

Status of Women

Mr. Clarke: The Prime Minister apparently did not learn anything from his one-time member for Vancouver-Kingsway, whom he referred to as "the hon. lady". She took particular issue with the Prime Minister, saying she had been elected as a member of Parliament without regard to sex; that she was not here as a lady at all but as a Member of Parliament. I am not sure she won her argument, but she did take issue with him. That was at least five years ago and the Prime Minister has not learned anything.

Miss MacDonald: Not on the issue of women. He just doesn't learn.

Mr. Clarke: I also want to refer to the words of the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) when speaking to the press today. He is quoted as saying that the only thing he regretted was that there was a "major issue made about a matter I felt should have been resolved by the council without all this publicity".

The obvious question that comes to mind is why is the minister afraid of the publicity if he does not have anything to hide? Was he worried because the council did not just take his suggestion, meekly fold its tents and go away rather than make a fuss as Doris Anderson did? Was the minister worried that his interference with the council would come out? He may have been thinking that if the constitutional committee had reported when it was scheduled to do so, on December 9, the advisory council would not yet have scheduled its meeting and he would not have had the problem. Perhaps that is what he was trying to hide. One cannot be sure with this minister and this government.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, let us reflect for a moment on the creation of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. In 1973, the then minister of labour, Mr. Munro, made a statement on motions in the House. That seems strange, Mr. Speaker, because nowadays statements on motions are always heard outside and not inside the House. Let us reflect for a moment. The minister said, and I quote:

The purpose of the council will be twofold: to bring before the government and the public matters of interest and concern to women, and to advise the government on actions that it deems necessary to improve the position of women in society. These terms of reference are purposely very broad in order that the council will have freedom to take whatever action it considers necessary. The council will also have authority to publish its reports, recommendations and statements. In this way the council will be in a position to keep before the public, as well as the government, the whole question of the status of women.

In reply Mr. Gordon Fairweather, then member for Fundy Royal in New Brunswick and spokesman for our party on that subject, said, again I quote:

The royal commission, after all, recommended in 1970 that the advisory council on the status of women should be established and report to Parliament. The government, unfortunately, ignored that good advice and took a different route by appointing what is, in reality, a committee that is to report to the minister. The results will enable us to judge who is right. Despite what the minister says, in my opinion the terms of reference he enunciated today are much too restrictive.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let us look back upon the incident which occurred in the House yesterday. The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) asked the right hon. Prime Minister whether there is a policy which prevents the council from reporting to Parliament as do the Auditor General, the Economic Council of Canada and the Commissioner of Official Languages. Mr. Speaker, he could have added a few more organizations, for instance the Library of Parliament, the electoral boundaries commissions for the decennial report, the internal economy commission, contested elections, the Economic Council of Canada, the Queen Elizabeth II Research Fund and the annual report of the Council on Official Languages. All those reports are tabled in the House, Mr. Speaker.

But what did the Prime Minister say? He replied, and I quote:

There are many different councils which advise the minister directly, such as advisory councils in trade, health and welfare, immigration and sports. They advise the minister so he can keep their advice in mind when introducing legislation.

I emphasize this:

—so he can keep their advice in mind when introducing legislation.

As I said, in 1977 the advisory council stated before the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration that the government had not consulted them about the unemployment insurance bill, a very important measure for women.

● (1750)

[English]

In the few minutes remaining perhaps I could add some positive notes to the debate. The government opposite often complains that we complain too much and do not give them the real answers. We showed them what the real answers were on many subjects.

The Prime Minister was being particularly, if not unparliamentary then certainly impolite in talking about the "might have been" policies of this side.

Let me run over a few of the things that were done by this side in the short time we were in government. Let me start out with a reference to what the Minister of Employment and Immigration said. He said we had done nothing in our time in government. The records show that 24,000 women were placed in jobs in the time we were in government, compared with the 10,000 this minister has put into jobs in a similar period.

During the first six months of the government of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition the profile on the status of women was greatly enhanced because of the very strong personal commitment of the then prime minister, the minister responsible for the status of women and several other ministers, most notably the minister of employment and immigration.

Increased resources were allocated to the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. In fact, the budget was increased by 89 per cent over the budget provided by the Liberal govern-