

# Women's institute members vote to oppose de-indexing

By Chris Dona  
of The Free Press

One of the oldest women's groups in the country is starting to test its strength as a lobby group, and with a third of its members over 65 the de-indexing of old age security is its newest cause.

The 45,000 member Federated Women's Institutes passed an emergency resolution on the de-indexing of old age security Thursday at the University of Western Ontario.

There was relatively little debate on the resolution to petition the government "to reverse the budget decision and restore full indexing of old age security," and it passed with only a handful of delegates opposed.

"The power for change is in the numbers," said the organization's new president, Beatrice Reeves of Charlottetown, P.E.I. "Our resolutions chairman will write to the minister in charge and convey our opinion on that issue."

Reeves, who assumes the role of president today, said she intends to help the organization obtain more power in its attempts to become a persuasive force in Ottawa, where its head office is located.

"The Women's Institute should not play as low a profile as it is doing. It should become better known," she said.

Started in 1879 as a vehicle for the education and support of rural women in Canada, women's institutes have only recently begun to branch out and formulate resolutions on national and international issues.

"Most of the resolutions deal with some type of legislation," Reeves said. "Our avenue to having some action on them would be the national government, since we are a national organization."

Of the resolutions passed Thursday, some dealt with nuclear arms limitation, restrictions on pornography, family law regulations, reduction of beer advertising and the preservation of seed varieties.

Of the 1,200 members who attended the organization's 10th national convention here, 130 delegates voted on the resolutions.

"We are hoping our members become more aware of the effects of lobbying, and we are encouraging them to lobby," Reeves said. "One way is to contact the federal government ministers with our recommendations. Another forum is the government task forces, to whom we present briefs when the issues concern us."

Reeves, who has been with wom-

en's institutes for 39 years, said women today are much better informed. And although adult education is still a mandate of the organization, it has begun to emphasize action.

"When (FWI members) know the issues and the facts, we hope they will turn that concern and information into action," she said.

"I think women are much more aware that things won't be done if we can't reach the people with the power, or become the people with the power."

She said the provincial units of

the women's institutes has considerable lobbying power with their respective provincial governments.

"Because of the tremendous amount of extension work and programs we do in the community, the provincial governments are fully aware of the strength of our organization."

Part of the women's institutes move in becoming more influential is their emphasis on leadership skills, which Reeves said "would help our members go on to take on leadership roles on boards and commissions, even in politics."



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