

## PRESIDENT'S OPENING REMARKS

Every year seems to have its own memorable milestone - 1970, I hope, will be of very special significance to the kindergarten movement because of the submissions we are privileged to make to the Committee of Inquiry into Pre-school Education - our evaluation of the past eighty years and our projected thoughts for the next twenty-five years. We are grateful to the Honourable the Minister of Education, Mr B. E. Talboys, for his appointment of the Committee, a commission in its own right, which will fix pre-school education in the minds of people, because of the importance placed on it by the Minister. We had a special meeting of the Executive to discuss, and decide on, the submissions the Union would make and it was a little disappointing to find a number of associations did not contribute in any way.

Some weeks ago I received a copy of Dr Neil Begg's latest book, "The New Zealand Child and his Family". It is a publication I can recommend to you all. In his foreword, Dr Begg uses a quotation made by Sir Robert Hutchison. "From too much zeal for the new, and contempt for what is old, from putting knowledge before wisdom, science before art, and cleverness before commonsense ... Good Lord deliver us."

I felt this quotation rather apt in telling you, briefly, the underlying principles used in the setting out of our submissions.

We have no contempt for the old - quite the reverse. We are proud to record our history of the past eighty years and to recognise that the aims of the 1890's differ very little from the basic aims of the 1970's - to help little children on the road to a life of full endeavour and enjoyment. But there is a place for ... "the zeal for the new". In recent years our way of life in many areas has changed perceptibly. Industry, the growth of our Polynesian population, dense housing areas, have left us behind in the establishing of kindergartens. It is no longer possible for us to raise the one-third of the cost necessary to establish a kindergarten in these areas - and New Zealand cannot afford the time lag of four or five years, and in some cases more, that it takes to raise this money in the more affluent localities. I have made numerous statements to the Department on this, but it is now time all of you raised your voices and made it known that nowhere in the field of education is our voluntary effort - money-wise - matched. Two million dollars is now spent on kindergarten education but we raise by voluntary effort \$600,000 to complete the service we have such faith in. Where else is the extra 30% of the total Government grant raised by parents and other interested people?

Our submissions point out very clearly that kindergarten pre-school is a popular preference by parents, the length and breadth of the country, but when faced with the raising of \$8,000, initially, for a kindergarten, it is obvious that those children most needing help are going to miss out. We must be united, and vocal, in our request for sites and buildings. We are equally anxious to retain the vital parent involvement in the day-to-day running of the kindergarten, for in this environment both parents and children grow together - it is a family experience. And here we are very proud to note that 81% of our kindergartens have Maori children attending, and that their parents, in most cases, are keen to participate fully.

Fifty per cent of what a child learns, he learns by the time he is five years of age. Let me return to the words 'wisdom' and 'art' in my opening quotation. If so much learning takes place in these early years, then it is obvious that those children fortunate enough to be able to attend well run pre-schools have a tremendous advantage. Our submissions point out our concern that



in New Zealand at the present time only 31% have this opportunity. A wise nation must look to the foundations on which its future citizens are building.

Growing up is an 'art', we conform to no scientific formula - nor are we alike in many respects. It is the good Lord's way of making interesting people. But we have to live together and kindergarten is the first experience children have of learning this very vital lesson. Should any of them be denied it?

'Clever' statements are seldom helpful. 'Commonsense' will bring us much nearer our goal - and quicker. Our submissions are definite in what we ask for all children. We must be firm in our resolve to implement them as quickly as possible. But within our movement let us get our priorities right - let us put our emphasis where the need is greatest.

Laura M. C. Ingram,

President,

N.Z. Free Kindergarten Union.