

As a newcomer to this Committee, Sir, I trust I may be forgiven, if throughout our discussion of this article, I have sometimes had the impression that we have been more concerned with the abuses of freedom of information, than with our efforts to ensure that everyone shall have the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The experience of history has shown all too clearly that governments do possess the means to apply any necessary restrictive measures and that these measures have sometimes been used to curb the voices of freedom. Should we not consider this matter in a positive rather than a negative sense? Surely, the most important aspect of this article is the need to ensure that people everywhere shall have the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to express them freely. This is admirably and succinctly phrased in the first and second paragraphs of Article 19. The third paragraph goes on to express the general limitations placed upon these fundamental freedoms. Those who drafted the third paragraph have been wise in not going beyond these general considerations, and I suggest, Sir, that we will be wise in confining ourselves to them. Many delegations can, I am sure, go on to specify a great many other limitations which are of particular concern to them. But it is our opinion that by adopting further limitations we weaken the article itself, perhaps defeat its intent, and run the risk of making it an instrument which would countenance the suppression of the very freedom we seek to preserve.

This is not to say, Mr. Chairman, that we regard the present text as in any way sacrosanct - indeed, many nations now represented on this committee were not present here when it was drafted and have had no other opportunity to discuss it. We welcome their comments and agree wholeheartedly that where we can improve the text we should most certainly do so. We sympathize with the fears of many of those who have spoken about the need for further limitations in the third paragraph of this article, and with the difficulties they have encountered in dealing with this subject. The vast technical improvements in the media of communication have most certainly created new and complex problems for all of us. We are not convinced, however, that the remedy lies in further restrictive measures. In Canada we believe that it lies instead in having the courage to permit our people and those engaged in the press, radio and television, to develop within themselves a sense of public responsibility, with which they can best serve the interest and welfare of the community as a whole. To us this is a vital element in the heritage of democracy.

I listened with great interest to the comments of the distinguished representative of Chile when he spoke on this subject on Friday last. He made a number of most useful suggestions. I was also impressed by the statement made by the distinguished representative of Pakistan, and with her comment that some of the amendments which have been proposed relate more appropriately to Article 26 than they do to Article 19.

I have endeavoured, Sir, to outline the point of view on this article of my delegation, and I shall not take up the time of the Committee to indicate our position on each of the amendments before us. Where we think such amendments will improve the text, or result in an acceptable compromise, we will support them, provided they do not in our opinion prejudice in any way the intention of those who drafted the article, to ensure the basic freedoms set forth in the first two paragraphs. We should not, Sir, lose sight of our basic objective in our endeavours, however worthy, to prohibit licence.