

## EDITORIAL

**N**OTHING IS REAL UNLESS IT'S LOCAL"—The text is not mine, but it seems to have a special meaning for us as individual Women's Institute members in a year when so much attention has been given to our international conference. When big events are in the news it is easy to forget the fundamental things that make these events possible.

The feeling of oneness among women of every race, every national, religious and political background at the A.C.W.W. conference was something to warm the heart and gladden the spirit. But these few hundred women were only representatives of the five-and-a-half million associated country women scattered over the world. If their sense of comradeship was merely the outcome of association at a conference, that is, unless it also expressed the feeling of the women back home, it might count for very little. So, for those of us who came from Ontario it was good to think of our own Institute members who search out the new Canadian women in the community and make them welcome, feeling personally richer for knowing them. International good will at a big meeting can be a pretty nominal thing. It isn't real unless it's local.

At the conference we were reminded that this is World Refugee Year and we were moved by what we heard of the millions of homeless men, women and children in refugee camps, in caves in the earth, sometimes behind barbed wire. Others before us have been *moved* by the plight of the refugees but that doesn't do the refugees much good. What they want is a country to take them in and let them get back to normal living. It is true that this requires the action of governments but governments are usually very sensitive to the feeling of the people, especially if the people make their views known to their local representatives through their local organizations. Sometimes they go farther, translating into action their understanding of the "foreigner" in a strange country, homesick for family and friends and the customs and ways of his homeland—or hers. So we find Women's Institutes asking women from other countries to come to a meeting and tell about life in their old country, so show their handicraft, to sing their native songs in their own language. This is accepted in theory in most national organizations but it isn't real unless it's local.

We learned at the A.C.W.W. conference that two-thirds of the world's people are living in hunger, disease, ignorance and oppression and that under the United Nations, experts in agriculture, health and education are working to change this; are indeed working almost miracles. In their enthusiasm the delegates voted to set up a home economics scholarship to provide more workers for better nutrition, better family life. There isn't much doubt that this will be supported by "pennies for friendship" or other donations from country women the world over; and that country women will urge their governments to continue or increase their help to the countries in need of it. No government project can go far without such support. Since—at least in a democracy—the people are the government, no government policy is real unless it's local.

For years back we have been hearing that food production cannot keep pace with the world's increasing population. Now—so our advisers told us—scientists aren't afraid of this if they can get the peasant farmer to make use of what science discovers. By the same token any education or any extension service, however good it may be, isn't worth a thing until the people are ready to take it and put it into practice. Education is not real unless it's local.

The importance of the local unit came up again at the conference as the women reported unusual and significant work they had done in their branches. Always the report showed that out of some woman's originality and vision something good was done in her community that had never been done before. Other communities adopted it and soon it became a part of the general programme. It seems to me that most of our organized women's work has developed in that way—not from the top down but from local women upwards.

So it may be encouraging for the woman working in her local Institute—studying, trying things out and proving them, keeping a warm happy feeling in her organization and service to home and country always before her, to know that she is the key person, the most important person in the whole international country women's movement.

*Ethel Chapman*