

Human Rights

I feel, Mr. Speaker, that we have the right to say what we think.

And, I repeat, this does not mean that we have a monopoly on reason. But we are sincere and we express what we think is the truth. If anyone believes we are in the wrong, then let him tell us so and prove it.

Mr. Speaker, before closing my remarks, I hope the Prime Minister will decide to have this bill considered by a joint committee of the house and the Senate. Before resuming my seat, I want to express my astonishment at the speeches of some hon. members, that is, some Conservative members, who took part in this debate. They seemed to have had some prior briefing. All of them praised the Prime Minister of Canada. Not a single criticism was levelled at the bill. Besides, those who might have criticisms to make will not make them here. I know, and if you want a name I shall give it right away. But it is obvious that not all Conservative members of this house are this enthusiastic about this bill.

However, I hope that the Prime Minister will take into account the suggestions made by the opposition. Especially do I hope that the bill of rights will help maintain the freedoms of all Canadians, freedoms of which we are all proud, and that we all want to be maintained in Canada, both the leader of my party and the leader of the government.

(Text):

Mr. Robert Muir (Cape Breton North and Victoria): Mr. Speaker, in opening the remarks I have to make upon this subject may I observe that I believe there are few occasions in the normal routine of parliamentary business which justify a non-partisan approach. However, I believe the measure now before the house provides ample evidence in support of the assertion that on this occasion we are justified in leaving our partisan or sectarian prejudices aside in the consideration of so vital a matter as the preservation and enlargement of fundamental human rights.

Indeed it is on occasions such as the present bill introduced by the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) affords that parliament should be seen at its finest, when the gangway that divides this house should shrink under the friendly atmosphere of a common concern and a shared sense of appreciation of the important essentials that in fact unite us. When we come together to consider ways and means of securing even more surely the foundations of human liberty it should be in an atmosphere devoid of

personal bias or narrow, partisan sectarianism. This is not the time nor the place where the sacred rights of the individual are to be trifled with like pawns on some national chessboard for mere selfish, partisan advantage. In our attempt to guarantee the basic rights of all Canadians let us beware lest we appear to be the pleaders of some special cause or interest. Freedom is indivisible; it must know no boundaries, no limits, no ethnic, racial or religious preferences, apart from the reasonable and equitable demands of reason and responsibility.

Perhaps no subject prompts such widespread interest as the consideration of human rights. Around the world there are precious few bonds that unite nation with nation, but of all the ties that do bind the hearts of mankind none is so strong or so universally appealing as the deep-seated hunger after liberty. It may find expression in different tongues, with different symbols and contrasting motives, but whatever the language the overtones, the melody of liberty is familiar.

I am reminded that in my own riding, as I am sure in other ridings across our land, the heritage of our past recalls for us the truth of this yearning that goes beyond the boundaries of race or creed, or even time itself. Some of the early settlers of Cape Breton came to this land from across the seas in order to escape the tyranny and persecution which afflicted them. They came because the air was free. They came that their children might be born and educated free from the depressing shadows of the countless types of slavery that threatened to envelop and enslave them. They came in quest of personal liberty.

So, I feel that the people I represent are vitally involved in this bill of rights, and I would be remiss in the discharge of my duty to my constituents and to Canada if in a matter that concerns every Canadian I were to remain silent and by that gesture of neglect fail to raise my voice for the cause of freedom.

The bill before this house is a most interesting and significant legislative development. I must at the outset disclaim any pretence of being versed in the legal or constitutional complexities of such a measure, but I respectfully submit that the voice of freedom's followers cannot be confined to the carefully measured syllables of the legal expert alone. On the contrary, our voices must transmit the longings and aspirations, the hopes and fears of all who hunger and thirst after liberty. Perhaps I can add my voice to those of others, and speak, if I may, for the so-called ordinary man in the street, or