

March 11

Drew Asserts New Bill Will Place No Brakes On Freedom of Speech

The Drew Government's anti-discrimination bill was given second reading in the Legislature yesterday with only one voice raised in opposition to its passage, that of T. A. Murphy (P.C., Toronto-Beaches). The bill now goes into Committee of the House for discussion and at that time the Government will move an amendment to the effect that the act shall not be deemed to interfere with the free expression of opinion on any subject, by speech or in writing, and that it shall not confer any protection or benefit to enemy aliens.

In speaking on the principle of the bill, Premier Drew declared that, in spite of what had been said to the contrary, the bill in no way limited complete freedom of speech or the right to discuss any subject which could now be discussed under the existing laws of libel and slander, the provisions of the Criminal Code and other similar laws.

"It is intended to stop the use of offensive signs, notices and symbols which, by announcing the denial of equal rights to any particular group in our community, offend equally those of that group itself and all who accept the principles of democracy," said the Premier. "Many proposals, many sincere proposals, have been made as to the provisions which should be included in a bill such as that which is before us today. Requests have been made that such an act should cover terms of employment, that it should deal with the obligation of hotel-keepers in regard to the use of their rooms; that it should deal with libellous or slanderous statements, and with a number of other similar subjects. All these are covered by existing laws.

Activities Not Affected.

"It would not only prove ineffective, but it would actually cause confusion and dissatisfaction to the very people who claim protection, if any attempt were made to pass laws which could not be enforced. That we will not do in this or any other case. I wish to be equally emphatic in stating that existing laws do not cover the points dealt with by this act. The offensive signs, notices or representations with which it deals are not now covered by the Criminal Code or any other law in this Province. The act, as drafted, cannot possibly affect any of the legitimate activities of any racial group."

The Premier stressed that the passing of laws was one thing and their enforcement was another. Both were linked, and a Government which recognized its obligation to the people would not pass laws which appeared to give some rights or protection but which, in fact, could not be enforced.

"In our opinion this act will be effective in stopping practices which should be most objectionable to every citizen of this Province, who believes in the basic principles of British democracy," continued Premier Drew. "The meaning of the words 'discriminate against' leaves no doubt about its purpose. If you discriminate against any person because of race or creed in respect of his ordinary rights as a citizen, you deny that equality which is part and parcel of the very freedom we as a nation are fighting to preserve.

Simple Choice.

"It seems to me that we have a very simple choice to make. If we permit signs and notices to be put up in conspicuous places indicating that any particular group of people are denied the ordinary rights available to other people, then those who should be most indignant are not

the people against whom the signs and notices are directed, but those whose basic principles of freedom, justice and equality have been outraged."

The Premier said he was well aware that passing bills in the Legislature would not end prejudices and animosities, and that was one reason why he was not prepared to support any vague or uncertain provisions. Prejudice and animosity could only be cured by education, and he added: "I hope that our education in this Province will produce better results in that direction than it has in the past." If the present bill went further than it did and attempted to go into fields of legislation already covered elsewhere, "we might only increase the very evil we are seeking to remove," the Premier said.

E. B. Jolliffe, Opposition Leader, said he concurred with a great deal of what the Prime Minister had said. The posting of signs and posters and similar actions were the outward manifestations of a situation which should not be permitted to exist, he declared. With that principle the members of the C.C.F. Opposition were in full agreement.

"These outward manifestations of inequality and discrimination may produce results which none of us would welcome, results in no way compatible with British democracy," Mr. Jolliffe declared. "We are aware that not all beliefs and prejudices can be dealt with by legislation. But a serious problem has arisen with regard to what I have described as outward manifestations, and we understand this bill is designed to deal with this problem."

Murphy Objects.

After A. A. MacLeod (L.P., Toronto-Bellwoods) had voiced complete approval of the bill, Mr. Murphy rose.

"I wish to record my opposition to it," said Mr. Murphy. "The bill is inopportune and too far-reaching. I have no objection to what the bill proposes regarding signs and posters, but it also covers what is said over the radio, and we must take into consideration that we have no jurisdiction over radio.

"Strong objections have been made in the press to this bill and surely they have good legal advice on which to base their views," Mr. Murphy continued. "They say it goes much further than most members realize. It prevents candidates in this House making statements at public meetings regarding their opponents and it also bars advertising on billboards. It prevents publication of sermons by ministers and prevents such publications as the Orange Sentinel, Protestant Action and the Catholic Register from publishing opinions."

"Bow to the Majority."

There were cries of "Oh, oh" from all parts of the House at this statement, but Mr. Murphy declared: "Well, that is my opinion. It also prevents churches referring to other creeds. I don't believe the people of the Province are ready for a bill of this kind. I wish to be tolerant, yet I believe the minority must at all times bow to the majority. I ask the Government to withdraw the bill."

Farquhar Oliver (L., Grey South), in the absence of Liberal Leader Harry Nixon, said that, in so far as his group was concerned, it was anxious to see the bill pass second reading and go into committee for examination and amendment if necessary. In voicing entire agreement with the principle of the bill, Mr. Oliver said that the difficulty in the past has been to find common ground on which to proceed. He hoped the Government bill would provide that common ground.