

What We Are Fighting For

“Liberty for All Canadians Knows No Bar of Race, Color”

By Denis Murphy

Perhaps at this time it is a good thing for us to remember what we Canadians are fighting for. It is said we are fighting for democracy. But in fact the matter goes deeper than this, for democracy is only the form through which we achieve and develop our ideas of liberty. We are fighting to maintain the liberty we now have and for the opportunity of broadening and depending our conception of that liberty in the future.

Liberty — Canadian Liberty — extends now to each and all of us. Each of our daily lives is made freer because we have it, and our understanding and tolerance towards each other is possible because we cherish it, not only for ourselves, but for all Canadians.

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Liberty is the one idea most abhorrent to our enemies. Their ideology is its direct antithesis, and they attempt to destroy by force the institutions that keep its ideas alive, while using every artifice of propaganda to destroy its ideals in people's minds.

Liberty — Canadian Liberty — is not an imperishable heritage of any group of Canadians, but of all. That is what makes valid the ideals that flow from its conception. No nation which embraces liberty could keep it alive while depriving any group of its citizens of it, because liberty applies to everyone and unless it does, it cannot exist.

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Ancient Greece abounded in liberal ideas, but since it was built on slavery, it did not believe in liberty but in privilege. Should this happen in Canada, the blood now being shed by us in foreign lands would rise to mock the sacrifice thus spent.

Yet it has been suggested that we should deprive a large group of Canadians from Canadian liberty, a group of Canadians which has

also shed blood to preserve the very thing we now wish to take from them, although their blood helped to preserve it for us.

Some have even gone so far as to say that we will use force against our fellow Canadians, that we might impress them of their unworthiness to share so precious a thing as liberty.

In time of war vast agencies are put in motion to protect all, whatever may be the color of our skin, our racial stock, our creeds. All citizens of Canada, even though their skin be yellow, are children of liberty.

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Through centuries of sacrifice we have created a legal system which is both the bulwark and the means of protecting it for each separate individual, and for all of us as a group. Are we now suddenly and immediately to be the instruments to strip the liberty from any Canadian or group of Canadians, and thereby destroy what has been so painfully been built up?

To those who suggest that we select one group of Canadians, deprive them of their freedom, shuttle them like cattle from their homes to distant parts, we ask, is this what we are fighting for?

Is this the meaning and content of tolerance and respect that is the life and blood of Canadian liberty?

Newspapers reflected the range of opinions about the treatment of Japanese Canadians. This letter to the editor from the *Vancouver Province* considers the question of how a democracy ought to behave in trying times.

Excerpt from *Internment and Redress: The Japanese Canadian Experience*. British Columbia: Queen's Printer, 2005.