

Tributes to Deceased Members

conference itself took place, and I also received a summary of the proceedings of the conference before any announcement was made to the public. More than that I do not feel I should say at the moment.

I should like to add that when the matter comes up for discussion I hope to have at my left the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Ralston), who unfortunately met with an accident a few days ago but who I am happy to say is now rapidly recovering from its effects.

TRIBUTES TO DECEASED MEMBERS

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have referred to our pleasure in meeting together once more, but there is seldom a long adjournment of parliament, or a session of any length, during which one or two or more of our members are not taken from us. The adjournment of the past few months has been no exception in that particular. Since we last met here two well known members from this side of the house have been taken away, Doctor Fleming, the hon. member for Humboldt, and Mr. Peter Bercovitch, the hon. member for Cartier. Both of these gentlemen made important contributions to the work of parliament.

To one following the proceedings of this house from the galleries it might seem a little strange that at a time when the lives of large numbers of men are being sacrificed in different parts of the world in the cause of freedom, when we are suffering such losses as are being suffered in the different services, we should pause at the beginning of our proceedings to take notice of the passing of but one or two of our small number here. However, it is not merely the thought of the individual himself that is in our minds on occasions such as this; it is what he represents, in his own personality and character, and also what he represents of the constituency whose honour he upholds in this parliament and over whose interests he watches; it is also what the constituency itself represents in the life of our country, and the experience which an hon. member must necessarily bring to parliament, as a result of which he is chosen as representative of the community from which he comes.

Doctor Fleming was one of a group of medical doctors who constitute one of the important professional groups in this parliament. Like many of the young men of a few years ago, upon completing his course at a university in Ontario, he went to western Canada and began the practice of his profession on the prairies. He chose a community which had been largely settled by persons who had come to Canada from different countries in Europe.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

As a member of that community he took a special interest in the fortunes and burdens of those who come to a new country from other lands. He was an outspoken champion of racial equality, regardless of the origins of those whose interests he was supporting. He was strong in his advocacy of those measures which would make for fair treatment of minorities. I am sure there is no cause more deserving of support at this particular time in our country than that pertaining to the rights of minorities, and to those of different racial groups. In helping to understand their feelings and their interests, and thereby in helping to further the cause of unity among those of different racial origins in our country at a time of war, Doctor Fleming rendered a real service to parliament and to the country. He passed away at the early age of forty-six years. It is unfortunate that the course of his earthly life should have been so brief.

The late Mr. Peter Bercovitch who entered parliament in 1938, was also a representative of a constituency of special character, in that its electors in large part were of a faith different from that of the majority of their fellow citizens. Mr. Bercovitch sat in parliament as the representative of a constituency which for something like twenty-five years has been represented in parliament by a member of the Jewish faith. After the passing of Mr. Jacobs, whom those of us who sat in parliament with him will always remember as one of the most lovable characters, the late Mr. Bercovitch was offered the nomination in that constituency. He was no stranger to politics, having been a member of the legislative assembly in Quebec for a considerable number of years. I believe he first entered that assembly in 1916, and continued as a member until he resigned to contest the federal constituency. It was a tribute, I take it, not less to the man himself than to the ideals and the cause he championed that he, a member of the Jewish faith, should have entered this parliament on the first occasion without opposition. He was returned at the last general election, but not being in robust health, in fact far from it, he was not able to take an active part in the proceedings of the house. However those who knew the late Mr. Bercovitch will be the first to recall that he held a high and honourable position in his profession and that he was recognized as one of the leading barristers in our country. Also, as hon. members are aware, he was a leader of Jewry in the part of Canada in which he lived. He was a constant and fearless champion of the welfare of the people he represented. I should imagine there is no member in the House of Commons who felt more deeply