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LETTERS

Bill of Rights and Our Banality of Mind

Sir:
 I was quite interested to read in a recent editorial your views and comments on the proposed Bill of Rights. I must, however, take exception to most of it as being founded almost completely on a certain inbred banality of mind.

The question of whether the Bill of Rights as it is presently conceived would be or should be enacted and entrenched in the law of the land seems to be the substance of your remarks. We have liberties now, you say, and they are fundamentally prescribed by the fact that they are not mentioned formally in either the British North America Act or in the law of the realm. Why is it then necessary, you continue, to enshrine in an amendable and repealable Act of Parliament those fundamental rights and freedoms which we presently enjoy, again as established by the British North America Act.

There is one fact of life in the

western democracies of which I feel certain you are aware, that present day legislatures are falling into low esteem. Government has become so complicated in the modern welfare and socialist states that the individual, contrary to the dogmas of well-farites and socialists, has become blurred, and has also, as far as Acts of Parliament are concerned, little more than a statistic. Government has become so increasingly complicated that many pieces of legislation merely set out its requirement in general words, not in specific terminology, leaving great discretionary powers in the hands of ministers and departments. The numerical increase of such Acts is accelerating, and it will continue to do so in the long years ahead.

My point here is simply that rule by Cabinet or departmental decree might well become the governing factor of our nation, with Parliament, and indeed all representative congresses and assemblies, little more than appendages to the arm of the executive. No more, in fact, than an uninfected wart on the executive's little finger.

If the individual organism man is already becoming blurred into a statistic, then it is possible, in the future for the fundamental rights and freedoms constituting the basic stuff of our institutions and government to become similarly blurred.

This is what must at all costs be avoided. Mental stagnation has set in to most citizens of this country towards politics and all things political. The Canadian people have been asleep for a long time. They have awakened drowsily on only three occasions in this century: 1911, 1926, and 1956-57, but have promptly dozed off again into blissful oblivion.

This sleepiness of the Canadian elector must be watched at all costs; he must be made aware at all times, if possible, of his position as a citizen, for the continuing subversion of the usefulness of Parliament by the executive could well rob him of his birthright. The Bill of Rights was designed to safeguard his position from Federal encroachment not only now, but in the years to come. This is the purpose of the bill, a bill clothed in simple language, for human rights and fundamental freedoms require no grandiloquent

words to contribute to their greatness and importance.

After the conclusion of the American revolutionary war, the then new government found it necessary to enact ten constitutional amendments containing the sum total of their rights and freedoms, even though these rights and freedoms were generally accepted as forming part of their heritage and tradition. To quote the Prime Minister on his introduction of the Bill, "Thomas Jefferson contended that it was far better and was the only safe course to have safeguards for personal freedom on the statute books than to trust to the discretion and whims of a majority".

Mr. Mackenzie King, regarded by some as the founder of true Canadian autonomy and the man who established a truly individual Canadian nation (a view with which I disagree on the basis of proven facts of history), acknowledged at the end of his career, to quote John Farthing, "no responsibility to Parliament or to the elected representatives of the people in Parliament. He held himself responsible only and directly to the people who are allowed to express themselves at the end of carefully prepared election campaigns held at intervals of four or five years. In the periods between elections the party leader alone is answerable for the government of the country. His responsibility to anyone beyond himself consists in his recognition of the single idea that to justify his conduct he must at all costs win the next election. I am not implying a low sense of morality; I am merely making explicit the moral implications of the position. It is not necessary to accuse the party leader who made it his own moral astigmatism. The moral astigmatism is in his successors".

The Kingsian tradition, of which you appear to be a supporter by your opposition to the present Bill of Rights, must be discarded at all costs if we are to remain a nation thriving on the liberties and freedoms of our heritage. The discretion and whims of a majority can be equally dangerous inside or outside of Parliament.

Yours very truly,
 Mike Steeves.

OUR SEEDS OF SELF-DESTRUCTION

The film *On the Beach*, recently shown in Halifax, and taken with an unusual degree of accuracy, by Hollywood standards, from Nevil Shute's novel of the same title, is especially appropriate in the light of President De Gaulle's late sally into the field of atomic armaments and tests. The movie describes the last few days of life on earth (in Australia) following a disastrous atomic war and the resulting gradual, but complete, annihilation by radioactive fallout of all living things.

While at present it would seem that we need not fear any immediate outbreak of an atomic world war, it would appear, at the same time, that the human race is industriously and systematically planting the "seeds of its own destruction" in atmospheric dust. The alarming increase in the amount of Strontium 90 (which can produce, along with other heart-warming items, the disease of leukaemia, an insurable form of blood cancer) is in itself sufficient indication of the importance of placing a ban upon atomic explosions.

It may be pointed out that the loudly voiced complaints of the press are not merely the product of a search for sensational journalism. Competent scientists in the physical, chemical and biological fields, not to mention medical experts, have expressed their deep concern here at Dal and at leading scientific centers all over the world.

De Gaulle's desire to raise French prestige on the international scene is, perhaps, human and understandable, but this does not make his atomic policy either politic or excusable. Besides endangering the health of the world's population, his action can only arouse other powers, like China, to similar unfortunate expedients.

Laying aside, however, patriotic considerations such as these, which have indeed become obsolete with the increasing need for international co-operation, there can only be two reasons for the continuance of atomic tests: (1) To gain scientific information valuable in peaceful, as well as military, research, and (2) To act as a deterrent, through fear, to war. But with respect to the first, physicists have already shown that the benefits are far outweighed by the disadvantages. And the second motive is based upon the flimsiest of all possible principles, the concept that the more horrible the weapons that man constructs are, the more likely it will be that his fear of war will force him to peace. This blind faith in the infallibility of human reason is touching, but hardly supported by historical experience. Somewhere,

sometime, there will be somebody drunk enough, insane enough, frightened enough, or misled enough to press the fatal button.

And if it is once conceded that war will not be prevented by such means, then the full tragedy of atomic armaments becomes immediately evident; for the United States has put so much faith in the deterrent fallacy that it has neglected conventional stockpiles, thereby assuring that hostilities would take on an atomic character.

What an ignominious end for humanity is now within our grasp! All life and progress may well cease upon the explosion of a series of glorified fire-crackers in the hands of a few adult children.

VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

The twelve unpainted wooden buildings stood mired in the early March mud, and a chilling fog blotted out the barren, mountainous landscape beyond a waist high wood-and-wire fence. The camp was very nearly silent. Now and then a pinched, suspicious face would appear at a window, two or three grimy figures would splash between buildings.

Spring had come to Kapfemberg barracks, in the Austrian mountains, one of 60 refugee camps dotted across Europe, Asia and North Africa.

Who are the refugees? They are the victims, some 16 million of them, of World War II whose homes and livelihoods disappeared in the holocaust; the lost souls who exist without money, without identity, and largely without hope, in concrete bunkers and overcrowded wooden barracks far from the homelands they will never again see.

Living on handouts and breadlines, they are ignored and forgotten by all but a few charitable agencies in the West. There are potential students among them, intelligent young people who will have no chance at an education; too poverty-stricken to learn a trade or to become useful citizens; grown men with no chance at rehabilitation. All of them barely hoping for that chance, barely subsisting, and many simply withdrawing from the life that has spurned them.

The United Nations has declared the period between July 1959 and June 1960 World Refugee Year. There are three objectives of its world program: (1) to make everyone with a home aware of the refugee plight; (2) to promote immediate financial contribution from governments, voluntary agencies, and the public; (3) to promote repatriation, resettlement, and rehabilitation of millions of refugees.

Beware The Old Encyclopedia Pitch

The *Gazette* has been informed that encyclopedia salesmen have been at work on the campus again, with the most misleading and unethical approach yet. The pitch, condemned by the Halifax Better Business Bureau, is this:

Salesmen for a firm called the "Universal World Reference Encyclopedia" have been approaching college students offering a FREE set of books (Shakespeare, etc.) plus a set of coupons worth (they claim) \$4.00 on an annual supplement worth \$10.00.

Just send in a coupon and \$6.00, they say. But reputable business men advise us that the books aren't worth nearly \$6.00. The whole package deal costs \$130-\$140, and the prospect is told it would cost him \$500 on the open market. This is nonsense.

Some students have been told they had been specially treated "as part of an advertising campaign" in the area—hardly a true statement; others that they are getting a special price because they have been specially chosen as prominent and popular students... The pitches are old, but they still work.

The Better Business Bureau publishes a pamphlet that lists and condemns the practises used by the above-mentioned Encyclopedia company. In effect, there is no "special" price, no reductions, and, if anything, a few extra costs implanted in "mailing and handling." Think, before you sign.

In Canada, every university student and professor will be approached to give one dollar to the refugee fund. The single fund is jointly directed by NFCUS and WUSC. It has been estimated that the money would accomplish the following:

- \$14 will provide rations for a refugee for one year.
- \$70 will allow a refugee to learn a trade.
- \$180 will give a refugee a year's vocational training.
- \$500 will house three families, or provide vocational training for 25 students, or rehabilitation courses for 25 handicapped refugees.

In nearly every country a campaign similar to the one in Canada is now underway. Mere dribbles of cash will not solve the problem, but only sustain it at its present level; the giant steps must be taken now if the refugee problem is ever to be alleviated. The burden may appear to be simply financial, but it is far greater a moral one: these people are human beings.

When WUSC asks Dalhousie students for their support, we shall be ready.