

The Financial Post, which is not a particularly radical paper, has this to say in an article headed, "Personal Liberty Worth Preserving":

Communism is an economic and social theory which is offensive to a great many people. But those who believe in communism have as much right to present their point of view to the public as those who believe in capitalism, a competitive economy, or state socialism . . . There are some things worse than the propagation of new and even unpleasant and unsound doctrines. Among them are the tyranny of the state and the loss of personal liberties.

I was interested in reading an article in the Montreal Star, from which I took two or three extracts. My colleague suggests that this is another communist paper! Reference is made first of all to the situation in the United States:

Written right into the constitution of the United States is the following clause:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Great Britain has no written constitution. But she has a very definite and well understood unwritten constitution, established by usage and "broadened down from precedent to precedent." In this constitution there is no more firmly fixed principle than the freedom of the press.

Now we come to Canada:

We are the legitimate heirs of England's slowly shaped postulates of justice, of her imposing framework of court practice and legal axioms, of her many blood-bought bulwarks of liberty from Magna Charta down.

Is it not a fair inference to say that we are also the heirs of her three most signal achievements in establishing freedom within her borders, free speech, freedom of conscience and a free press? Are they not as much a part of our constitution as if they had been written into its folios?

And one sentence from the Free Press of my own city:

There is no guarantee of freedom so long as that threat exists; and in the absence of a Bill of Rights embodied in our constitution, the solution for lack of a better one rests in active and stringent use of the powers of disallowance of provincial legislation vested in the federal government.

Yes, this further one:

The responsibility that lies upon the dominion government is therefore very great. Its power of disallowance is relatively unimportant in so far as provincial laws are concerned which are merely ultra vires. In such cases there rests an adequate appeal to the courts. But it is in other fields, where the fundamental liberties of the citizens are threatened by laws legally passed by provincial legislatures, that the danger lies.

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

I cannot but think how different is the general indifference in this country to the passing of this kind of legislation to the keen interest shown in the motherland in preserving fundamental liberties.

Let me read a few words of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Sir John Simon, upon introducing legislation which would help control the difficulties met by all governments these days. Sir John said:

If honourable members will take a broad view of the events of the last few years it will be agreed that since the war developments in Europe have tended to let loose extremist doctrines—whether doctrines of the Right or the Left does not matter—which in their application have this special quality, that are essentially intolerant and determined to browbeat and overthrow contrary doctrines. The adherents of these doctrines deny the right of others to hold different opinions. If they succeeded they would do their utmost to stop the expression of different opinions. In the meantime they are ready, if not to use, at least to display force to spread their own views. In contrast with this the great characteristic of British political life is its tolerance. All the things which we prize—freedom of opinion, freedom of speech, and freedom of meeting—are all based on our conception of political and civic toleration. . . .

I am not discussing whether it is communists who make fascists or fascists who make communists. That is not the point. The point is that we should do our best to act even-handedly in the matter and base ourselves on general principles.

That is all that I ask from this government. I am quite confident that the Minister of Justice must be stirred by an appeal to the traditions of Liberalism, but I would say to him that he cannot avoid the heavy responsibilities which are placed upon him in his position to-day.

An hon. MEMBER: He can take the responsibility.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: Well. I assume he must! I have said that again and again. But we have had fourteen months of waiting; fourteen months during which there have been these arrests, which I think most of us would call illegal arrests; fourteen months in which there has been suppression of freedom; fourteen months in which homes have been closed; fourteen months in which people in one province in this dominion have not been allowed to exercise their inherent rights as British subjects. How much longer are we going to wait? It is said, "Let the minister decide." Of course, he will have to decide; the government will have to decide. But as I said in my opening remarks, I am here to present these facts in the parliament of Canada where I think they should be