

# Adelaide Sinclair

## Adelaide and the Cuban Hurricane

■ Many Canadians have been associated with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), but no one for longer in a senior position than Adelaide Sinclair. Born and raised in Toronto, she lectured in economics and political science at the University of Toronto before the Second World War. During the war, she became director of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service. Her involvement with UNICEF began in 1946 when she was executive assistant to the deputy minister of Health and Welfare, George Davidson. She was Canada's representative to the UNICEF Executive Board for 10 years, and its chairman from 1951 to 1952. In 1957, she joined the UNICEF staff as deputy executive director for programmes, retiring in 1967. She died in November 1982 at the age of 82. In the week before her death, she had been tape-recording memories of her days with UNICEF in a typically un pompous style. The following is drawn from the interviews she was then giving to Jack Charnow, and also from her farewell remarks to the UNICEF Executive Board in June 1967. Her introduction to UNICEF was fairly casual:

"The Canadian government in 1946 didn't care a hoot who represented it on the UNICEF Board. They were not in favour of this thing being started at all. The UN was very exciting and full of big opportunities, and to put in this extra little thing was, they felt, a kind of a waste of time. But when the UNICEF resolution was finally passed and Canada was elected to the Board, we had at least to make a show of appearing at the meetings. They considered that this was below the dignity of a serious foreign officer, and so they tossed it over to George Davidson and said: 'You will have to send somebody from your department.' When I came back from a weekend away, George came into my office and said, 'I'm afraid I've wished something on you while you were away. I hope you don't mind.... It might be interesting for you to see the UN and how it's developing and what it's like.' And so I said, 'All right, I'll be good. I'll go.' I think quite a lot of the people in External rued the day. They got a little tired of me at times.

"I had no instructions because nobody gave a hoot, you know, to give me any instructions. It was really more fun that they didn't, because I made up my own. At the beginning, I telephoned and asked for instructions. I presumed that was what I was supposed to do. I mean, George got instructions before he went to ECOSOC [Economic and Social Council], and a lot of other people I knew did. But I was told from External, 'Adelaide, you know more about feeding children and everything else than we do ... just use your head!' So for the first two or three years I had no instructions whatever, and it was perfectly lovely. I suddenly would find myself saying, 'The Canadian government could not agree to that,' or 'The Canadian government would support that,' and then thinking, 'I must remember to tell them sometime what we are doing.'

"I tried to write ... reports when I got home, since I thought that was my business, and they almost begged me to stop because they hadn't time to read them.... I don't blame them in one sense because they were all terribly busy, and this wasn't of paramount importance as far as they could see. And then the WHO [World Health Organization] delegates were chosen from our