

## FWIC PRESIDENT

Mrs. Oddie extended greetings from the Executive and Board of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada.

"In speaking to this meeting attended by representatives of branches from all over Ontario, I am deeply conscious of the origins of Women's Institutes. Each time that I come to Ontario on FWIC business I have a sense of coming to the place where it all began. I am conscious of the burden of gratitude that FWIC owes the women of Ontario for work in preservation of the origins of WI history at the Hoodless and Erland Lee museums.

I am deeply conscious too, that women from Ontario comprise well over two-fifths of the strength of FWIC and that this is a significant opportunity to speak to a group representative of so many."

FWIC forms an avenue of communication between provinces; it initiates nationwide programs; it provides the means through which financial aid flows to projects in underdeveloped countries; it provides WI's everywhere with a window on the world.

I am presently attempting to respond on your behalf to the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee. I consider it important that our organization should have input, but what will I say? How can I know that what I have said represents a majority opinion of FWIC women. Do we want more Canadian content in broadcasting? Do we want improvements made in the national gallery? I turn to provincial presidents. I look at resolutions sustained in recent years.

As I prepare submissions I am increasingly convinced that in view of the slowness of communication that there is a need for policy enunciated by the provinces. Perhaps some policy statements can be extracted from recent resolutions perhaps some can come as expressions from meetings at all levels. Perhaps next year you can consider policies at this meeting.

We are quite aware that Branches differ widely. Some have a healthy age mix, some unfortunately, largely consisting of older women who may not share the desire of our National Board, to see FWIC as a vital force, affecting national policy. Your Junior WI's have excellent vigorous programs. The need for new members is a priority, methods used to achieve this goal may in some cases be different — the grafting on of new ambitious young women to the tired main stem, or a new plant started from scratch.

The programs planned by new branches may be very different. The needs of members must be met! The world is very different and women are very different: well educated and assertive with easy access to many special interest groups and little tolerance for the dull and inept performance.

As we are engulfed with escalating societal economic and social change, we in WI must try to predict where and what and even why we will be in the future, and plan for change if this be needed. Every single member, like every branch, is a public relations officer for the organization, conveying good or bad images according to the extent that they reflect a vital active organization trying to grapple with issues in today's world, or on the other hand, show to the community an unflattering image of complacency. The issues range from the realm of home and community to the whole world. We have had agriculture convenerships for years, yet in 1980 it took the First Women's Conference on Agriculture to capture media attention. We can profit from the issues raised in their research papers and we can attempt to find solutions.

And while we talk of issues, may I say here that FWIC

bridges the gamut of philosophies between the feminist stridently crying for women's rights and the homemaker quietly knowing herself to be indispensable in the farm or home situation, fulfilling a very necessary role, a bridging role, linking together elements that might be poles apart. We in FWIC believe in equality for women but we believe that welfare of women is part and parcel of the welfare of family and society as a whole. This is an emphasis built on caring and sharing, this is the Women's Institute way.

When speaking of WI's assessing how well their plans and programs meet needs of members, this is a task of great magnitude. We need to look to the future. We are bewildered enough by present societal change.

We are confronted daily with the knowledge that starvation stalks the earth for so very many, that for many women equality development and peace are impossible dreams; that there has been a breakdown in old moralities, and that confrontation is the name of the game.

We know that problems of inflation have grown beyond solution by government. We see that pressures on the environment being difficult decisions of individual freedom versus the common good.

The influence of the media is inescapable. But we cannot escape our involvement.

We know other things more disquieting. We know now that in Saskatchewan relatively no difference exists between behaviour patterns of young people, rural or urban, in drug abuse, alcohol consumption, sexual activity and nutritional habits.

We know that women at home are the mainstay of the hidden support of the economy. Attempts at assessment of the importance of the domestic economy has never been satisfactorily accomplished. We have experienced a downgrading, under-valuing and discriminating against women that work in their own homes.

Perhaps if a few more experts buy this definition of the economy we may see the volunteer work of the WI recognized for what we know it to be, important and of real worth.



**AND THAT'S WHAT A CONFERENCE IS ALL ABOUT.** *Learn by doing. During the Federation Representative session Mrs. Irene Wallace is seen writing down ideas proposed by L-r Mrs. Francis Wark, Welland East District; Mrs. Lourens Visser, Rainy River Centre; Mrs. Howard Cumming, Prescott District.*