

# The Perpetuation of a Myth: The Anderson-Axworthy Affair

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**Berenice B. Sisler** was born in Winnipeg in 1924. She was a prominent and active volunteer with the church, the YWCA, the Liberal Party, and the University of Winnipeg. She received several awards for her work in the areas of family law and pension reform, including the Order of the Buffalo Hunt (1985), the Persons Award (1986), the YM-YWCA Woman of the Year Award for Public Affairs (1989), and a Doctor of Laws from the University of Winnipeg (1990). Her book, *A Partnership of Equals: The Struggle for the Reform of Family Law in Manitoba* was published in 1995. She was appointed to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women in 1980.

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## Abstract

A member of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) gives her account of events comprising the crisis of 1980-81. As an activist from outside Ontario, Berenice Sisler presents a different view than that of lawyers and the central Canadian women's movement. Sisler indicated that this account was written in 1997. She referred to Edward Greenspon and Anthony Wilson-Smith (1996) as having provoked it, and wrote in ink at the bottom of the last page "February, 1997."

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## Résumé

Un membre du Conseil consultatif canadien sur la situation de la femme (CCCSF) fait son propre récit des événements qui ont engendré la crise de 1980-1981. En tant que militante venant de l'extérieur de l'Ontario, Berenice Sisler présente une vision différente de celle des avocats et du mouvement féministe du Canada central. Sisler a indiqué que ce récit avait été rédigé en 1997. Elle a cité Edward Greenspon et Anthony Wilson-Smith (1996) comme les personnes ayant provoqué cette crise et a écrit à l'encre au bas de la dernière page « Février 1997. »

Someone once said that if you told a whopper and told it often enough, it would soon become accepted as fact. In my opinion, that is exactly what has happened with respect to the now infamous feud between Doris Anderson, the former president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and Lloyd Axworthy, the former Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. Misinformation about the affair continues to be circulated in many ways: by the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) in the film "For Our Sisters, For Our Daughters"; by writers such as Sidney Sharpe in her book *The Gilded Ghetto: Women and Political Power in Canada*; and in repeats of interviews with Doris Anderson (Armstrong 1991; Sharpe 1994).

My introduction to what was to become a most unpleasant interlude in the history of the women's movement in Canada came about when I was appointed to the CACSW as a representative from Manitoba. The appointment was made by Lloyd Axworthy for whom I had worked during the elections of 1979 and 1980. It was made not because I had worked for Mr. Axworthy (many others had done so), but because of my work in the women's movement, most particularly during the struggle to reform family law in the 1970s, an involvement recorded in a book I authored entitled *A Partnership of Equals* (1996). My involvement in the YWCA of Winnipeg, the YWCA of Canada, the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, and the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba was evidence of my concern for all issues of concern to women.

Prior to my attending my first meeting of the CACSW in the late fall of 1980, the council had undertaken "research on Women and the Constitution, as he [Lloyd Axworthy] had requested, and was prepared to move ahead with a high-level conference" (Minutes of the meeting of the CACSW held in Ottawa, June 9-11, 1980). At the June meeting, Mr. Axworthy had welcomed the council's commitment to prepare a report on women and the constitution, saying, "It was absolutely critical that women examine the issue from their point

of view, and [he] suggested that they would conclude that a strong federal government was in their best interests” (ibid). He offered to address a conference on the subject to explain his views. Ms. Anderson thanked him for his presentation, commenting that “the Council realized that in three months he couldn’t achieve vast changes, but that they looked forward to future progress” (ibid). (The Liberal government had taken office in March of 1980.)

At the Executive Committee meeting of the CACSW held on August 25-26, 1980, an in-depth discussion took place of the upcoming conference on women and the constitution scheduled for September 5-6. It was agreed that if the strike of government translators was not settled by 12:00 noon on Tuesday, September 2, all council members and conference participants would be notified of the postponement of the conference by telegram. This was subsequently done and I received a telegram signed “Doris Anderson President” which read: “Due to the translators’ strike conference on Women and the Constitution Ottawa September 5 and 6 postponed until further-notice.”

On September 9, 1980, Ms. Anderson informed those concerned with the conference that she was forwarding a copy of the background paper by Mary Eberts entitled “Women and Constitutional Renewal,” which was to have been released at the conference. She expressed disappointment that the conference had been postponed and explained that the CACSW, an independent council, could not “be caught in a crossfire between a union and the federal government” (Information release dated September 9, 1980, and signed by Doris Anderson). New dates for the conference were to be circulated as soon as they were established.

The *Toronto Star* (September 3, 1980) reported that the CACSW supported the translators’ demand for maternity and paternity leave but was concerned that the conference might be picketed. The Canadian Union of Professional and Technical Employees expressed surprise at this concern because it had notified the council that translation services would be provided and no picket line would be set up at the conference. The translators had been working to rule and holding rotating strikes across Canada since August 26 because the Treasury Board had rejected a conciliator’s report recommending 15 weeks maternity leave with 75 percent of salary and up to two or three days of paid paternity leave. Doris

Anderson was skeptical that the union could deliver on its promise to provide translators for the conference. She felt that the conference had to be postponed while the collective bargaining process was taking place and until it was settled. She feared that, since the government and not the union decided who would be assigned to work at the conference, management personnel would be sent to do the job. If this were done, it was more than likely that the union would picket. Bringing over 600 to a conference in Ottawa was an expensive undertaking and the risk of having the conference sabotaged was not one the CACSW was prepared to take.

Reactions to the cancellation of the conference were mixed. A memo from the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), October 1980, informed that NAC was planning a one day women’s conference on Persons Day, October 18, in Toronto, at which Lloyd Axworthy would be the guest speaker. The Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL) criticized the decision and interpreted the cancellation as a repudiation of the CACSW’s former position of support for the translators’ strike and “for those working for paid maternity leave” (Letter from Blowden Piercy, President of CARAL, to Doris Anderson, September 24, 1980). Ms. Anderson’s response clarified this erroneous interpretation, indicating that not only was the conference cancelled, but also the regular meeting of the council. She reiterated the support of the council for the translators’ stand on maternity leave saying she was unable to imagine why CARAL thought this had been reversed (Letter of Doris Anderson to Blowden Piercy, October 2, 1980).

On October 2, 1980, the [CACSW] president wrote to the Prime Minister expressing concern that the draft Charter of Rights did not protect women adequately. Her letter itemized the reasons for this concern and pointed out three areas needing revision: (1) the composition of the Supreme Court of Canada, (2) the transfer of divorce jurisdiction to the provinces, and (3) the entrenchment of human rights. The letter urged immediate revision of the proposed wording to guarantee Canadian women their “fundamental *human* rights to equality.” It included a working draft of an equality of rights clause and urged the Prime Minister to consider this as a top priority. In conclusion, Ms. Anderson indicated that she would meet with the Prime Minister at his convenience.

It was unusual procedure for the head of a body such as the CACSW to communicate unilaterally with the Prime Minister when there was a minister responsible for its area of work, and to do so without even sending a copy of the communication to that minister. A letter addressed to “Dear Member of Parliament” dated October 8, 1980, and sent to all MPs, was, with a few minor changes, a duplicate of that sent to the Prime Minister. Presumably this was how Mr. Axworthy was informed about the council’s specific concerns with the draft Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It was understood that this slight was the cause of some friction between the minister and the president. Doris Anderson had been the editor of *Chatelaine* magazine prior to becoming president of the CACSW and, no doubt, was accustomed to contacting whomever she pleased without regard for the protocol followed in government. I was to observe, as time went on, that communication of this kind was not one of Ms. Anderson’s strong points. It was apparent that she had not had the experience of working in volunteer organizations that many of the council members had had, where consensus was the order of the day. I recall one member saying that, when Doris ran as a Liberal candidate, she was difficult to work with as she was not amenable to taking direction. Joanne Linzey, the member from Yukon, in an interview for a Yukon newspaper, recalled “being stunned by the overriding will” of the president. She went on to state that “the full membership had to force her to present the employment committee’s recommendations to the minister.” Norrie Preston, a member from British Columbia and chair of the employment committee was quoted as saying that the president told her in June 1980 that she was not prepared to accept certain recommendations on employment because they might “annoy the minister” (*Victoria Times—Colonist*, January 28, 1981). Mr. Axworthy was also the minister of employment and immigration at the time. The committee had to remind the president that she was obligated to present the recommendations to the full council.

The CACSW consisted of 30 members appointed from the provinces and territories and headed by a president. It met quarterly in Ottawa where its administration was carried on. In between meetings the executive, or executive committee as it was called interchangeably, met to make decisions not requiring the approval of the full council. The executive consisted of

the president, three (later two) vice-presidents—all of which were salaried positions—and two nonsalaried representatives of the council members. The latter were elected annually by the council. At the time, the president, Doris Anderson, and one vice-president, Hellie Wilson, worked out of the Ottawa office. Win Gardner, the western vice-president, worked out of the Winnipeg office, and Lucie Pépin, the eastern vice-president worked out of the Montreal office. The two council representatives were Joanne Linzey and Florence Ievers.

At my first council meeting in mid-November, there was heated discussion over the information sheet entitled “Women, Human Rights and the Constitution ...the Next 100 Years.” This was designed with a detachable coupon designated as sponsored by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The coupon requested that it be filled in and sent to the CACSW office in Ottawa. It stated: “I BELIEVE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSAL TO ENTRENCH A CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS IN THE CONSTITUTION SHOULD INCLUDE;

- an equality clause which guarantees women “equality of *rights* under the law without regard to sex...”;
- specific mention of women among those groups for which “affirmative action” programmes may be allowed;
- directions to remove any law which discriminates on the basis of sex, whether the law discriminates against *all* Canadian women or only *some* of them;
- a clause guaranteeing the appointment of a representative number of women to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The information sheet had been sent out without the prior knowledge of the council. Several members had reservations about the guarantee of the appointment of a representative number of women to the Supreme Court. The executive had obviously had concerns as well. The summary of the decisions taken at their meeting of October 16 -17, 1980, states that “Following a discussion of the meeting on the Constitution and the fact sheet between the Minister, the President and three Vice-Presidents, it was decided that a tighter system be set up in the central office to make sure all correspondence, etc., be distributed to the Minister, the Executive, Council members, etc.” The vice-president in



the Ottawa office was to take “responsibility to establish and maintain this system and to keep the Executive and the members completely informed. Under the direction of the President, she would be responsible for contacting and informing the Executive when emergencies occur and would act as liaison with the Minister’s office to ensure that all correspondence sent to him is received and that he is kept informed of Council activities.” It seemed to me that some of the reason for this change in procedure was the bypassing of the minister by the president in her contact with the Prime Minister.

At the same executive meeting, the president announced that the council would present a brief to the Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution, and that it would probably be written by Beverley Baines with input from “the best possible legal experts.” The executive agreed that the fact sheet, the full text of the Baines paper and the Mary Eberts paper be sent to all members as preparation for discussion at the next council meeting. Constitutional experts would be present to give both sides on the question of entrenching rights in the Constitution. The president suggested that the minister attend “to present the government’s views.” The constitutional conference was to be rescheduled as soon as the translators’ strike was over.

The executive meeting summary records that the president suggested, and the executive as a whole agreed, that authors of papers to be released at the conference be given permission to release these to other conferences on the constitution organized by women’s groups. All the constitutional papers commissioned by the CACSW were in the process of being edited and would be presented in book form. It was hoped that this would be ready in both official languages by January 1981. In fact, it was not ready until March 1981 and was released on March 11, 1981.

The opposition in the House of Commons used the CACSW’s concern about the wording of the draft Charter of Rights and Freedoms to its advantage. Pauline Jewett, Member of Parliament for the New Democratic Party, both complimented and insulted the members of the council in a single paragraph of one of her speeches on the issue. Speaking in the House of Commons, October 23, 1980, she said:

Fortunately, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, every one of them a patronage appointed Grit,

had the guts a couple of weeks ago to stand up and say that, as far as women are concerned, this package will not do. For the first time in the many years that the Liberals have been appointing people to that council, they showed their independence.

Doris Anderson, herself a patronage appointment like many of us, while expressing appreciation for Ms. Jewett’s support, took umbrage at the statement. In a letter to Ms. Jewett, October 8, 1980, she said it was not fair “to question the independence and courage of the Council members,” adding that, “Over the years the Council had taken up many issues, a number of them *very* controversial, and made recommendations as it saw fit without regard to the government policy of the time.” She said that she knew of no single instance when the members had not been “dedicated and hard working for the cause of women’s rights.” She pointed out that the CACSW had “always enjoyed the support of *all* political parties...” This letter was copied to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

The general meeting of the full council that had been scheduled for September was rescheduled and held November 12-14, 1980. At that meeting one of the members, Lucie Lussier, objected to the lack of opportunity for input into the decision to publish the fact sheet on the constitution. The president reminded her that the executive had the power to act on behalf of the council when there was an urgent need for a decision.

The council heard three presentations by Beverley Baines, Michele Duple, and Mary Eberts on the wording of the proposed Charter of Rights and Freedoms with respect to the entrenchment of equal rights. Lloyd Axworthy was then introduced and was questioned by several members on many aspects of the proposed legislation. Later in the meeting, discussions took place regarding the process by which recommendations were drafted and approved by the members. Norrie Preston objected to draft recommendations being given to the members at the same time as research documents were being circulated. She felt that the committee system within the council should be strengthened and that the recommendations should come from members, rather than members being under pressure to deal with recommendations given to them and to deal with them in a short time frame.

I recall this meeting, my first, as having an undercurrent of dissension. On entering the meeting

room, I noticed that all the members from Québec sat together at the opposite end of the table to the president. Even though my linguistic ability in the French language was severely limited, I decided to join them. I felt uncomfortable with the visible division of the members. As I spent the time listening and observing, I could sense the discontent around the table. Frustration was expressed at the procedure that produced a CACSW position on the proposed constitution with little or no input from council members. The president explained that the importance of the issue, the tight time frame, and the inability to hold a general meeting due to the strike had all contributed to the way in which the decisions had been made. She did acknowledge the breakdown in communication between the members and the Ottawa office of which members complained. One member pointed out that the credibility of council policies depended on the link between members and the regions they served. Concern was expressed that both sides of the entrenchment of rights question had not been given at the meeting. The president defended the staff indicating that they had encountered "continual difficulty getting in contact with the members" (Minutes of the meeting of the CACSW, November 12-14, 1980).

As the meeting progressed, it became increasingly obvious that decisions were being made in the central office by the president on advice from the research department and that the members felt their legitimate role was being bypassed.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the president spoke of the "period of great stress" through which the council had recently come and expressed the opinion that the right decisions had been made and the right procedures followed. She indicated that it had always been her intention to increase the members' involvement in council activities. She proposed the dates of January 19-21, 1981, for the next meeting. No mention of a date for the constitutional conference appears in the minutes of the general meeting of November 12-14.

The executive met following the full council meeting primarily to discuss the criticisms by the members of the channels of communication. The president did not attend this debriefing meeting at which it was decided that executive meetings be held monthly for the next six months at least; that there be an account of the votes on all motions and resolutions taken at general

meetings; that at the next executive meeting there be a discussion of the role of the CACSW staff at general meetings; that executive decisions could not be altered without consultation with the executive.

On December 4, 1980, the president wrote to the minister to indicate that the timing of the conference on women and the constitution was "pretty well established...[to] take place at the end of February." The purpose of the letter was to ask the minister if he would agree to act as host in the same way he had planned in the fall. When the president heard from him, she would be in touch with the House of Commons staff regarding the arrangements.

In the summary we received of the executive meeting held on December 12, 1980, there is no mention of the conference or the dates of same. However, on December 15, 1980, I received a telegram sent at 12:21 Ottawa time which informed me that the postponed conference was now scheduled for February 13 and 14, that it would have the same agenda and speakers, and that details would follow. It was signed by the president. The president had conversed with the minister that morning according to a letter she sent him later that day. She forwarded a copy of the agenda of the conference as he had requested and indicated that there would be little change in it or the list of speakers. A telephone check had been carried out and most of the participants had indicated that they were able to take part on February 13 and 14. She went on to refer to their discussion about the timing of the conference. She felt that if the conference were not held on the "planned national women's conferences and major events. The schedule for late winter and early spring was 'extremely crowded.'" She believed that a conference "or some sort of similar project" would have to be held or women's groups would become "very discouraged and disillusioned." The letter concluded with an offer to discuss the matter further at the minister's convenience. This, in spite of the fact that telegrams had been sent to council members at noon that day confirming the date of the conference.

A memo dated January 5, 1981, from Hellie Wilson to Doris Anderson and marked "Rush/Urgent" stated that the vice-president had spoken to "Nancy C" that morning. Nancy Connolly, an assistant to Mr. Axworthy, had discussed the conference with the minister and he preferred that the CACSW hold a series of regional conferences rather than a national conference

in February. Ms. Wilson understood that the minister had mentioned this to the president and asked the president what she thought. (My notes indicate that regional conferences were rejected by the full council although there is no mention of this in the minutes of the November meeting.) The memo went on to say that Ms. Wilson had spoken with Win Gardner who agreed with her that the matter should go to the executive. It concluded with: "May we discuss?" The salutation to the memo: "Happy New Year!" proved to be an unfortunate one.

The executive meeting of January 9, 1981, at which the executive voted against holding the conference in February, began with a discussion of debriefing sessions of the executive after full council meetings. The summary in the form of "Discussions arising from the Executive Committee meeting" stated that "Doris Anderson suggested that since these [the debriefing sessions] take place right after Council meetings that everyone should have the time to cool off because people are very tired from the Council meeting and that can be disastrous." I recall being astounded when I read this. It suggested that either there was friction between the president and the other members of the executive or that the president was not comfortable with full council meetings or both.

The summary, which we received at the special meeting of the full council held on January 20, 1981, was based on notes of a secretary from an employment agency. We received the notes as well and they were entitled "Unedited, Unrevised Transcript of Proceedings of the *Executive Committee* of the CACSW, January 9, 1981. According to Secretary's shorthand notes." They were marked "CONFIDENTIAL." The matter of who had transcribed the notes into the summary form was to become a topic of speculation. They were filled with inaccuracies and revealed an inexperience with reporting motions. When a motion was moved, it is quoted as "motion carried." In one instance, it was stated that the "motion was not carried by anyone but was" without further explanation, although the seconder was noted. A tied motion was recorded as "MOTION STALEMATE." Another motion was recorded as being proposed by the president although the president was in the chair and ought not to have made any motions. A paragraph regarding the timing of the meeting with the minister was not clear about the sequence of events.

It read: "Meeting breaks up at 12 noon and the decision is taken to discuss the meeting which is to take place at 1 p.m. today with the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy over lunch." This was followed by "Between 2:10 and 2:30 p.m. members of the Executive wandered back in to the meeting room." These descriptions were left out of the summary form. As well as being unfamiliar with the recording of motions, the secretary recorded Lucie Pépin's comments incorrectly. The notes and summary both state that Ms. Pépin "demanded" that her request for more travel budget be recorded in the minutes. It is more than likely that she "asked" that this be done when one realizes that "demander" in French and "ask" in English are one and the same. As those of us who worked with Lucie Pépin can testify, her version of the English language, albeit delightful, often required translation.

The secretary had no difficulty with the discussion that took place after the lunch break and the meeting with the minister. This was due, perhaps, to the fact that she was not present at the meeting with the minister. Her notes state: "Since members were all talking at once this secretary understood out of the conversations that were taking place that the Minister had strongly suggested that the Conference on Women and the Constitution be cancelled because: a) the timing was bad because the Conference was being held at the same time as the Charter of Rights would be tabled in the House and b) it would be an embarrassment to the government."

The president then asked each member of the executive to state her position and her reasons for it. What followed in the notes is particularly interesting in light of Norrie Preston's question to Doris Anderson at the January 20 meeting. She asked if the president had indicated to the secretary what to record at the January 9 meeting of the executive and when to record it. The president replied that she had. This was omitted from the January 20 minutes and Ms. Preston requested that a correction be noted in the minutes to this effect at the June 1981 meeting of the full council.

The president's reasons for or against holding the conference in February were not recorded. Win Gardner was quoted as saying: "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 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 towards his government.” Her comments undoubtedly did the minister more harm than good. Although Joanne Linzey spoke at length, her statement was condensed into “I agree with Win and vote *for* cancelling the conference.” The minutes of the January 20 meeting record that she had “asked the secretary [of the January 9 meeting] to note in the minutes her desire to go on record as being opposed—not to the conference, but to re-doing it without referring the question to the members. The President had vetoed her request.” The minutes of the January 20 meeting further record that “The President explained that a decision had been made in the past not to include in the Executive minutes the names of those who had voted against motions or their reasons; because some past members had abused this privilege and it had become too cumbersome.” Presumably she had forgotten that, at the executive meeting of January 9, she had requested each executive member to “state her position and her reasons for it” (Secretary’s notes).

Florence Ievers’s statement is recorded as: “I say 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 agree with Win. I vote *for* cancelling the conference.” One wonders if she was aware that her comments were being recorded. Hellie Wilson categorically denied the statement attributed to her, viz. “I don’t wish to embarrass our Minister so I vote *for* cancelling the conference.” The notes then indicate that Lucie Pépin asked that her statement be taken down verbatim. It is puzzling that while Joanne Linzey’s and Hellie Wilson’s statements were one sentence conversations, those of Win Gardner, Florence Ievers, and Lucie Pépin seem to be more complete. That of the eastern vice-president was obviously a confusing one to the secretary. At the January 20 meeting, Ms. Pépin stated that her reasons for voting against holding the conference in February were not included in the secretary’s notes. She denied saying that the council did as the government wanted and, indeed, had said the reverse. When one reads between the lines, as one often had to do when grasping Lucie Pépin’s English, she obviously had concerns about the channels of communication between the council and the minister and with the members themselves. Urging change in this respect she said: “We must

try to work as a team and we don’t play as a team” (Secretary’s notes).

No motion to cancel the conference was recorded in the summary of the executive committee meeting of January 9 although it was recorded that five voted for cancelling and one voted against cancellation. Again one wonders what procedures were followed in the executive committee as the chair of a meeting ought to vote only to break a tie. In the secretary’s notes, a motion to cancel the conference was made by Lucie Pépin and seconded by Florence Ievers but no result is recorded.

The president then proposed that no press release go out regarding a conference in February. Joanne Linzey said Doris Anderson had three options at that point: “She could have refused to accept it [the executive decision]; she could have insisted on polling the membership; she could have issued her ultimatum. She did none of these things. She asked instead what we should do about a press release.” At that time, only the members and about 15-20 speakers had been notified of the February date. There was no need to issue a press release but the president insisted on a motion. A motion by Win Gardner on the wording to be used when explaining the cancellation, viz. that the date of a future conference would be decided at a full council meeting, resulted in a tied vote.

The meeting of the executive concluded on the Friday and by the Monday, the president, without consultation with the executive or members of council, sent out letters and registration forms indicating that the conference had been rescheduled for February 13 and 14. I received mine, dated January 12, 1981, on January 16, 1981. It was sent to me, not as a member of the CACSW, but as a member of the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women. That same morning the president went public and announced that she would defy her executive and go ahead with the conference “Unless the full Council decides to cancel...” (CACSW media release, January 12, 1981). She said she was “personally shocked that the executive interpreted a suggestion from the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, that our conference might be slightly embarrassing to the government, as a valid reason to cancel this conference...In the history of the CACSW, I know of no other instance where an executive has tried to cancel a clear Council commitment on such flimsy grounds,



or where a government has attempted to influence the Council's plans so directly." Doris Anderson's initial ambivalence regarding the actions of the minister—was it a "suggestion" of the minister or "influence" by the government?—was to become a vindictive charge of interference. In an interview with Barbara Frum on "As It Happens" that evening (January 12, 1981, 6:30 pm), Ms. Anderson described the political pressure as "the mildest that you can imagine." During the interview, the president expressed her concern that the council would lose credibility if the conference was postponed. Certainly the brouhaha which she had generated by her media release would have been a contributing factor were that to happen. She claimed that: "One of my biggest problems since I took over this job is to give the council credibility and maintain an independent status." She chastised her executive for "caving in so supinely to a mild suggestion from the federal minister."

On that same day, I received two telegrams: a short one sent at 12: 22 EST informing of a special meeting of the CACSW [on] January 20, 1981 to discuss the decision of the executive; and a much longer one sent at 14: 35 EST. The latter turned out to be a duplicate of the president's media release.

At this point, partisan politics reared its head and the opposition in the House of Commons had a field day. Flora MacDonald, a Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament, informed the House that "Mrs. Anderson has charged that the government is pressing the advisory council to cancel its constitutional conference..." (*House of Commons Debates*, January 12, 1981). She asked Lloyd Axworthy if he was afraid the conference would embarrass the government. The minister replied that it had been his idea to hold the conference in the first place; that he had recommended the conference to the council; that he had met with the executive at their request; that he had told the executive that it did not matter one way or another what they decided with respect to the date of the conference but that "it might be preferable to hold meetings on a regional basis so that a broader range of women could be consulted" (*ibid*). Ms. MacDonald then accused the minister of charging Doris Anderson "with fabricating the document which was released earlier today" (i.e. the president's media release). In a further attempt to embarrass the minister, she made a motion in the House of Commons the next day demanding that the minister refrain from exerting

further pressure on the CACSW. The motion was not agreed to.

That same day, Pauline Jewett, who was known for her caustic comments, accused the minister of "continual criticism" of the CACSW's constitutional proposals and named one of the vice-presidents of the council as someone who "aided and abetted" him in interfering with the conference. She further suggested that he be "tarred and feathered." In her turn, she moved that he be stripped of his responsibility for the status of women; that the executive members who had aided and abetted him be asked to resign from the council; and that the House support the efforts of the council and its president to hold the conference in mid-February. This motion also failed to gain approval.

Two points are of interest here. Firstly, the full council had not met to make its decision in the matter, and secondly, while chastising the government for interfering with an independent council, Ms. Jewett was calling on the House of Commons to do so.

The following day, Flora MacDonald rose on a question of privilege requesting that the statements made by the Mr. Axworthy in the House on January 12 "respecting directions given by him to the executive of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the significant discrepancy between the minister's assertions and those of the president of the council, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections." Mr. Axworthy responded by reading into the record a statement issued by the executive of the CACSW that day. It stated that the executive was appalled by the action of the president of the council. The executive committee had expressed its concern about the timing of the conference in December. [At the January 20 meeting, listing her reasons for postponing the conference, Lucie Pépin said she had made her position known to the president the evening of January 8, before the meeting with the minister on January 9.] The release from the executive further stated that the timing of a February conference was no longer opportune as the issue of the entrenchment of rights had been "properly and thoroughly dealt with by the advisory council" by its successful presentation before the joint parliamentary committee; that, because of the government's agenda at that time, issues such as the transfer of jurisdiction over divorce would receive a better airing at a later date. At no time was cancellation of the conference even con-



sidered. The statement of the executive of the CACSW included the statement of the minister that “we can live with it either way.” The release noted that it was the executive which sought the meeting with the minister and that the decision about rescheduling the conference would be made by the full council the following week (*House of Commons Debates*, January 13, 1981).

Mr. Axworthy suggested that Ms. MacDonald would have to recant unless she was prepared to say that other members of the executive of the CACSW were not telling the truth and asked her to withdraw the statement she had made because it was unfounded. He continued, saying that the matter was a concern of the president of the council, its executive and members. He pointed out what many came to realize as time went by, that “Mrs. Anderson had her own desires or ambitions overturned by the executive committee. She obviously felt compelled to take some fairly extreme action to deal with them.” He went on to say “I do not think it is a matter which should be used for partisan reasons. What really is at stake is the integrity of that council, and that is a question which should be decided by that council and should not be brought into the forum of partisan politics as the hon. member has done.”

Pauline Jewett then took up the gauntlet and accused the minister of an on-going undermining of the council, and particularly of the president. She called “some of the vice-presidents there...total patsies” and named one, Hellie Wilson, “a mole” (*House of Commons Debates*, January 13, 1981, 6141). She charged that “No one wanted her on the council, not a single member. She was put on it because the Liberals wanted to have a mole there whom they could trust to do their bidding.” Her description of Ms. Wilson as “an otherwise very agreeable person” did little to soften the blow. The member’s vituperative outpourings, which were rambling and incoherent at times, were brought to an end by the speaker because “the hon. member is stating things which should be followed by real charges” and was “going beyond what is parliamentary.” The partisan attack on the minister was then carried on by Joe Clark, the leader of the opposition.

Elizabeth Grey had added fuel to the fire that morning on CBC Morningside by stating that even though the minister’s office, the executive, and Doris Anderson herself, had denied political reasons for cancelling the conference in September, “there was an

innuendo at the time.” She stated that there had been agreement on December 12 to hold the conference on February 13 and 14. The president’s letter of December 15 to the minister indicated a strong preference for these dates but said that she would be prepared to discuss the matter further with him. Elizabeth Grey had received a reply from Florence Ievers on January 12, which indicated that she “did not know the arrangements had gone so far for this conference.” Ms. Grey described Doris Anderson’s actions on January 12 as “drastic.” The president had told her: “I was in a corner. I had to do something. It was either resign or fight.” Elizabeth Grey continued by referring to the difficulties Doris Anderson was having with both the minister and the executive. The executive had said that “she tells them nothing, she barges ahead and does not consult.” She mentioned the bad relations with Québec members who had complained that there was no French research being done, no French researchers hired, and slow translations. Ms. Grey criticized the strategy of the executive in asking for a meeting with the minister: “Why could they not have held the meeting themselves and taken their vote and done it?” She said that “In fairness to Lloyd Axworthy...he was asked for his opinion.” Her assessment of Doris Anderson was that she did not play by Ottawa rules and that her style was that of a “star.”

Press reports fanned the flames, aided and abetted by interviews with all too willing members of the opposition in the House of Commons. In an interview on CBC Morning with Harry Elton on January 14, Flora MacDonald gave momentum to what she described as the allegations by Doris Anderson that the minister had manipulated the members of the executive. The president’s own description two days earlier contradicted this account of what had happened at the meeting between the minister and the executive. Ms. MacDonald did not seem to be bothered by circulating inaccurate information. She asked: “...why is the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, when it puts forward proposals, suddenly stopped in its tracks and criticized so harshly by the Minister.” At this time, the council had not made a decision one way or the other as to the dates of the conference and hence had not been “stopped in its tracks”; the council had not put forward proposals to the minister; the minister had not criticized the council harshly nor any other way. I was reminded of the saying, “My mind is made up. Don’t confuse me with the facts.”

It must be recognized that Doris Anderson was a member of the media. I felt that this explained, in part at least, why she received so much attention and why the whole affair was blown up out of proportion. A headline in *The Citizen*, November 1, 1981, read: "Govt. named spies, patsies to control Doris Anderson." Harry Elton's 7:45 a.m. interview with Flora MacDonald was followed at 8:15 a.m. by one with Doris Anderson. In it she embellished her statement of January 12 to Barbara Frum and stated that Lloyd Axworthy had "certainly" interfered "in the last week." She considered the executive decision was made "under duress and under pressure" from the Minister." She said "we" had set the dates as February 13 and 14; that "we" had asked for his support; that "we" went ahead with the plans. Her use of the royal "we" was as interesting as her changed view of the interference of the minister. Had the politicians got to her? She even used Pauline Jewett's expression "patsy" in describing whether the council was independent or not. In response to a question about the integrity of council members, Ms. Anderson indicated that one had come from the Prime Minister's office and that some had worked long and hard for the Liberal Party. She did not see that as a real disadvantage. She thought "a lot" of women on the council had "a great deal of integrity" and said the council "got re-established as an independent council," thereby casting aspersions on former councils.

Every day brought a more exaggerated version of events. Michele Landsberg in the *Toronto Star* on January 15, 1981, went so far as to assert: "Well, now we know. Both last September and last week, it was not Anderson but the executive, led by Hellie Wilson, that scrambled to please the government by dumping the 'embarrassing' conference." The headline "Act of dissent proves Anderson is leader we need," may have pleased the president but surely attributing the postponement of the September conference to one of her vice-presidents must have annoyed her, given the number of explanations she had made with respect to the translators' strike. In my opinion, the article was replete with inaccuracies and exaggeration.

Canada A.M. interviewed Lloyd Axworthy on January 15 as a follow-up to the interview of Doris Anderson the previous morning. He again explained that the executive had contacted him, not the reverse. He reiterated his view that regional conferences would reach

more women in other parts of the country, but said he had made it very clear to the executive that it was their choice to make, that he could accept either choice. He explained the statement that a February conference might be embarrassing to the government—although he did not think he had used those exact words—by saying, "It could have been awkward and embarrassing to have a whole range of issues being introduced." He did not think Mrs. Anderson was being quite fair. He thought it would be "much more important for the women's movement to hold their conference at a time after the parliamentary Debates on the Charter had been finished...to get more attention drawn to what are critical issues to them—the family law issue, the jurisdiction on day care and social services. That would have been lost if the conference had been held at a time when you and other reporters had been down in the Commons watching the debate." In reply to a question about a possible personality clash between the minister and the president, Mr. Axworthy replied:

Well, I don't know, Mrs. Anderson is a very strong-willed person, I suppose, and so am I. I haven't had any major conflicts with her up to this point. She has said some pretty damaging and serious things about me. I always thought the Debate was really between her and her Executive Committee. They had that difference of opinion. But I think Mrs. Anderson is a very respected woman in this country. What I hope is, frankly, that this controversy will not damage the Council, because it has been drawn into a political forum. Miss Jewett made a lot of abusive remarks about people on the Council...

He concluded by saying that if he had any complaint or criticism about Mrs. Anderson's action, it was her taking the matter into the public forum. He felt that the place where it should have been decided was in the council.

On January 14, I received a phone call at 2 p.m. from Doris Anderson. She told me that after she had received Hellie Wilson's memo of January 5, she had called Win Gardner who, she said, was in agreement that the minister could not interfere with respect to regional conferences vs. one central conference. According to the president, the western vice-president supported Doris completely. She went on to tell me that she felt cancellation would be devastating, and that the

integrity and credibility of the council were at stake. She told me that the executive had groveled before the minister and that they were now saying that they wanted a postponement only, not a cancellation. Over the January 9 to 12 weekend, Doris had decided to resign because she felt she had been framed. Then she thought there was another way: she could go to the council as a whole. However, the fact of the matter was that before she did this she went public, and because of this contradiction between her words and her actions, I was uneasy with her explanation of events as she was relating them to me. She then told me that the minister had called her a liar in the House of Commons. This I knew to be untrue and told her so. She corrected herself to say he had called her statements inaccurate. She continued by saying "We are not going to shut up. We can't operate this way." We discussed how we got change and I expressed my view that because it was the government that had power to make changes, we needed to communicate with the government at the same time as we brought pressure from outside. In my opinion, the two went hand in hand. Years of lobbying for change to Manitoba's family laws had taught me that lesson. The president did not seem to regard this observation as relevant.

Doris Anderson asked for my support for her position that the conference should proceed February 13 and 14. As I was a new member of the council, and as I had not heard both sides of the story, I felt that I needed more information before I made a decision. I had reservations about the president's actions. I felt it was inappropriate for the president to go public on internal business of the council before the council as a whole had met or had even been aware of what had transpired. I was concerned that the executive had been compromised by Doris' statements. Further, her veiled threat to resign in her conversation with me left me with an uneasy feeling. I was unable to comprehend the urgency of the situation. I could not understand why the conference applications had been mailed on January 12, a full week before the council was to meet. It would have been more appropriate for the president to ask that the decision about the date of the conference be deferred until the full council had been consulted, in view of the significant disagreement between the president and the executive. I was disturbed by her public comments about executive members and considered these inap-

propriate and unprofessional. I could not imagine the heads of boards on which I had served behaving in this way.

The feedback I had from women in Manitoba indicated support for both sides of the argument. One woman said "Don't lay blame. Fix it." Most expressed concern about the damage to the council specifically and to the women's movement generally. The information on which they based their reactions was, of course, gleaned from the media, whose reports were often exaggerated or inaccurate or both.

The president's lobby was in high gear by the time I received her phone call. When we arrived at the special meeting on January 20, 1981, we were presented with a package of information for which we were required to sign. It included: a chronology of dates; the January 5 memo from Hellie Wilson to Doris Anderson; correspondence from the president to the minister; the summary of the January 9 executive meeting; the president's January 12 press release; the January 13 press release of the five executive members who disagreed with the president; January 12, 13, and 15 excerpts from House of Commons Debate; a copy of the order-in-council establishing the CACSW; a copy of the by-laws and regulations of the CACSW. Also included in the package was a sealed envelope marked "Confidential," which contained a transcript of the notes of the secretary at the January 9 executive meeting, and a summary of the executive's "decisions" regarding the same meeting. The latter two documents had to be returned, which accounted for the need to sign for them. Although this was a very unusual procedure, we were never given an explanation for the secrecy. Much later, it was my understanding that the secretary of the January 9 meeting had not intended that her notes be circulated and that this was done without her knowledge. However, two documents, each entitled "Decisions arising from the Executive committee meeting of the CACSW held on January 9, 1981," were intended to be minutes of that meeting and obviously were taken from the secretary's notes. The errors noted above provide the proof. The second document is a slightly tidied up version of the first. We were not told who had been responsible for these.

In addition to the information listed above, we were given 22 pages of names of organizations and individuals who supported the February dates for the con-

ference, along with copies of their telegrams and letters. Several names were duplicated. An accompanying sheet informed that about 100 communications had been received by the Ottawa office. The excerpts from some of these communications were described as being “of particular significance.” I found the telegram from the Elizabeth Fry Society of Kingston interesting. It read: “Our friends held in the prison for women join us in expressing our total support for your position.” I wondered how that survey had been accomplished. I myself received a telegram dated January 15, 22:30 EST, from Lynn McDonald, the president of NAC, urging support of the conference.

While the president’s lobby was being carried out, Flora MacDonald kept the pot boiling in the House of Commons by reminding the speaker about the question of privilege she had raised the previous week. In a lengthy explanation (*House of Commons Debates*, January 19, 1981, 6315), among other things she attributed the press release of the CACSW executive to Win Gardner who, she noted, was a constituent of Lloyd Axworthy. She went so far as to say: “I dare say that the statement itself was dictated in the office of the minister.” I never ceased being amazed at the kinds of charges MPs made in the House. Ms. MacDonald described Doris Anderson as “a leading public servant,” a description similar to the one given by the minister in the January 15 Canada A.M. interview. She insisted that the minister provide proof of the statement that the date of the conference was called into question in December, even though the statement he had read into the record was that of the CACSW executive, with the exception of the president. She supported the slanderous charge Pauline Jewett had made about Hellie Wilson and claimed that Miss Wilson had “taken upon herself, perhaps at the urging of the minister, to phone members of the Advisory Council...” to tell them that “Doris Anderson must go.” I, for one, had had no such phone call and was not aware of any other member who had. Ms. MacDonald continued her harangue by accusing the minister of attacking the council.

Mr. Axworthy responded by saying that he had not asked for Doris Anderson’s resignation and that it was she who was carrying on the public offensive. He suggested that the “best way to ensure the integrity and independence of the council is to allow it the right to decide on its own issues, not bring them into this House,

as the hon. member has done.” Ms. MacDonald’s question of privilege was denied by the speaker.

When the council assembled at 2 P.M. the following day, the president moved that the members have 20 minutes to examine the background material she had provided. (It surprises me now that no one challenged her making a motion when she was chairing the meeting.) “The chronology of events around the constitutional conference” we received in the package omitted the December 15 letter the president had sent to the minister regarding the timing of the conference. There was some difference of opinion regarding the information Lucie Pépin had given Québec women. Although the summary of the December 12 executive meeting which council members had received made no mention of the constitutional conference, the chronology indicated that the executive had discussed it “in detail.” The December 12 entry noted that participants for the conference began booking hotel space, etc. The December 15 entry noted that members were sent telegrams that day, three days after conference participants were notified. The period from December 16 to 30 was listed as a time when the president contacted the minister’s office “daily to check on any changes he might have to suggest in the agenda.” It is surprising that the minister’s office was open during much of this period as it included the Christmas break. The description of events from January 6 to 19 contained much that was refuted by the executive members. Win Gardner is reported as saying: “no former minister interfered with the Council this way.” In light of her comment at the January 9 meeting regarding her friendship with the minister, it is highly unlikely she said this. Nancy Connolly is supposed to have said that the minister seemed determined about cancelling the February date and holding regional conferences. In light of the minister’s subsequent remarks, this too seems highly unlikely. Joanne Linzey said the notation that no one suggested consulting council members was incorrect as she herself had given that as a reason for voting against a firm February date. In any event, one wonders why the president didn’t suggest consultation with the full council. The chronology notation of January 12 makes mention of a distribution of press releases and letters but does not describe what these were or to whom they were sent. I received one as a member of the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women on January 16. I noted these discrepancies later as 20



minutes didn't allow for anything but a cursory examination. As I was accustomed to doing, I made extensive notes at the meeting, which we learned later had been taped by the president without our knowledge or permission.

When the meeting began, Joanne Linzey rose on a question of privilege and read a statutory declaration regarding the confidential document we had received. The declaration had been signed by five executive members and stated that it contained false statements and misrepresentations, and omitted essential parts of the January 9 meeting. Ann Dea asked whether the statements had been taken out of context, remarking that there were quotations from everyone but the president. If the secretary had been instructed to take verbatim minutes, she wondered why this omission had occurred. Hank Karpus stated that omissions could be just as significant as what had been included. He also noted that the transcript of the minutes of the executive meeting had been distributed to the full council before the executive had agreed to their accuracy. This was an incorrect procedure as the minutes belonged to that body. One of the Québec members indicated that it was important to have a large turnout at the conference. She said a winter conference complicated travel and could result in a poorly attended one.

At this point, Joanne Linzey summed up the situation by pointing out the two issues of contention: the validity of the minutes and the date for the constitutional conference. There was opposition by one member who felt that what had been done was a thing of the past and the only issue was the date of the conference. Sheila Duff Keet took strong exception to this, stating that the president had attacked the executive publicly, before the members had a chance to respond. She felt that the council's credibility had been jeopardized. Joan Seeley Butler believed the issue was one of the council's independence. She read a media report describing the president's attributes and noted the 150 letters of support from men and women in the Toronto area, 75 of which were from law students. In an interesting piece of name dropping, she informed the council that the son of Chief Justice Bora Laskin was one of these. She felt that the council would lose all credibility if the conference was postponed. Gabrielle Lasry said that Québec women would not have time for adequate preparation if the conference were held in February. The president

explained that the confusion in Québec about the dates was the fault of the eastern vice-president, Lucie Pépin.

After several members had commented on the matter at hand, Ann Dea summarized by pointing out that the president had had two options and the council had two options. The president could appeal to all the members or resign. The council was in a catch 22 position. If we voted to reschedule the conference, we could be viewed as lackeys of the government. If we voted for the February 13 and 14 dates, we would be supporting the president's unilateral actions, her public repudiation of the executive, and of the democratic process. I remember resenting the situation I had been placed in, but I was determined to listen to the discussion with an open mind.

The executive had not commented throughout the discussions. When these seemed to have concluded, the president explained her position. She said she regretted the bad feelings that had been generated. She felt she had had no choice, that as the chief officer she had had to make a judgment. Her first choice was that of a good democratic citizen to go along with the vote. However, she felt that because of political interference and because a lot of women knew that the conference had been rescheduled for February, the credibility of the Council was at stake. She went on to justify her actions by criticizing the executive and by pointing out that under her leadership the council's credibility was high. She referred to the November 14 meeting of the full council which she described as "not a very pleasant thing." She obviously had not understood her problem of communication with the members, which had been reemphasized by many at the time. In response to Ann Dea's alternatives, the president said that had she resigned at the time of the executive vote, her honor would have been intact but that the council's credibility would have suffered. Her reason for not polling the members before making her public statements was that there was not time. Many of us could not understand why there was such urgency and this was never explained. She felt she had to make a statement regarding the political pressure. In concluding her comments, the president described herself as a "high profile president." She admitted to making two mistakes. She had failed to understand the significance of French translations as she had come from Toronto where these weren't a requirement. She now understood the relevance of the

French fact and one-third of the council's research was being done by francophones. The other mistake was that she had "lost control of the executive." I found this a strange comment for the head of a democratic body to make. She had not attended the debriefing session of the executive after the November 14 council meeting in which there was considerable discussion about the lack of communication with members. Although she did not explain why she hadn't attended, she criticized the executive for making decisions without her. Her final comment was an emotional one: "I've put my job on the line. I need it. I have kids to support. I think you should remember that when you vote."

Joanne Linzey was the next member of the executive to speak. She had always fought as a feminist and never before been charged with groveling before anybody. She had been appointed by a Conservative government. Initially, she had had mixed feelings about the CACSW but this had developed into respect for the council and the work it did. She felt forced to respond to accusations which were not true. She pointed out that debriefing sessions of the executive were a regular occurrence after council meetings. The November 14 meeting and the executive meeting following were not a plot against the president. She believed that the members ought to have been polled before the fact sheet on constitutional reform was circulated, as she wanted done before the date of the conference was decided. She had been told by northern women and francophone women that time was needed to prepare for discussion of issues other than the Charter. She emphasized that at no time was any pressure brought to bear on her to postpone the conference. She concluded by saying that the CACSW was more than one person, that it represented the women of Canada.

Win Gardner, in her turn, asked that no notes be taken while she spoke. It surprises me now that I acquiesced to her request and put my pen aside like a chastised child. It was obvious that she was not aware that what she said would be taped by the president. I recall that she refuted the charge of political pressure. Florence Ievers seconded Win's statement and said she had wanted consultation with council members.

Hellie Wilson spoke next and recounted her version of the events leading up to the January 9 meeting. In her role as vice-president, she never went to see the minister and referred all matters requiring a final

decision to the president. She too refuted the charge of political pressure. She asked why consultation between Doris Anderson and the minister was not political pressure and the meeting between the executive—at their request—and the minister in January was political pressure. She was not happy with the personal attacks she had suffered and had begun legal proceedings.

Lucie Pépin stated her reasons for voting to postpone the conference, reasons which she gave at the January 9 meeting but which were not included in the minutes of that meeting. She felt the February date was a bad one because (1) the council had already presented its position on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (2) the Conservative leadership convention was to take place in February and this would reduce media coverage (3) the House of Commons would be debating amendments to Section 15 of the Charter (4) a provincial election was expected in Québec and this would involve a large number of Québec women (5) the attention of the government, opposition, and the media would be on other matters. She had made her position known to the president on the Thursday evening before the executive meeting, so that her opinion had been voiced before the meeting with the minister. She said she could not and did not act politically and supported this by her refusal to respond to Doris Anderson's pressure to act in the Yvette campaign during the first Québec referendum. The press reports of the president's actions and comments had affected her ability to work with women's groups. She could not take a stand under pressure from certain women's groups any more than she could from a politician.

In order to facilitate the resolution of the issue of the date of the constitutional conference Norrie Preston moved, seconded by Jacqueline Demers, that because (1) information regarding the Charter of Rights had already been disseminated and the CACSW position on the Charter made known (2) family law and overlapping jurisdictions had become the priority issues of the constitutional conference for the women of Canada (3) the agenda of the planned September 1980 conference needed to be adjusted in light of the CACSW presentation to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (4) there was no assurance that the publication containing information papers would be available for distribution prior to a February 13-14 date for advance study and preparation

by the participants (5) the February date did not allow enough lead-in time for participants to reschedule their agendas to attend; that the constitutional conference be rescheduled to May 1981 to maximize the effectiveness of the conference for the women of Canada.

Lengthy discussion ensued. Each member was asked to voice her/his concern. Prior to the vote being taken, an explanation of the result of the vote was requested. The president stated that a "Yes" vote would be a vote for the executive and a "No" vote would be a vote for her. She was reprimanded by Hank Karpus for her interpretation. The secret ballot resulted in 17 votes for the motion and 10 votes against it. Doris Anderson announced her resignation and adjourned the meeting.

What followed was a nightmare of innuendo and abuse as information about what had transpired was disseminated by all and sundry. The *Globe and Mail* (January 20, 1981) reported Doris Anderson as saying: "I lost. But it was a really good fight and it was really worthwhile." The executive had caved in to the minister's wishes. "He snapped his finger and the council executive jumped." She claimed that Mr. Axworthy had told the executive that the conference could provide ammunition for critics during the debate on the government's constitutional resolution. An editorial in the same paper three days later interpreted Win Gardner's appointment as acting president as a further sign of Mr. Axworthy's patronage. The fact of the matter was an automatic succession was outlined in the order-in-council establishing the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. A minimal amount of research would have revealed that the minister had nothing to do with the choice of acting president. The editorial stated that he had picked Win Gardner to fill the position and spoke of "Mr. Axworthy's evident influence over the council." The *Vancouver Sun* (December 22, 1981) described Ms. Gardner as "a former Axworthy aide." Win, like myself, had campaigned for Lloyd Axworthy but had not been one of his aides. Flora MacDonald stated in the House of Commons (January 23, 1981) that "Even Win Gardner...said that the council as it is now constituted could be open to political manipulation," a comment one found hard to credit. The *Globe and Mail* (January 23, 1981) reported that four council members had resigned and that Margaret Ritcey, a Conservative appointee, was one of these. Two other Conservative appointees

had done so but Margaret Ritcey had not, although she was a staunch supporter of the Conservative Party. The same edition of the *Globe* carried a cartoon of Doris Anderson leaving a room in which Lloyd Axworthy is seated in front of a row of council members marching to his tune. Pauline Jewett kept up her condemnation of the minister and the council, seemingly oblivious of the damage she was doing to women generally. Her main concern was in scoring political points.

The full council continued meeting from January 21 to January 23. Although they had participated during January 21, Marion Edwards and Joan Seeley Butler, both Conservative appointees, resigned the morning of January 22. Elizabeth Batstone's letter of resignation was read by the acting president, Win Gardner, that afternoon.

The council released a statement January 21, 1981, informing that the reasons for rescheduling the constitutional conference were: (1) that information re the Charter of Rights had already been disseminated and a CACSW position on the Charter made known (2) family law and overlapping jurisdictions were now the priority issues of a constitutional conference for the women of Canada (3) the agenda of the planned September conference needed adjustment in light of the CACSW presentation to the Joint Parliamentary Committee hearings (4) there was no assurance that the publication containing information papers would be available prior to February 13 for advance study and preparation by participants (5) the February dates did not allow enough lead-in time for participants to reschedule their agendas. When the agenda item on the conference came up for discussion on January 21, Ann Dea suggested that the council focus on (1) giving a direction to the executive, establishing a clear commitment as to the date (2) establishing the content and format of the conference and (3) responding to allegations made by women's groups. On January 23, the dates of May 29-30 were approved by a motion of council.

I had a concern about different council members making conflicting public statements and asked whether there was a policy regarding this. On other bodies on which I had served, members supported the majority view when speaking publicly whether or not they did so privately. Elizabeth Batstone asked why there was a problem regarding material being ready for a February meeting when the conference was to have been held in

September. She was informed that a complete set of papers was not ready at that time, and there was no presentation available of a contrary point of view to those on hand. As has been pointed out above, the publication of the papers for the constitutional conference was not ready until March and was released March 11, 1981, contrary to the information being given out by Doris Anderson.

Meanwhile the battle in the House of Commons and the media continued. On January 21, Ray Hnatyshyn charged Lloyd Axworthy with undermining Doris Anderson, Walter McLean made a motion to relieve Mr. Axworthy of his duties as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and Flora MacDonald stated that Doris Anderson's resignation was "a result of direct interference by the minister." She cited as evidence a "confidential" document transcribing the proceedings of the January 9 executive meeting. One wondered who her "mole" was. She informed the House, incorrectly, that the transcript stated that the minister strongly suggested that the conference on women and the constitution be cancelled. Her question to the Prime Minister, viz. would he demand Mr. Axworthy's resignation immediately, was answered by Mr. Trudeau. He indicated that, although he regretted Mrs. Anderson's decision, she herself had made it. He pointed out that, in suggesting that the minister was interfering in the process, Ms. MacDonald, in her turn, was suggesting that the democratic vote was made by irresponsible members of the council. He refused to accept that. The antagonism shown to the government by opposition members was engendered in large part, one has to believe, by the coup of the Liberals in unseating the short-lived Clark government in late 1979. Many felt that Doris Anderson and the council were being used to further political ends. Flora MacDonald's inaccurate comments and snide remarks only served to discredit all Canadian women, as did Pauline Jewett's. A lengthy debate in the House of Commons, January 22, on the alleged interference with the CACSW, did little to advance the cause of women's equality.

An editorial appearing in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on January 22 seemed to be unique among the media in its support for the council's decision. In a brief outline of the issues, it concluded by summarizing the situation: "The question which remains is whether an independent body has to reject sensible advice simply

to prove its independence. Mrs. Anderson evidently believes that it does."

The eastern media rivalled the opposition in the House with its exaggerated and oft times inaccurate reporting. They were aided and abetted by the former president, whose public comments became more and more vitriolic. Her January 23 interview with the [*Ottawa*] *Citizen* disclosed that she had encouraged council members to work harder, that many were either "too lazy or too ignorant about women's issues to do the job." Were these the members who voted for the February date or those who thought a later date would be more productive? She said too many members got appointed because they had licked envelopes in someone's campaign. The interview described Ms. Anderson as grinning as she said: "Axworthy's being embarrassed terribly. Our little conference would have been minor compared to this." A report from Vancouver (CP) stated that Doris had charged the five other executive members with conspiring behind her back to cancel the conference. This was wrong on two counts: (1) there never was any intent to cancel the conference, only to postpone it and (2) Lucie Pépin had informed the president about her opposition to the February dates the evening before the executive met with the minister. The article appearing in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on January 26, 1981, stated that the six executive members had agreed on January 10 that they would try to dissuade the minister from cancelling the conference. This, too, was wrong on two counts: (1) the date of the meeting with the minister was January 9 and (2) the council made the decision about the date of the conference, not the minister. She likened the request of one member of the executive for more funds for the council to "prostitution—you pay me off," a particularly offensive remark for the head of a national women's council to make. In making the comparison, the intent was to cast aspersions on the character of a member of the executive. However, it did more than that. It maligned all women. The *Gazette* (January 24), in describing the situation as "a sordid affair," supported Mr. Axworthy in his decision to consult with women's groups to reevaluate the CACSW. It noted that "Mrs. Anderson doesn't emerge as the martyr many women's groups seem determined to paint. Plainly she was unable to persuade her colleagues to go along with her. Her effectiveness thus compromised, resignation was her best option." Both the *Gazette* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*



(January 24) picked up on the suggestion being made in many quarters that the council should report directly to Parliament rather than through a minister. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women report had recommended that “a federal Status of Women Council, directly responsible to Parliament, be established...” (1970, 391). However, section 12 (390) of the discussion leading up to the recommendation describes such a council as one that “would make an annual report to Parliament through a Minister.” To my mind, women’s concerns were much better addressed through a minister on a regular basis than through a yearly report to Parliament. One obvious advantage was that a minister was a spokesperson for the council in the cabinet and caucus. Another was the ability of the council to access a minister whose responsibility was the status of women. I was not convinced that a minister could influence the research the CACSW produced as the reports were made public at the same time as the minister received them. In any event, all the brouhaha surrounding Lloyd Axworthy amounted to very little in the long run. He was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs 15 years later.

Council members soon found themselves responding to rumors, charges, misinformation, and outright lies. Ann Dea, a member from Edmonton, told the *Gazette* (January 23, 1981) that she had a lot of respect for Doris Anderson and was sorry that she had resigned. However, Doris herself had made this choice. Ann had served five years on the council at this point, one of the longest serving members. She said that she had “never felt there was any attempt to interfere with our recommendations or research. We’ve attacked the government many times. Our record is there for all to see and I stand by it.” Both Ann Dea and myself responded to a telegram council members had received January 21 from Patricia Carson, the president of the Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations of Ontario. The telegram purported to speak for 30,000 teachers. In that it was sent the day after the council had voted to postpone the conference, it is unlikely that any polling of these teachers had taken place. The telegram expressed “anger and dismay over the failure of the council to resist ministerial interference and the refusal to support Doris Anderson” and went on to insult council members further by stating, “The obvious lack of independence of the council makes your role as an advisor to the government questionable.” Ms. Carson called on

those members who had voted to postpone the conference “to consider carefully whether their continued membership on the council serves any useful purpose to the women of Canada.” Ann questioned why the teachers had been “so quick to assume that women could not act independently, not only of the minister but of Ms. Anderson, and decide a conference date on its merits” (Letter of Ann Dea to Patricia Carson, January 28, 1981). She pointed out that the council had attacked the government on many occasions [on] many issues and felt that it was unreasonable to assume this attitude would change overnight. She stated that the charge that she was subject to ministerial influence on any score was not only wrong but offensive.

My own letter to Ms. Carson pointed out the contradiction between the charge that I had failed to resist the minister’s interference on the one hand, and the one that I had failed to support Doris Anderson on the other. The implication was that I was so incompetent or passive that I had no choice but to succumb to one or the other. I wrote that neither party politics nor ministerial sensibilities had any part in my decision to vote for a later date for the conference. Further, at no time had I spoken to the minister about any aspect of the conference including its timing, content, or form. I pointed out that the majority of the council members had not supported the suggestion that the conference take the form of regional meetings. I then listed the reasons that a later date was more opportune. The reply I received did not respond to the issues I had raised but indicated I had not understood “our concerns which dealt with general principles rather than just the specific areas of your address.” I wondered what general principle was involved in the request that I resign for the good of the women of Canada.

Norrie Preston of Victoria, also a five year member, held a press conference to refute Doris Anderson’s “smear campaign” against CACSW members (*Times-Colonist*, January 28, 1981). She disagreed with the former president’s claim that the executive had caved in to pressure from the minister, saying that it was “basically a showdown over the way she conducted her chairmanship.” It had been simmering since the previous spring and had little to do with ministerial interference. Doris Anderson “had lost the confidence of her executive and the majority of her council.” She had failed to consult with the council and to respond

to its consensus. Doris had told the council that she hadn't learned to control her executive, indicating that she saw the executive as a body to control rather than one to work with. The agendas for the council meetings were arranged in such a way that the members had little opportunity to do committee work. Women's groups operated through consensus, not through the hierarchical decision-making process common between a boss and subordinates. In Ms. Preston's view, the former president saw consensus as a weakness. The employment committee, of which Norrie was chair, had put forward recommendations in June 1980, which Doris Anderson had said she was not prepared to accept because they "might annoy the minister." She was reminded that she was obligated to present them to the full council to approve or disapprove.

Meanwhile, the level of debate in the House of Commons was sinking lower and lower. Walter McLean (Waterloo) charged (January 28, 1981) that the minister had slurred the professional competence of Shelley-Ann Clark, the temporary secretary whose notes taken at the January 9 executive meeting were the cause of so much controversy. Mr. Axworthy explained once again that he had not criticized the secretary's competence but had simply reported to the House that five members of the CACSW executive had sworn an affidavit stating that the secretary's minutes were not accurate. He had written the executive members requesting permission to make the affidavit public. The release of the declaration to the public was the business of the executive, not his.

Two days later, Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East) rose in the House "on a matter of urgent and pressing necessity." It concerned a report in the *Globe and Mail* that a women's conference would be held at Stornoway in February and a spokesperson had said that the Liberals and NDP would be asked to "contribute something in the form of sandwiches" so that there could be non-partisan participation. Whereupon she moved, seconded by Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre) "That the minister responsible for the status of women interfere again to conduct a national survey of Canadian women to determine what type of non-partisan sandwiches should be served at Stornoway, and in particular, should we serve barefaced Liberal chicken or two-faced Tory baloney." Small wonder that the general public becomes cynical about politicians.

Peggy Ritcey, a Nova Scotia council member and staunch member of the Conservative Party, gave an interview in her area in early February in which she charged that at an executive meeting on January 12, the minister and six executive members had decided to cancel the conference because they felt it would embarrass the government to hold it at the same time as the Charter of Rights was being tabled in the Commons. This was incorrect on two counts: the meeting was held January 9, and the minister did not attend executive meetings. Ms. Ritcey had been erroneously reported as having resigned in January. Although she had continued as a member of the council, she obviously felt no obligation to uphold the council's decisions nor to promote them. She said she doubted "very much if it [the conference] will ever be held." She claimed the executive's vote had been a vote for the government against Doris Anderson, not a vote about the conference.

Doris Anderson's appearance on "Front Page Challenge" (February 2) provided her with another forum. Although she had chastised Pauline Jewett the previous October for her description of council members, Ms. Anderson now called the council "a fraud of an organization" made up of "political appointees" who "bowed to political pressure." In one breath, she said the executive committee had not supported her and in another maintained that she got along with them. Her claim that the material for the conference had been ready since September simply wasn't the case. Her comment "I gave the council stature" revealed her real problem.

An interview with Harry Brown on "Take Thirty" that same day reinforced the perception that Doris Anderson was now believing her own rhetoric, even though much of it was in contradiction of previous comments she had made. She maligned former councils and said she had been appointed because a high profile person was needed to take over. The impression was given that she was going to save the council from the depths to which it had fallen. She referred to the embarrassment which the minister had suggested a February conference might cause by saying "they are sure getting a load of it now..." She seemed to be unaware of the political manipulation taking place. That it was part of the picture was evident from her information that Flora MacDonald and Pauline Jewett were sponsoring the

conference designed to replace the one that had been postponed.

An article written by Elizabeth Gray in *Maclean's* (February 2) revealed that the "confidential" documents for which members signed January 20, had "found their way via an angry council member to Tory MP Flora MacDonald and later to journalists." Although the executive members had sworn an affidavit as to the inaccuracies and omissions of the minutes of the January 9 meeting, the same inaccuracies were quoted as fact and the affidavit was not mentioned. The secretary's contract with the CACSW was to expire in a matter of days but she was reported as resigning "in order to defend her records and Doris' credibility." Ms. Gray described Doris' style as "blunt" and "uncompromising," one which, while an asset when she was editor of *Chatelaine* magazine, was otherwise when dealing with the government and the council. The former president's assessment of the minister was "He's a bully and I don't see why women should be bullied." Her determined mien in the photo accompanying the article made it difficult for one to believe that anyone could bully Doris Anderson.

Much of my time was taken up responding to charges of caving in to political pressure. The Peterborough Women's Committee and Women's Resource Centre had based their accusation on "our understanding from the various media," and asked: "You are losing credibility and independence, don't you think?" I replied to their letter and others I had received and wrote articles for the newsletters of the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Winnipeg YWCA, and the YWCA of Canada, as well as meeting with and talking to those who wanted to hear both sides of the story.

The plans for the alternate conference to be held in Ottawa on February 14 were gearing up. Registration forms were being circulated by the Ad Hoc Committee of Canadian Women with a butterfly insignia on the form. It became known as the "Butterfly Conference." Margaret Mitchell claimed that "a broad cross section of Canadian women from across Canada" were supporting the conference and assured Mr. Axworthy that every effort was being made to make the event a non-partisan one (*House of Commons Debates*, February 6). This was in marked contrast to her "sandwich" speech. As it turned out, and understandably so given travel costs, most of those attending the alternate conference

were from Ontario. It was a masterful piece of organization with 1000 reported to be in attendance. However, it was not without its controversies. The entrenchment of a Charter of Rights in the Constitution became an inflammatory issue. Maureen McTeer felt so strongly that no Charter should be entrenched until after the Constitution was patriated that she left the meeting fifteen minutes before she hosted a reception for the conference participants at Stornoway. Doris Anderson kept emotions at a peak the following day by recommending that the conference demand Lloyd Axworthy's resignation. Her comment, "I think as long as Lloyd Axworthy is running the council, I have doubts about its credibility," not only insulted the minister but also those council members who disagreed with her.

The games in the House of Commons continued with the Prime Minister taunting the opposition by suggesting that the government might change its proposed Charter of Rights to suit the demands of the Ad Hoc conference if the Conservatives reversed their opposition to its entrenchment. With the conference concluded and the immediate need to appear united with Flora MacDonald ended, Pauline Jewett reverted to her confrontational style by pointing out that "All amendments but one [proposed by the conference] were proposed by the New Democratic Party in the constitutional committee. All but two of the amendments suggested at the weekend [conference], the Tories voted against."

Following the conference, Elizabeth Gray reported on CBC "Morningside" that she had received an envelope from Walter McLean's office, which contained follow-up material to the conference from the Ad Hoc Committee for Canadian Women. The use of Mr. McLean's franking privileges helped to confirm the partisan political involvement in the entire affair. She also reported, erroneously, that the dates of the next CACSW meeting had been changed to coincide with a visit to Canada of Ronald Reagan, the president of the United States, in order that members could attend a gala event planned in his honour. I had been given a copy of meeting dates in the fall of 1980 when I joined the council and the dates of March 9-11[1981] were clearly listed on it. Her assessment of the resignations of some of the research staff was greatly exaggerated. The subsequent research department, headed by Jennifer Stoddart, proved to be as productive as the staff that resigned, if not more so.

The minister held a meeting with representatives of 14 women's groups [on] February 16, 1981, to discuss the structure of the CACSW. He pointed out the valuable role the council had performed in producing independent research and in advocating for women's rights. Unlike many councils, the CACSW set its own topics for research. He had had no responsibility in this. He received documents at the same time as the public, not in advance of them being made public. As to the giving of advice, the executive met with him from time to time to inform him of the council's concerns and to ask him to intercede on council's behalf with cabinet or other ministers. He saw himself "as a conduit for information, advice, or recommendations" (transcript of the meeting with women's groups, February 16). Maureen O'Neil, Coordinator of the Status of Women, then described the mandate of the CACSW, pointing out how it compared with other councils in government. She commented that councils couldn't access funds without going through a minister. Group discussion followed with a myriad of suggestions being made. There was general recognition that any attempt to achieve a well-balanced selection of members from across Canada, from various ethnic groups, women's organizations, and specialized constituencies would prove to be almost impossible. Mr. Axworthy noted that the original purpose of the council, as described by Senator Florence Bird, who had chaired the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, was a narrowly defined one. It was not to be an omnibus body or a kind of umbrella group that would represent all women's interests in all times and all places, but would concentrate on the need to develop good research and information. Further, she indicated that the Commission had felt it important that members of the council not represent women's associations, but be informed, intelligent people, appointed for their knowledge in various fields. One of the participants in the discussion with the minister believed that the main criteria ought to be a woman's commitment to women's issues and concerns and to feminism.

The antics in the House of Commons continued as the opposition parties attempted to score political points (*House of Commons Debates*, February 5, 6, 9, 10, 12). There was no recognition that they were advocating two contradictory actions, viz. that the government interfere in the business of the CACSW on the one hand, and on the other, that the Prime

Minister relieve the minister for the status of women from his cabinet duties for interfering in the business of the CACSW. Walter McLean criticized the council for its decision to have an internal, rather than an external, review. He made reference to "the launching of a \$1.3 million lawsuit, ostensibly against the CACSW," but did not elaborate. The *Globe and Mail* (March 13) reported that Shelley-Ann Clark, the temporary secretary hired by the council, had served notice of this lawsuit on the five executive members who had sworn an affidavit as to the inaccuracy of her note taking.

The council decided at its March 9-11 meeting to conduct an internal review of the structure and operations of the CACSW. It was suggested that the review emphasize the council's relation to government; the regionalization of the council's activities; the criteria for appointing members; and the council's relation with other government organizations which had as their focus the status of women. There was to be consultation with women's groups but an external review was regarded as an unwarranted use of the council's limited resources of both time and money.

Following the March meeting, I attended the annual meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women at which Doris Anderson used a hastily convened session called to review the CACSW, to reiterate her complaints about the council. The general meeting of NAC called for the resignation of Lloyd Axworthy and the members of the executive of the CACSW, and an external review of the council. These recommendations were not surprising, given that NAC had been one of the organizers of the Ad Hoc conference and that meeting had made the same recommendations. At this point, the leaders of the 1000 member Montreal-based *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* withdrew their affiliation and left the meeting.

Council members continued to be maligned. One cartoon showing Doris Anderson as an executioner spouting the caption "I believe he's Axworthy," depicted the executive members, all with porcine snouts, in Mr. Axworthy's embrace. The Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women newsletter, "Action" (March 1981), in reporting the NAC meeting accused council members of lying to the women of Canada but neglected to be specific. Instead it incorrectly reported that no CACSW member attended the meeting and that material from the CACSW office was unavailable to Ad



Hoc conference participants. In fact, material had been supplied to the office by MP Margaret Mitchell and displayed at the conference. Most of it had been circulated across Canada since the previous October. The publication "Women and the Constitution" had not been available as it was not ready for release. The report also stated that the Charter proposed by the government had many loopholes, one of which would perpetuate discrimination against Indian women who marry non-Indian men. This was not the opinion of Gordon Fairweather, then chairman of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, who had told the CACSW (January 23) that the amendments to the proposed resolution re the Constitution of Canada guaranteed an end to section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act. In his opinion, this was also the case for the resolution as originally presented. The article in "Action" described members of the council as caught up in their own justification and politics, as "party hacks" devoting their time to in-fighting. No attempt had been made to contact Win Gardner or myself before the article was printed although we were both a telephone call away and had made every attempt to be available to the women of Manitoba.

Walter McLean kept up his call for interference in the business of the CACSW by requesting that the government "order (underlining added) an external review" of the council (*House of Commons Debates*, March 16). He criticized the new appointments to the council, stating that NAC had not been consulted before these were made. Mr. Axworthy defended the appointments as being representative of business, education, the Inuit and Native communities, and the farm community. The interests of women generally were represented, not the interests of a particular women's group. The appointees were from Labrador, Montreal, Prince Edward Island, Fredericton, and Winchester (Ontario), and comprised a director of legal services, a personnel officer, a mayor of a cooperative town, a professor of nursing, and a farm journalist. In writing about the appointments, Michele Landsberg (*Toronto Star*, March 20, 1981) concluded her critical article by referring to the CACSW as a "shamelessly docile council" involved in a "political sell out." "Docile" was certainly not the word I would have used to describe the women with whom I served on the council. Her description of us "being paid very handsomely indeed" led me to believe that she did not think women on the

CACSW should have been remunerated on the same scale as other councils advising the government. (We were not, of course.) We reeled from one attack by the media to another from the opposition in the House of Commons. Doris Anderson kept the pot boiling with a lengthy article in the *Ottawa Magazine* (April 1981) depicting her version of events since the cancellation of the conference on the constitution in September 1980. It was obvious that each time she repeated it, she was more convinced of its authenticity, and that each time she gave an augmented version with more exaggerations and errors. *Chatelaine* and *Homemaker's Magazine* embraced her version. However, Joan Wallace, who had served on the CACSW for the first four years of its existence, a former reporter, a freelance writer, and assistant editor of *Executive Magazine*, outlined in the *Vancouver Sun* (May 20, 1981) "the media and political extravaganza" that followed the 17-10 vote of the CACSW to postpone the conference on the constitution. She refreshed memories by quoting Doris Anderson's own description of the political pressure exerted on the executive as "the mildest you can imagine." This was Doris's description before she had lost the vote in the full council. Joan Wallace remarked that both the minister and the council had been condemned without trial, almost unanimously. She queried why the vast majority of women, including the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, had accepted the "old stereotyped view of women as a bunch of weak-willed patsies...afraid to stand up to political pressure." Ms. Wallace wondered whether, had the chairman of the Economic Council of Canada resigned after being outvoted by the council, it would have been assumed that the chairman was 100 percent right and that the other men on the council were "knee-jerk Liberals" who bowed meekly to political pressure. Or would it have been assumed that he had lost the confidence of his council and decided to resign.

Ms. Wallace pointed out that women worked through consensus and not through the hierarchical decision-making common in big business. She noted that Doris Anderson had a background in a large publishing company and "no experience whatever in grass-roots women's organizations." She added: "The power struggle within the council over democratic versus dictatorial control has been going on for months." She quoted from an article by Joanne Linzey, an executive member

of the CACSW, in the March issue of *The Optimist*, a publication of the Yukon Status of Women:

I remember being stunned by the overriding will of this person. Doris was not concerned with creating a council of equals. She felt her views were the right ones and did not easily tolerate opposition. For instance, in June 1980 the full membership had to force her to present the employment committee's recommendations to the minister. She thought they might annoy him, for they were very critical of federal government strategies.

The charge that council members were not representative of many differing groups of women was, in Joan Wallace's opinion, "simply untrue" and could have been checked out by those claiming it, but was not.

In mid-April, Jean Wood, president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, announced that the 21-member executive of NAC had decided to boycott the May 29-30 constitutional conference organized by the CACSW, as a protest against the decision of the council to hold an internal review. Helen Marr, president of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, wrote to Jean Wood to express the "distress" of her organization upon learning of NAC's decision. She pointed out that it was crucial for all women to continue to struggle for equal status with men, noting that women could not afford the luxury of being divided.

The CACSW conference entitled "Women and the Constitution: The Next Five Years" was held May 29 and 30, 1981. Over 700 registered. It was my impression that, because of the boycott by NAC, those attending comprised a broader representation of Canadian women than would have occurred otherwise, because of the efforts of council members to reach out to their constituencies. And rather than the so-called leaders of the women's movement in Canada, conference participants were grassroots women. Elaine Adam, president of the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba, wrote that the conference was a success, one which she felt inspired a sense of unity and strength (Letter of June 4, 1981). The Manitoba contingent reflected the solidarity for women's equality that had been shown in the struggle for equitable family law in the late 1970s. Manitoba women did not let partisan differences detract them from the goal, and we worked together regardless of po-

litical stripe. This did not seem to me to be a characteristic of many women in other regions.

Contrary to the views of conference participants, Walter McLean described the conference as "a whitewash designed to avoid controversy" (*Winnipeg Free Press*, June 1, 1981). His comments revealed a contempt for the women attending the conference, many of whom were members of his political party. Doris Anderson kept up her part of the bargain by responding to the article Joan Wallace had written for the *Vancouver Sun* (Letter to the editor, June 13, 1981). Her complaint that "her" executive had "caved in" to the minister's wishes was now one that the entire council had "bowed to the minister's wishes." At no time did the minister speak to me about the date of a constitutional conference. At no time did I feel any pressure to vote in a particular way, except from Doris Anderson when she called me in January. There seemed to be no relief from her vindictiveness. When she was named president of NAC, the *Financial Post* (February 27, 1982) reported: "She clearly views her new position as an excellent opportunity to act as unpaid critic of the federal advisory committee, an organization which she headed until January, 1981." Ms. Anderson is quoted as saying: "I'm going to be very critical. And as long as Lucie Pépin is president, the credibility of the committee will have to be under close scrutiny." Her personal feud had not abated four months later when Ms. Pépin was renamed president of the CACSW. Doris Anderson termed the appointment "disgraceful" (*Globe and Mail*, June 19, 1982).

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the CACSW, Dorothy Lipovenko wrote a very critical article about the council in which she said "And doubts are simmering in women's circles about its potency and usefulness—if it ever was useful" (*Globe and Mail*, June 23, 1983). Doris Anderson was quoted as saying that since she had left, there had been only one paper released that wasn't already being researched when she was president. Her exaggerations were only surpassed by her inaccuracies. I was criticized by the vice-chairman of the Special Committee on Pension Reform because we had not costed out our support of a homemaker's pension in our presentation to the committee. Clearly we did not have the resources the government had for such an undertaking and anyone studying the issue knew that such logistics were the business of actuaries.

Criticism of the council reappeared in an article in a Prince Edward Island paper (*Star*, June 1, 1984) in which it repeated Ms. Anderson's charges of the council bowing to political pressure and her criticism of Lucie Pépin's leadership. Lynn MacDonald, NDP Member of Parliament, claimed that women had always taken the council with a grain of salt. Flora MacDonald, Conservative Member of Parliament, questioned whether anybody could take the council seriously and called Ms. Pépin's leadership "partisan." The media continued to be fed the same erroneous information Doris Anderson had found it to her personal advantage to disseminate.

During this time, there were rumblings about the council being disbanded. Some of the rumors, I believe, were prompted by members of NAC, based on the hope that NAC would receive some, if not all, of the funding the CACSW received. Interestingly, there was also support from REAL Women of Canada, a group whose goals, one would suspect, were diametrically opposed to those of NAC. As I write this in 1996, the CACSW has been disbanded as a cost-cutting measure of the federal government. In retrospect, I believe that the council played a critical role in bringing the inequities for women in Canadian society to the attention of the Canadian public.

Fifteen years after my first CACSW meeting in November 1980, I believe my first instinct about the relationship between the president and the council was not far off the mark. It became obvious that there was a basic disagreement regarding the modus operandi of the CACSW. Most of the members had worked in women's organizations where consensus was the order of the day. Doris Anderson's style, understandably, was that of a boss issuing orders, making unilateral decisions and expecting compliance. When she ran into opposition over the date of a conference, she was surprised and angered. That anger, initially, was directed at the other five members of the executive. But, as the incident mushroomed and she was not supported by the full council, she turned that anger on Lloyd Axworthy. She was aided and abetted in this by the Conservative and NDP opposition, both of whom, in my opinion, manipulated and used her. The comments of Flora MacDonald and Pauline Jewett, in particular, did nothing to promote the image or interest of women. Quite the reverse. They fed the stereotypical view of women not being able

to work for a woman or with each other. It would have been more productive had they been less interested in fostering divisiveness.

As I indicated at the outset, my motivation in recording this was to refute the misinformation that continues to resurface. The latest political expose, *Double Vision* perpetuates the myth (1996). The media rhetoric of that time is repeated as fact with the charge being made that the government decided "a planned Women's conference on the Constitution would prove embarrassing" and directed Lloyd Axworthy to persuade Doris Anderson to call it off (81). Mr. Axworthy's response to a request from the executive of the CACSW to meet with him and a question from an executive member about the timing of the conference, is explained as an attempt to strong-arm Doris Anderson. The facts are: that the government did not decide the date of the conference; Mr. Axworthy did not decide the date of the conference; Ms. Anderson did not decide the date of the conference; and the executive did not decide the date of the conference. The truth was that the council as a whole made that decision by democratic vote. The inclusion of this erroneous information in *Double Vision* is but another example of the rhetoric gaining credibility through repetition. Doris Anderson was a media person and the media—almost to a person—backed her version of events. After being subjected to the errors in TV and radio interviews, the LEAF film and quotes in poorly researched publications, I decided that it was time for someone to set the record straight.

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