

Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks as a conscience of mankind. The first two recitals in that Declaration read as follows:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Those recitals which preceded the declaration are still applicable. Thirty years after the declaration was made, the situation has not substantially changed, although it would be wrong to deny that much useful progress has been made. In many parts of the world there is still contempt for human rights, resulting in barbarous acts. This is not the proper place to go into any detail on that matter. I only want to say that we must not be selective in our judgment wherever human rights are involved. Whatever regimes invade them should be treated alike, firmly and fearlessly by the expression of Canadian opinion, not only in international forums but also in bilateral relations.

An hon. Member: Fora.

Mr. Brewin: Somebody says fora. I do not like that word. I purposely left it out.

The declaration contains two types of rights, those that are political in nature, such as freedom of religion and speech, freedom from torture and cruel punishment, freedom from discrimination, and the right of access to the courts. It also contains a number of social, economic, and cultural rights which are enumerated in the declaration.

We in Canada have had much talk about a new Canadian constitution. It is not easy to predict when this new constitution will come into being. I hope it will be soon. We believe that when it does, the essential political rights should be enshrined in it as they embody the fundamentals of Canada's democratic society. A constitutional declaration of these political freedoms would not only have tremendous educational effect but would be a means of protection against invasion of these rights from any source, including governments.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights goes much further than merely dealing with political rights. It includes, of equal importance, a declaration of economic rights, for example the right to work, the right to form and join trade unions, the right to equal pay for work and the right for leisure and periodic holidays with pay, the right to security in unemployment, sickness or disability and to a standard of living adequate for health; the right to education, the right to cultural life in the community.

These are fundamental rights. However, they cannot be secured by a mere parliamentary or even constitutional declaration. They depend upon detailed legislation and administration, and the planning of a just society, which is our job.

[Mr. Brewin.]

● (1222)

Many Canadians are in urgent need of these rights—I think especially of the million or so unemployed, the large segment of the population which is below the poverty line. Special attention has to be paid to the rights of our native peoples, of immigrants and of aliens in our midst. We should, from whatever party we come, dedicate ourselves to realizing these rights for all our people.

What are the limits? There is no limit based on geography. The rights proclaimed are rights of all human beings by virtue of their humanity. There is no distinction to be drawn between people of different racial backgrounds. The poison of racism and racial discrimination must be totally eradicated. To many, the Declaration of Human Rights is a naive, idealistic, and theoretical exercise. We, on the other hand, hold a deep conviction that it is the way of sanity, the way of true realism, and the way of peace.

The Declaration of Human Rights must be applied to the world of nations; this is necessary in order that we may build a world society. It must also be applied within nations such as Canada. International proclamation is meaningless unless supported by the institutions and personal convictions of persons within different nations. It must permeate the thinking of individuals.

Our former colleague, Mr. Gordon Fairweather, who was the member for Fundy-Royal and is now chairman of the Human Rights Commission, said this:

For me to live a full human life, my neighbours must be just as free as I am. Their freedom is my freedom, their equality is my equality, their dignity is my dignity. Freedom is indivisible, human rights are universal.

I think that says it all. I have ended my quotation from the former hon. member for Fundy-Royal; I am not sure that all the members of his party are interested in hearing it. I commend that quotation to all members of the House, and to all Canadians. I, and those for whom I speak, accept the commitment to fight for human rights and to fight for the rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the world, in our own countries, in our own communities and, if I may be personal for a moment, within ourselves.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to join the former speakers and all hon. members in the House in commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as proclaimed by the United Nations on December 2, 1948. At that time I expect most member countries of the United Nations supported the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, just as all the other countries which have since joined the family of the United Nations also support it. However, we unfortunately have to admit that in many countries around the world that declaration is far from being respected, though several countries have adopted their own bill of rights; we have to realize that regrettably there is still a long way to go and many situations have to change before its theory is in fact applied.