

To The Editor

Dear Sir:

I was most interested in the contribution of Dr. Herb Sohn in the recent edition of your journal dealing with the Jewish contribution to Human Rights laws in Ontario. It revived many memories of battles fought, some lost, some won, many years ago — though it still seems like yesterday that it all happened.

I would like to take the liberty of supplementing the story with one episode that stands out in my memory quite distinctly.

Dr. Sohn writes on p. 114:

“On still another front, the J.P.R.C. arranged for U.S. Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon to be a guest speaker on January 11, 1951 before the prestigious Empire Club of Canada. Senator Morse, a respected leader of the progressive wing of the Republican Party, was a sponsor of anti-discrimination legislation in the United States.”

That is quite true, but the further details of this episode are worth reporting.

The initiative of bringing Wayne Morris came from a Ben Brith named Norman Cowan who had set up a small action committee on the promotion of fair employment laws. We picked up the Senator in Buffalo and drove him to Toronto where he addressed the Empire Club. The following day, with Frank Garber at the wheel, we drove out to Guelph where Senator Morse addressed a joint luncheon of the Rotarians and Kiwanians. Then the CBC asked him to give a five minute talk on its “Speaker of the Week” slot which came right after the ten o’clock National News on Saturday night (it was January 1951, before the television era was to hit Canada). Senator Morse consulted with the writer (who was then as now executive director of the Joint Community Relations Committee, or Joint Public Relations Committee as it was still called) and he proposed that in a foreshortened address as he was asked to deliver on radio, he would concentrate on the matter of anti-discrimination legislation as it had worked in his own state of Oregon (in his address to the Empire Club and the others he had interlarded his remarks with comments on other aspects of U.S.A. political questions).

This he did. The remarks were taped on Friday afternoon at the CBC building on Jarvis Street and the Senator took leave of us.

I wondered, as I said *au revoir*, whether this “shot in the dark” would repair the investment. The speaker’s fee was \$700 — by no means exorbitant but a substantial sum for our limited budget. The investment, in fact could more properly be called a gamble since we could have no assured knowledge of what

effect it would have, other than a vaguely educational one, on those who were directly exposed to it.

We, i.e. the JPRC, had had an appointment on the following Wednesday with Premier Frost to discuss with him our then very active subject — an anti-discrimination law in employment.

Coming to the office that Monday morning January 15th, I received a telephone call shortly after nine a.m. from the Premier's office. His message: he wanted the appointment advanced to that same day — to Monday afternoon. Needless to say, we were most willing to accommodate him. I phoned around to our delegation of officers: J. I. Oelbaum, Ontario president of the Congress; Prof. Jacob Finkelman, national JPRC Chairman and Fred Catzman, Ontario JPRC Chairman. All three quickly made whatever changes were needed to meet Mr. Frost's request and we were ushered into his presence in the midafternoon of that same day. I recall Fred Catzman arming himself against over-confidence with a passage from the Psalms: "Al tivtechu bin'divim: Put not your faith in princes. . ."

Mr. Frost was cordial but slow in unwinding and getting to his subject matter. But we were willing to wait. He told us of his Jewish friends in Lindsay, Ontario (he had always prided himself on being a small town lawyer) and how he had once been dubbed the "Jewish" lawyer because of his many clients of that religious persuasion.

We waited patiently. Eventually, in his leisurely but sure-footed way, he came round to the matter at hand.

He indicated his initial skepticism about the anti-discrimination law, then his gradual acceptance of the concept. He knew that George McCullagh, publisher of the *Globe and Mail* did not approve but this wasn't the only issue on which he and McCullagh differed, he assured us. Ontario, he expected, would be a focus for many immigrants from all parts of the globe in the years to come and he did not want a single one of these to feel himself a second-class citizen in this province. The writer has had many occasions to recall these words of Leslie Frost in the intervening years and he has admired and respected the far-sightedness and advanced thinking of this statesman who paraded as a "small town lawyer".

Then came the bombshell which took me quite by surprise. Only the night before, he said, listening to the radio he had heard a short commentary by Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon who had explained how such legislation had been found effective and acceptable in his home state. "And he's a Republican," Frost underlined, "a Republican who's got the courage to disagree with his

senior leader Senator Taft!’’ Clearly the fact that Morse was a Republican, albeit a liberal Republican and that *he* had endorsed the legislation made an impact on this Ontario Tory. (Within a year, incidentally, Morse was to switch to the Democrats).

We did not assume that the words of Senator Morse had by themselves converted the Ontario Premier. But they constituted the last link in a chain of events and of reasoning which led him to the conclusive determination to approve of the idea and concretize it into law. It was Senator Morse’s words heard on the radio which had impelled him to alter the Wednesday date and shift it to the preceding Monday, so eager was he to report his feelings.

I don’t know whether my face betrayed my feeling of gratified astonishment. Never before — and never since — did I experience such a total and positive response to a legislative campaign tactic. Mr. Frost told us then and there he would introduce the bill when the legislature opened and, as Dr. Sohn writes, he did. He asked us to keep the information to ourselves. Within a day or so he was to see a Civil Liberties Association deputation but would rather not make the announcement prematurely.

While we were with Mr. Frost he received a note several times from his aides. At one point he said, “He’ll have to wait till I’m ready”.

On walking out in a state of suspended elation, we saw Sydney Smith, then president of the University of Toronto who had been cooling his heels in the foreroom for more than an hour — by now it was after 6 p.m. Prof. Finkelman was particularly embarrassed as Dr. Smith was his boss at the university.

As I write, it is just over 30 years since this event and I feel I can now safely disclose the confidential “leak” we then received from Leslie Frost.

Yours,

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Canadian Jewish Congress & Bnai Brith