



*Doris Anderson, 1980s.*

# A National Presence

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JULYAN REID WITH LINDA MARKOWSKY

*Doris Anderson a emménagé à Ottawa quand elle fut nommée présidente du Conseil consultatif canadien sur la condition féminine (CCCCF). Elle a cherché “les boutons à pousser et les leviers à activer” au gouvernement pour améliorer les chances d'accès à l'égalité pour les femmes. Le Conseil sous son impact est devenu plus dynamique et fut reconnue à la fois par les femmes et les décideurs. Sa plus belle victoire a été l'inscription de la clause de l'égalité pour les femmes dans la Charte des droits et libertés.*

Doris Anderson became President of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women in the spring of 1979. I had been hired as Research Director for the Council just months before she arrived. The first time I met Doris as my new boss, she told me she really wanted the job as President of the Advisory Council. She said she had done as much as she could to help women as editor of *Chatelaine* and as a journalist at that time. She now wanted to know “which buttons to push and which levers to pull” in government. To Doris, the Advisory Council looked like a good instrument for change.

The Council was set up to monitor progress from the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The Council had been given the broadest powers

of any para-governmental advisory body. It could do independent research, publish the results, submit recommendations to government and make those recommendations public. Doris saw the opportunities.

We started out by meeting with Cabinet ministers. We were received very politely but it became apparent that this was not the way to get results. We then turned to the research program of the Council. This program was designed to do research on issues of concern to women but only had a budget of \$28,000 and a small staff of three. Doris brought a winning combination of vision, determination, business sense, impeccable timing, as well as humour to the challenge.

Doris knew what she wanted—she knew when she wanted it and she knew what to do with it when it was done.

She made us work like dogs and we loved her for it. She was the best boss I ever had in my whole career. Always positive and cheerful, smart and focused, she could agree on what had to be done on a handshake and never changed her mind. Doris inspired devotion and courage in all her staff. Marcia Clement (Lalonde), one of the researchers on staff describes her time at the Council as “a brief and shining moment that was the highlight of my career

... the time I felt most connected and most committed to a cause.”

Doris was professional and savvy about how to get people's attention. She understood that she had a role in reaching women through the media, because the Council didn't have the budget to advertise or to reach the public in any other way. She used her business and media knowledge to empower women to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others. She taught all of us in the research section of the Council to get women the facts, break down the walls of silence, base our arguments on solid research, get our research out to the widest possible audience, and ensure that the audience included both men and women.

## Getting Women the Facts

Doris knew how much women needed basic facts on their situation in order to improve their lives, and she committed herself and her team to getting those facts to women. The research team developed a series of fact sheets that were easy to use and understand, showing such things as the difference in pay between men and women. At that time women earned 63 cents to every dollar men made. We dealt with pensions, aging, work, and many other issues. The fact sheets were hugely suc-



Doris Anderson at the United Nations Conference on the Status of Women in Copenhagen, 1980. Tory Cabinet Minister (Responsible for Women), Walter Maclean, is sitting behind Doris.

cessful and broadened the dialogue among women across Canada and in other countries.

### Breaking the Walls of Silence

Doris knew she had to break the wall of silence around many issues that are part of women's life experiences. She broke down barriers by increasing the breadth of subject matter that the Council dealt with. She was interested in tackling issues that had not been noticed or dealt with in or out of government.

For example, when Linda Markowsky (MacLeod) proposed research on wife battering, an issue that no one wanted to fund, Doris had the vision to approve it. She insisted that we take the statistics route to get the attention of the public, and the result was stunning. This work had an immediate and unexpected impact on the media. In the past, the media, dominated

by men, had been reluctant to cover the issue of rape. We were told that many men feared that they could be accused of rape when they thought they had consent, and therefore tended to be cautious in assuming blame. However, both male and female members of the media were outraged that men would beat their wives, and gave the issue and the book *Wife Battering in Canada*, terrific coverage. It became the focus of call-in shows on the radio and seemed to open a floodgate of stories told by women who had previously covered up the abuse they experienced at the hands of their spouses. It led to changes in the way police dealt with domestic disputes and took Linda around the world speaking to other countries and organizations. As Linda remembers, "Through Doris's courage and ability to position the issue to resonate with media and the public, the suffering and violence women experi-

enced at the hands of their partners and spouses that previously had no public name, became part of the common lexicon around women's lives and inequality."

We did work on reproductive health hazards at work, changing the focus from women only to both women and men. Previous work had focused solely on women and led to differential pay, on the assumption that men should be paid more because they could stand more pollution without negative impact. Nancy Miller-Chen's research showed that men were seriously impacted by pollution such as radiation and Agent Orange, leading to birth defects and miscarriages when their wives had children. Nancy's book *Reproductive Hazards at Work* led to recommendations for reduced health hazards for everyone and a call for equal pay for women.

Julie White researched and wrote a book on *Women and Unions*, outlin-

ing the second-class place of women in the trade union movement, and showing how trade unions could, if they wanted to, lead in the fight for better pay for women, maternity leave, and daycare rights. We were thrilled to receive a letter from Senator Eugene Forsey, complaining about one sentence in the book. The fact that he had read it from cover to cover made up for the complaint!

games with statistics on women. One year, Treasury Board stated that one of their divisions had doubled the number of women. It turned out that the number had gone from one to two women employees! The Public Service Commission claimed that women were not entering the executive groups because it took 15 years on average to reach that level. Marcia Clement (Lalonde) showed

publish in a more professional way and to charge cost, but to reach more people.

She made a deal with the Queen's Printer to publish the documents. The Advisory Council would pay the production cost of the first run and they would charge a price that covered their costs of administration and distribution. The Queen's Printer would keep the profits from

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Nicole Schwartz (Morgan) started research on women and the economy, which was published some years later. Many other reports were undertaken on pensions, part-time work, critiques of government programs and policies, appointments to boards and commissions, and much more.

### **Building the Dialogue on Solid Research and Statistics**

The government was not used to being challenged with good research and accurate data. They were used to tearing apart the arguments made by women by showing how we didn't have good information, and therefore didn't have to be taken seriously. We had to do ten times the work normally required to make a case to government—and we did it.

Doris knew that numbers and good analysis count. She insisted that we check our figures and assumptions and she demanded that we challenge our critics on theirs. For example, every year the Council looked at women in the public service, to track progress about the status of women in government, particularly at decision-making levels. The government played many

that it took an average of eight years for men.

*Women and Jobs* was an important report on the impact of Federal government employment strategies on women, researched by Patricia Dale. She showed that unemployed women were chronically sent to hair-dressing courses while the men were sent to a variety of courses linked to job shortages. Women were still regarded as "secondary" workers, even though statistics showed they were sole or important joint sources of family income.

### **Expanding the Dialogue Through Wider Distribution**

Doris didn't want to write for the converted—she wanted to reach the government and the public and get changes made.

She knew she needed to get the Council publications out to a larger audience. When Doris took over as President, the Council had a policy of not charging for any of its research, because women were assumed to be poor and couldn't afford to pay. This meant that the documents, which were mainly xeroxed reports, only went to a list of about 200 women's groups. Doris decided that it would be better to

any further runs of the same document. They were cautious at first and then delighted because these books were making them money. They even set up a special booth for our publications at the Frankfurt Book Fair one year. The result was that many women and men from all kinds of organizations had access to our research.

### **Being Inclusive**

Doris was an inclusive feminist. She included men and women in her audience, her scope for change, and her life. As Nicole Schwartz (Morgan) comments:

Doris was a whole woman and was variously a wife, mother of three sons, and a solid friend of men who respected and loved her. She was nonetheless fully aware of the immense difficulties women confront in negotiating for an elusive share of power, always a challenge, always difficult to keep.

Doris also knew that being inclusive meant telling a good story. Of course, she expected the documents produced by Council staff to be written in an interesting way

that grabbed attention. She told all of us that reading the first drafts of our reports helped her fall asleep at night. We got the message.

### **Laying the Foundation for Fundamental Change: Doris's Role in the Constitution**

Doris was a powerful catalyst who used the Council's research mandate to expand knowledge, understanding, and commitment to building women's equality in all aspects of their lives. But perhaps Doris's most fundamental and far-reaching contribution was her role in enshrining women's rights in the Constitution.

I was tipped off in the spring of 1980 by Maureen O'Neill, who then headed the internal government Status of Women Canada, that a special Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution was going to be set up by the government. Maureen also told me that the Advisory Council, as an external group, could have the opportunity to present a brief to the Committee, but we would have to work fast, because the hearings would be in the fall, and the submission would have to be good.

Peggy Mason, a young lawyer working for us, quickly drafted the key element of such a submission, which was that women should be equal under or in the law as well as before it.

Doris recognized that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and gave us the go ahead, but also realized that we needed some "big gun" lawyers to help draft and make the submission for the Council. We were fortunate to persuade Mary Eberts, with a distinguished law firm in Toronto and a former Professor of law and Professor Beverly Baines of Queen's University to lead this, and Professor Nicole Duple from Laval University to join us. Senator Florence Bird, who had chaired the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1967-1970), urged the Council to make sure it was repre-

sented by the best lawyers available during its appearance before the parliamentary committee. "This is your responsibility and you must do it in the most professional and objective way and in the finest legal tradition," she said ("Get tough in struggle for equality Senator urges Canadian women" 16). Doris had anticipated her.

The Council staff was 100 percent behind this goal and worked diligently and ferociously to support Doris every step of the way. As Marcia Clement (Lalonde) commented:

I remember knowing from the beginning that the equality rights fight was unlike anything that had gone before; that it was absolutely fundamental and that if we [all feminists] failed to have basic equality *effectively* enshrined in the Constitution, any other victories would be marginal at best.

Doris said in her opening remarks before the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the Constitution, November 20, 1980:

What is at the heart of our presentation and what we believe to be the main focus of women's concerns is with Clause 15, the non-discrimination rights section.... The equality that we envision would exist in the law, not merely in the administration of the law.

The effort paid off. The Minister of Justice, Jean Chrétien, appearing before the Special Joint Committee, on January 12, 1981, said:

First, I want to state that I agree with the proposal made by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the National Association of Women and the Law that the section be entitled equality rights so as to stress the positive nature of this im-

portant part of the Charter of Rights..... I want specifically to compliment the Advisory Council on the Status of Women for a particularly fine brief as well as for an impressive presentation before you. The work of the Council has greatly influenced the government....

But even with this high praise and agreement from the responsible minister, a submission alone was not enough for Doris. She wanted to be sure women had the facts and the analysis to understand the significance of all our proposed changes. The Council published a book, *Women and the Constitution*, edited by Audrey Doerr and Micheline Carrier, to provide more information on the key constitutional issues for women.

A conference was also planned to further inform women and to encourage lobbying for the necessary changes to the constitution.

To our frustration, it was cancelled by the Minister responsible for the Status of Women and the Advisory Council, with the support of the Council Vice-Presidents. However, this temporary setback led to the organization by women, with the support of Flora MacDonald, of an ad-hoc conference on Parliament Hill that was so successful it made history for women across Canada.

Doris was the mother of this history-making assertion of women's fundamental rights. In his memoirs, Pierre Trudeau wrote:

The charter had been enormously improved from our first draft in 1980... . . . 914 individuals and 294 groups had appeared before the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution, and as a result we had amended the charter to protect women.... (322)

Our former Advisory Council team, all with other jobs shortly after this "bright and shining mo-

ment” in all our lives, continued to meet with Doris as a group. We had a strong feeling that we had lived through a defining time in our lives. We will never forget Doris and we all hope that our daughters and sons and future generations will remember what she has done for them.

*The authors recognize the research support for this article from Barbara Hicks and reflections by Marcia Clement (Lalonde) and Nicole Schwartz (Morgan).*

*Building on the energy and insights gained as a researcher at the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Linda Markowski-MacLeod built a 15-year international career as a writer, researcher, and speaker advocating for greater understanding and prevention of violence against women and youth violence. For the past ten years she has expanded her focus and is currently working in the Accessibility Directorate in the Ontario government contributing to the*

*development of standards and public education to promote universal accessibility for people with disabilities and for the temporarily able-bodied across our society.*

*Julyan Reid served as the Director of Research for the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women from 1978 to 1981. Ms Reid worked in government, both federal and provincial, for 28 years, 15 of them as an Assistant Deputy Minister in Environment (Ontario), Finance (Ontario) and Human Resources Development (Canada). She continued to look for the “buttons to push and the levers to pull” to further equality for women. Julyan Reid has a B.A. (McGill) an M.A. (Toronto) in social anthropology and has pursued post-graduate studies at the London School of Economics and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris.*

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*“Never retract, never explain, never apologize – get the right thing done and let them howl.” – NELLIE McCLUNG*

#### THE STREAM RUNS FAST by Nellie McClung

Nellie McClung was one of Canada’s most important political and social pioneers for women’s rights. *The Stream Runs Fast* documents her thoughts and contributions to some of the most pivotal events in Canadian history, including her personal account of the Famous Five case in 1927, in which she sought, along with four other female activists, the right for women to be recognized as “persons” under the law. This landmark memoir offers a vivid and intimate portrait of an activist woman’s life in early twentieth-century Canada.



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