

I wish to express my concern at the campaign of criticism and condemnation that has been directed by a variety of Canadian social and political groups, as well as by sections of the Canadian news media, against the Canadian Ambassador to Chile, Mr. Andrew Ross, a conscientious and dedicated public servant who enjoys, and who continues to enjoy, the confidence of the government. This campaign against Ambassador Ross has been most unfair and unjustified because it has been based on selectively leaked messages and selectively quoted excerpts of messages which he sent to the government, and on a misunderstanding of the role and the responsibility of a Canadian ambassador abroad.

As Canadian Ambassador to Chile, Ambassador Ross' first responsibility is to represent the interests of Canada -- not Chile -- and to report events in Chile as he observed them on the spot and to relate these events to the totality of Canada's interests in that country. This he did to the best of his ability and it is a matter of concern that certain groups in Canada who would be the first to champion the rights of free speech and expression, and the rights of privacy of communication, would seem so ready to denounce Ambassador Ross for his exercise of these rights when some of his views did not, apparently, accord with their own.

There has also been much unjustified criticism of Ambassador Ross in regard to the question of granting temporary shelter in the Canadian Embassy and in regard to the movement of refugees and other persons seeking to emigrate to Canada. Ambassador Ross and the embassy staff arranged for the safe-conduct of over fifty persons to obtain shelter in other embassies and, eventually, to leave Chile. He and his wife also granted temporary shelter in the Canadian Embassy -- an exceptional measure in Canadian practice -- to eight Canadians and to nineteen non-Canadians who were cared for until arrangements could be made for their safe-conduct out of Chile. His actions were, of course, in accordance with instructions that he received from the government and which he carried out to the government's satisfaction. Certain responsible groups in Canada have obviously felt that the government should have been doing more in this regard and, as a result of their recent and documented representations and our own investigations of the situation on the spot, the government has agreed to apply more relaxed selection criteria with regard to persons in Chile wishing to emigrate to Canada.

Ours is a free country of free institutions and those who disagree with the government's policy on any particular issue are free to criticize the government and make representations for changes of policy. This is the essence of our democratic system of government. However, those who are critical of government policy should direct their criticism against the government and not against a dedicated public servant who is honestly endeavouring to implement government policy and government instructions to the best of his ability.