## "Challenges in a Changing World"

By Peggy Knapp

As we gather here in this flag-decked auditorium this evening the colours of our provinces and many nations surrounding us,
the banners of our host Area along the walls - how could we fail to
realize that this is a conference of the Associated Country Women of
the World (ACWW) where we will focus on - as the banner announces
- "The Challenges in a Changing World."

To add to the special quality of this evening, we have Canada's only ACWW Member of Honour with us, Mrs. Irene Spry, O.C. - an honour not only to her, but to all of us.

This Conference marks the first time that Ontario has hosted an ACWW Area meeting, welcoming not only the President of FWIC and WI members from this province, but delegates from the Women's Institutes of British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as the Presidents of Unifarm and the JWIO - altogether seven, or half of our voting Societies in Canada.

In all the countries belonging to ACWW, discussions are taking place on the "Challenges in a Changing World," the theme of the ACWW World Conference in New Zealand next February.

ACWW Area Conferences such as this are important because they:

- · give us personal access to an international network;
- help us remember we are a part of something beyond our Branch, community, province and country;
- allow us to hear about other women their lives and concerns and the issues that affect them;
- and, give us an opportunity to send messages directly to the International Board or to draft resolutions or recommendations that go to the World Conference.

But there was not always a way for women to take action - even in our own country or community. When we think of challenges, sometimes we need to turn the clock back - before we set it forward - and look at our own roots. We need to look at the ways that challenges have been faced and overcome by those who have come before us.

A century ago, the times were similar to today. It was the end of an age. The Industrial Revolution was just beginning; heavy industry and production lines were changing the more pastoral type of life. It was a time of great population shifts between countries and between rural and urban areas, and all with its accompanying stress on women and strains on the family.

Now, 100 years later, there are striking similarities as we leave that Industrial Age and step out into the unknown - a time being termed the "Information Age." Difficult enough for the Developed Countries, the challenges of our changing world are having devastating effects in the Developing World.

Let us look for a minute at names which have come down throughout many changing times in our own country:

- ◆ Adelaide Hoodless who foresaw an organization where women could develop to their greatest potential and support and encourage each other and learn together the best ways to build healthy, well-informed families and communities;
- Janet Lee whose charm and skill brought about the forming of the Women's Institute organization along with her husband, Erland;



been the symbol of ACWW since 1977.

- Madge Watt an indomitable little person who took the WI to British Columbia and then to England and Wales, and never stopped or paused in her course until she had begun, along with Lady Aberdeen, an international organization for women - our own ACWW;
- and, Agnes McPhail and Emily Murphy -two women from Western Canada who, from their isolation, loneliness, lack of decent housing and sanitation, formed other farm women's organizations.

There are long lists of others; women who saw the needs and looked for ways to fill them. Women of courage who risked their good names to make a difference. We need those kinds of women today; and indeed, we have them. But the odds are just as formidable as we fat the challenges of today.

This past July, the ACWW Board met in Birmingham, England, where we carried out the business of our International network and shared our concerns with each other around the Boardroom table. As we know, ACWW has consultative status at the United Nations, and for the first time the women who represent us at the UN offices in New York, Rio, Rome, Paris, Geneva, Vienna and Bangkok were able to meet directly with the nine Area Presidents on the Board of ACWW. Each of us spent a whole hour with them during the week, talking about our countries, our problems, the issues facing our women and families, and the challenges that face us all.

Some of these challenges are not nice to hear; some of them are not even easy to talk about. But as Meg Gerrieux, our representative in Geneva said with tears in her eyes, we must talk about them or we will fail to change them.

In the Developed Countries we still face substance abuse, family violence and increasingly dangerous streets and highways. There are still children dying of preventable diseases and many are going to school or to bed hungry. Many women are still isolated. If you don't believe that, ask the woman on welfare, the abused wife, the single parent, or the aging woman on a low fixed income, living for the most part, on tea and toast.

We still need better research and information on women's health and nutrition. And we need to be better educated about AIDS. We still need to find out why our daughters and granddaughters face an increasing risk of abduction or rape.

Those are our problems; now let me share some of the challenges facing those women from the Developing Countries who sat around that Board table in Birmingham.

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