their best interests at heart. There is also a need, as our motion suggests, to depoliticize the council and restore it to its former position of expertise and prestige in our communities. One of the considerations which might be given to the representative nature of that council in advising government and Parliament, is that in the future nominations for the positions on the council be solicited from women from coast to coast, that these nominations be reviewed by an all-party committee which would then make recommendations to the minister, allowing some latitude for the geographical decisions and other decisions which would be part of the final decision. This would help to restore confidence in the council as an independent, impartial body with considerable stature and effectiveness.

Such a move would return the council to its original direction and mandate, as suggested by the royal commission, that the council report directly to Parliament. We are suggesting that this council is not an advisory group to a minister on a specific subject, whether it be sports, business or some related interest group, but, rather, a council which cuts across the life of Parliament and the life of the government.

Let us be reminded that there are deep women's issues involved in many of the departments of government which require a strong and committed advocate on behalf of the implementation of women's concerns, whether they be in the areas of employment, labour, regional economic expansion, justice, the Solicitor General's department, national health and welfare, veterans affairs, fitness and amateur sport, communications, consumer affairs, industry, trade and commerce, the Secretary of State's department, and immigration. They cut across matters of Indian affairs, international development, finance, national revenue, the Treasury Board, national

defence and external affairs. These are but a few of the interfaces in terms of the life of Canada where the concerns of women and their rights ought to be heard.

In light of the rumours, the allegations and the unrest, we urge that a change be made in terms of the spokesperson in the life of government who will represent these concerns. We also call upon the government to return to the recommendations of its own royal commission and see that, as is the case with the Human Rights Commission report and the Auditor General's report, the report of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women comes directly to this House. Therefore, I have moved, seconded by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald):

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.

Miss Pauline Jewett (New Westminster-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, we in this corner of the House support fully the motion introduced this afternoon by the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean). Indeed, I have listened with care and interest to his remarks and can say, I am sure on behalf of all members of my party, that we agree entirely with everything he has said in his carefully prepared address. We have an addition which we would like to make to the motion, but I will come to that in the course of my remarks. It does not take away anything from the motion but, rather, adds something to it.

One of the points made just now by the hon. member for Waterloo was with regard to the incredible advertisement which the minister responsible for the status of women had put into every major Canadian daily newspaper. I do not have the headline with me at the moment, but I remember it as vividly as I have ever remembered anything. It congratulated women for having "helped out" in the Second World War. This is the advertisement, under the jurisdiction of the minister responsible for the status of women, that women were in fact a reserve labour force, that women were a secondary part of the labour force, and still are. You would not talk about them having "helped out" if you did not think that was what they were going to do once again.

● (1610)

I suggest, therefore, that not only should the minister resign as the minister responsible for the status of women, but he should also resign as the Minister of Employment and Immigration if his view about the role of women, who now constitute 40 per cent of the labour force and in a few years will constitute 50 per cent of the labour force, is that of a reserve force. If his view is that they are people who help out in the employment needs of this country, then he should not be the minister of employment any more than he should be minister responsible for the status of women. It takes, to quote the minister, "a great leap of faith", also pointed out by the