

Message from the Women's League
By Senator Jessica C. Odle

The Women's League congratulates Cynthia Forde M.P. JP. on her resounding victory at the polls to become the duly elected representative of the people for the constituency of St. Thomas.

This victory represents an increase in the number of women ever to sit in the House of Assembly. It is significant also, as for the first time the people of St. Thomas have a woman who is a daughter of the Parish, a grass roots woman, as their representative. This brings to four the number of women who are working side by side with our menfolk in the highest decision making body in the land to ensure that legislation created is beneficial to all citizens equally.

History has been made at the start of this new millennium for women's advancement as we move closer to an equitable balance, closer to the establishment of a critical mass that we hope will advance and ensure that a gender perspective is enunciated in all legislation. It is the hope of the Women's League that this will be apparent, and that the input of the League will, by resolutions that it has advanced and will continue to advance in the future, be included in the development process. We pledge our continuing support.

The Role of the League should not be trivialized, for over the years the League's activities which were primarily those of fund raising, support and sustenance are identified by the service, relatively unknown, but known to those who benefited, by some female stalwarts of this party particularly during the periods when the Barbados Labour Party constituted the opposition and party support was at a low ebb .

This contribution must be recognized for the use value that was generated in the private sphere which off-times is overlooked as a contributor to the exchange value in the public sphere. Women are the filter between the two spheres and the realization of gender equity requires that gender roles and the basic institutions of society be reorganized.

Today we strive to continue the upliftment of women in order to allow many to be of service in the public sphere serving in Parliament and on Boards etc. in a meaningful way. Our women continue to offer yeoman service. In this regard, our society must more broadly recognize women's participation as a democratic right and not as an allowance that some believe it is.

Women from all levels of society must continue to play an active part in politics. Our presence must be seen and felt in all arenas in the continual development of our great party and Nation.

In summation I refer to the comment of Dr. Rose M.D'Sa, Research Officer, Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat in the UK '.....Law alone cannot reverse the traditional subordination of women because it involves a dialectical relationship with politics, economics and culture. It is therefore intrinsically linked to the development debate and may very well be the decisive factor not only in achieving a radical transformation in the role of the sexes but also in altering the global inequities of the development crisis which now faces the world economy'.

The Women's League extends best wishes for an informative and successful Conference 2001.