

# Women's Issues — A Male Perspective

*A Speech Delivered to the Ninth National Convention  
of the  
Federated Women's Institutes of Canada  
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by John Eldon Green

The subject which I agreed to with your President for this presentation was *Women and Economic Development*, as your program correctly notes.

The reason for selecting that subject was a random observation that occurred to me one day, that although 40% of the labour force is now female, almost 100% of the initiative for economic development is provided by males

That apposition intrigued me and I wanted to explore the underlying reasons for this lack of female initiative with this broadly representative women's organization. Why, despite all of the contribution which women have made to agricultural development over the years — to farm productivity and farm management — why is leadership in farming organizations and in major farm issues so exclusively male?

I wanted to examine this situation, and also the possibility of new leadership roles for women in the area of rural economic development, and indeed in economic development generally. But two considerations discouraged that pursuit; the first was that my preliminary enquiries indicated very little research has been done on this subject, and I was faced with the need to do an original paper with very little time for original research on my part.

The second consideration has to be stated very gently, so gently that I think I will keep it to myself for a while until I create a climate for my speech

which will enable you to understand my hesitation.

I am not sure why I was invited here, but let me tell you why I came, and why I can feel comfortable talking to a convention of rural women about feminist issues — of which economic development is only one.

In 1971 I was given responsibility to assist the PEI government to respond to the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and had to take on the entirely unwelcome task of reading the Commission Report. I had no interest whatever up to that time in the Status of Women, as long as my meals were on the table and my home was maintained as homes were meant to be. But I did my duty and read the Report and it was not until I finished reading that I realized for the first time in my life — and I was then 44 years old — the different world which my three daughters would inhabit by comparison with my four sons, and that when I told people I had four boys and three girls I was describing much more than sex differentiation.

No matter if the girls were brilliant by comparison with the boys, or more industrious, more ambitious, with better character and better qualities of judgement, there would be nothing they could do to fully offset the disadvantage of their sex. Many of the professions and career options available to the boys would not be accessible to the girls, in practical terms, unless they clearly excelled all candidates. They would make less money, not have the same access to social and recreational activities and so on.

And so, in defence of my daughters — and possibly my granddaughters — I

became a closet feminist, enjoying the company of and promoting the interests of women, although sometimes at a risk to my reputation — and to theirs.

Now here is where I must draw on your Mary Stewart Collect for aid and courage, that I may state my views "straight-forward and unafraid" for you must permit me to be frank, and must tolerate my frankness. I am considered to be an intelligent, knowledgeable, and insightful man — prominent in my field, well motivated, and fairly well respected. That's not very modest, but it's honest, and fair. And if what I have to say at times seems tough to swallow, accept it as a male insight from within a system of thought and action which is dominated by male thought, opinions, views and prejudices. Worse still, of the men you will encounter in Government, or in positions of authority generally, I may well be among the best in my perception of women and women's issues. So accept what I have to say with that understanding, and let us start from there.

When I adverted to problems with my first theme, the second problem was my realization that this may not be an appropriate audience for a feminist type of speech, because there are possibly a wide variety of views in Women's Institute branches across the country concerning feminism and women's issues generally. One does not associate W.I. with definite feminist causes, and while it may not be a fair or accurate perception, the image of W.I. is that of a fairly conservative body whose orientation at the grass roots has had little to do with grass roots, or any other issue pertaining

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*Mr. Green is a former Deputy Minister with the health, education and social services sector in Prince Edward Island. In 1971, work on a response to the Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women "opened his eyes" to women's issues.*