

Mr. Chairman:

I am delighted to be here with you tonight, to be able to take part in your celebrations of Columbus Day. All of us who have our roots elsewhere, whether in Italy or, as in my case, in Scotland, can join in celebrating the discovery of the New World by Christoforo Colombo, a discovery that has given us and our fathers who came here before us a new life, a new freedom and a new home.

I will not waste my time and yours by producing for you tonight the bromides and clichés often considered suitable for occasions like this -- the greatness of the Italian nation, the great contribution made to our national life by Canadians of Italian origin -- all true indeed, but not, perhaps, what needs to be said here tonight. Like all of you, I am here to enjoy the good food, the good wine, the good company.

For a few minutes, let me talk about freedom, not as an ideal -- what could I say to my compatriots who come of the great nation that produced Cavour and Mazzini, and lived through the triumph and tragedy of the risorgimento.

In Canada, to a very great extent, we still enjoy a very basic, but very fragile freedom, the freedom to live our lives without constant surveillance by security forces, the freedom to walk on the streets unmolested. The security of Canadians still resides in peace and order -- rooted in the confidence people have in their free institutions and the will of Canadians to make them effective, rather than in the enforcement of law and order.

The peace and order that guarantees our personal freedom seems to be under attack throughout the world, certainly throughout what we call the Western world. Too often, special interest groups -- and I hasten to add that this is not an Italian specialty -- arrogate to themselves the right to jeopardize peace and order for some group objective that may or may not have great merit.

I need not remind you of the tragic events in Montreal a year ago. In the last few weeks we have seen with our own eyes or on television the deployment of armed guards in our peaceable capital of Ottawa and other Canadian cities on a scale unprecedented in our experience, as we have received as guests leaders of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

The right of free Canadians to demonstrate against people and situations of which they disapprove is not at issue. Many Canadians have suffered, or seen their families and friends suffer under oppressive régimes. Their feelings are to be respected and their seriousness of purpose accepted. Demonstrations have always played a role in the exercise of democratic freedoms.