

Editorial

Within the last year, in some of our newspapers there has been appearing a picture of a small child. This little girl has dark, curly hair; big, brown eyes; brown skin, and an appealing smile. Her name is Cheryl Ann Henry and she was a patient at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. She was brought to Canada by the Red Cross for surgery, to correct a defect in her internal organs. She is now on her way to recovery and has returned to her home in Trinidad.

There are few people who do not experience a feeling of pleasure when they look at these pictures, for she has been saved from the tragedy of certain death while still a child. It is interesting to speculate about the future of this little girl as she becomes a teen-ager and an adult in Trinidad. She has been lucky, for she has been given the human right of an opportunity for normal, healthy living. But what of millions of other children who are denied this right because of having been born in a country where medical care and the necessary food for normal growth and development are the exception rather than the rule?

Too many Canadians, particularly those whose ancestors were early pioneers in this country, have a tendency to take many of our human rights for granted; but Canada's two founding races came to the new world with long established traditions of regard for human rights. The English began their tradition in the year 1215 when King John was forced to sign the Magna Carta. The French Revolution was caused by the common people rebelling to force the King of France to agree to A Declaration of the Rights of Man. In North America in 1793, the First Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada forbade the buying of slaves and provided that slaves who outlived their masters would be granted automatic freedom. In 1833, by Imperial Order, all slavery was abolished in the British Empire.

Most of the people who have come to Canada, both early pioneers and latter day immigrants, were (and are) seeking certain rights which they had little hope of enjoying in their home countries.

This year, 1968, has been declared International Human Rights Year, and the time has come for all Canadians to consider seriously not only the rights which we think we should have, but also the rights we have long enjoyed and, perhaps most of all, to face squarely the unpleasant fact that people live in Canada who are not enjoying rights which should be theirs, and that in many countries of the world there are people who have almost none of the rights to which they are entitled as human beings.

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 says, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and his family."

Examination of this basic premise brings attention to the fact that the right to a standard of living for health and well being points directly to a concern for the right to a healthful home environment, and that points directly to the object in the Constitution of the Women's Institute which so concerned Adelaide Hoodless who said, "Apart from my family duties, the education of mothers has been my life work"; and "A nation cannot rise above the level of its homes."

The Women's Institute as an organization should be interested in every aspect of human rights. Points (a) in our Constitution, "To help women acquire sound and approved practices for greater home efficiency" and (d) "To help develop better, happier and more useful citizens", obligate our organization to make a study of human rights, particularly the rights of women in the areas of home and community. Note, our Constitution does not say Canadian women; it says "women".

What can an individual do? What can an organization such as the Women's Institute do? Quoting from the *Courier*, a magazine published by U.N.E.S.O., "The first duty of the individual citizen with regard to human rights may seem so simple and obvious that many of us neglect it. It is to understand what our human rights are so that when they are violated we can recognize the act as a violation."

Here, then, is something Women's Institutes can do.

Knowledge is power; knowledge develops concern. It is in the Branch programs that our members should be given opportunities to study human rights, to discuss human rights, to start action if violations are taking place in our communities in Ontario, in Canada.

The Women's Institute as an organization enjoys special and unique opportunities. The Women's Institutes are comparatively small groups of women located in every County and District in every part of Canada. Our groups, being non sectarian, non partisan and non racial, can cut across barriers to include all women in the community. The prime objective of the Women's Institute is concern for the well being of the home, whose usual focal point is the mother. The Women's Institute through its affiliates, F.W.I.C. and A.C.W.W., has opportunities to concern itself with the welfare of homes and women in all parts of Canada, in other countries of the world including developing nations where the welfare of women and homes has had little consideration in the past.

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