

The love-hate relationship between Joe Clark and Pierre Trudeau is so strong that I fully believe they must people one another's fantasy life when they go to bed at night.

Women are simply not in that league — they still don't "belong" in politics, despite the sometimes sufferance of their presence. The most dramatic illustration of the trivialization of political issues where women are involved was given in the House of Commons last month, in the spontaneous eruption of laughter over Margaret Mitchell's question on wife beating. Is it possible to gather almost 300 men in one room and not have a wife beater in the crowd? Why else did they laugh?

This may be a particularly sensitive issue here, because there are studies which show a possibly higher incidence of wife abuse in rural areas, where relief is harder for a woman to find. And this brings me to my third issue which is —

Women and Bodily Integrity

Here I am really treading in dangerous waters so may I preface my remarks by saying that I am a more or less old-fashioned Roman Catholic with eight children, whose religious values are pretty well established. I have this belief about God: there is not much any of us can do to upset God's plan — or Providence. We can do no harm that God cannot correct. Nothing any one

of us can do will condemn another person to damnation. Each person must do that alone. The relationship with God is personal and unique to each person. And moral judgements must be made on that basis. That is my belief.

So now the issue of bodily integrity. Women must fight collectively against the imposition of any external or political power over a woman's right to bodily integrity, or to have her integrity restored as much as possible after a violation.

Particularly, women must resist the leadership of men on all issues pertaining to bodily integrity — and here I am referring to other corrective measures which must be available to women in the event of violation by any person for any cause.

A woman violated has, in my judgment — an absolute right to be restored in her integrity to where it was before her violation. No result of the violation can overcome that original right and each individual woman must be rendered free to achieve it, regardless of personal wealth and power.

Obviously, I am speaking of the abortion issue, which is an outstanding example of the mischief which can be done by male leadership on a matter which affects only women.

Violated women must be free to choose, and those of us who have been fighting God's battle in that behalf would do well to lay off, because I suspect God has had very little to do with our motivation. When theologians lead, it is men who lead, and in this issue not only have they been profoundly wrong, they also seem to have been profoundly without faith.

Women and Poverty

I am exhausting my time and my ideas, but in this subject I simply want to remind you again that if you are born female you stand a much greater chance of being poor, or of working all your life for less money, than if you are born male.

If you are a single female parent you are six times more likely to be poor than if you are a single male parent; three times more likely if you are just a single person. So a single woman who gets pregnant instantly doubles her chance of being poor, while the man remains relatively unaffected — most often in any way — by the experience.

If you are an older woman your chances are indeed great for being

poor, especially if you are dependent on a husband's pension. For the majority of older women the OAS-GIS will be all they will have.

So do not assume anything great about the future, and while there is not a whole lot of money to be made in the poverty field, it is one in which women have a stranglehold. Welfare assistance is predominantly directed towards women, and so on.

Now, to pull this together for the Women's Institutes. Throughout my term as a Deputy Minister I always had a concern for the lack of a strong, persistent, forceful voice for women in our Province, because of the great need of understanding and support for the service system which I represented.

In conjunction with my Status of Women assignment which I described earlier, I took the initiative in having the P.E.I. Advisory Council on the Status of Women formed, but it proved to be a major disappointment for me, because they got off on exotic issues which had little to do with the real survival issues which I had thought important to women in my Province.

My experience with private sector organizations seeking to advance various causes was that they were largely incapable of advocating effectively with Governments, unless they were advancing a course of action which Government wished to adopt in any case, or where the issue was so picayune that it was easy for Government to accede. My concerns about the inadequacy of private sector organizations was for assisting them, consisting of a two-day seminar on "Effective Advocacy" covering such matters as the budgeting process, how to work with politicians, how to work with the bureaucracy, and how to develop your own strength as an advocacy organization. (I am prepared to conduct that seminar as a professional service anywhere in Canada, but it isn't free).

And so we come to the Women's Institutes, and I used to reflect on how this organization, with all its 3000 members on P.E.I. — mature women, with many, many years of strong experience, and all of their good will, and potential political strength, how could this organization be rendered into the effective political power it had the potential to become.

Because do not be mistaken about one thing, the Women's Institute, no more than any other women's organization, does not really count



Thornhill WI

A WI member for 50 years, 95-year-old Mrs. H. Mizen cuts the Thornhill WI 80th Anniversary cake. Others present for the celebration which took place late in April included, left to right, Mrs. K. Hiepleh, President FWIO; Mrs. E. Jackson, Tweedsmuir History Curator; and Mrs. W. Drew, President.