

PRESIDENT'S OPENING REMARKS

ANNUAL MEETING - AUCKLAND, 1972

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I have said on previous occasions, the privilege and the responsibility of opening the Conference proper, by the President, is one that has always given me the greatest concern - so anxious am I that we should have a successful Conference - one where we have achieved much, met old friends, laughed often, and, I hope, had time to relax a little in our own various ways, without the bell calling us to order.

I am reminded of school days when the teacher used to go through the weekly exercise of writing a topic on the blackboard and saying - "Write two pages on that!" It mattered little if all you knew could be recorded in two lines - two pages it was.

My topic is "The crest of the wave", and I hope these few thoughts will keep you interested for at least two minutes.

The Committee of Inquiry Report has now been very widely read. I will not discuss it in detail, as it has a place of its own later on, on the agenda - but briefly my own initial reaction to it was - it has recorded the status quo of the two major contributing organisations in pre-school education - it has indicated where bureaucracy could be more in evidence - and it lacks real vision. I think my reaction is understandable because, although I think I am interested in education at all levels, my particular interest happens to be the field around which the Inquiry was centred.

However, in the last two months, I have attended two conferences where the impact of the report was very evident. The first was the Education Priorities Committee held in August in Wellington. Approximately 300 people attended, representing 80 - 100 organisations. Delegates were divided into 9 groups of 30 people. Each group represented a cross section of personal interests, with an age range equally wide apart. All groups were given the same eleven headings to discuss and finally, to put into order of priority. I will not weary you with all the statistics I have worked out, that emerged from this exercise, but some serve to illustrate what I am trying to say. Only "Aims and Objects of New Zealand Education" was given top priority by all 9 groups. "Pre-School Education" received the top priority rating in 5 groups - over half, you see. Second priorities were also recorded and here 4 groups voted for Pre-School Education - 9 votes when first and second choices were added together. Of the eleven headings, only 4 had a total of 9 votes, and Pre-School Education was one of the four. This was decided by the widest possible representation of people gathered together specifically to contribute their thinking on the direction Education Planning must take for the future. I was tremendously pleased, because I felt that the quality of Pre-School Education offered by our kindergarten movement played a very significant part in the place it was given on the priority rating.

The second conference I attended was that of the National Council of Women, held in Nelson two weeks ago. This was the first opportunity I have had to attend an N.C.W. Annual Meeting, as it so often coincides with our own. I was most impressed by the very able women who spoke on a wide range of subjects. I must admit, I was a little lost in following their conference procedure, but their in-depth study of affairs affecting all facets of life facing our country today took me back to Nelson for three whole days when I had planned to attend only for one day. Here again were representatives of different Societies, Associations and Committees, from Bluff to the far North. They, too, were well aware of the content of the Committee of Inquiry Report, and, with

the unanimous decision of delegates, will be going to the Minister of Education with remits which urge the immediate implementation of the recommendation which asks for pre-school education for all children. What wide-spread and forceful support we are getting from this conference, which represents, through its branches and affiliates, about 300,000 women.

At both these conferences, in the brief time given to speakers, I did my best to tell something of the educational need kindergartens fill in these most formative years.

And my text for today? "The Crest of the Wave". Never before have we had such tangible support. As the longest serving movement, involving the greatest number of children, our efforts are going to be critically evaluated from now on. We have a wonderful opportunity with all this interest being shown, to urge the Government to give us more of the Education vote, which could be used to speed kindergarten experience for all those children who so vitally need it. Our aim is happy, useful citizens for the future of New Zealand. The preparation for this must start with early childhood education. May this Conference play its vital role.

L. M. C. Ingram