

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

(HANSARD.)

SESSION 1946-47.

FIRST SESSION OF THE EIGHTEENTH PARLIAMENT.

(SECOND PERIOD.)

11 GEO. VI.

VOL. 191.

(From the 25th March, 1947, to the 15th May, 1947.)

SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

F.8102.

GUIDED WEAPONS.

Debate resumed from the 6th March (*vide* page 440), on motion by Mrs. BLACKBURN—

That in the opinion of this House—

- (1) the proposal to establish a rocket bomb testing range in Central Australia is an act of injustice to a weaker people who have no voice in the ordering of their own lives; is a betrayal of our responsibility to guard the human rights of those who cannot defend themselves; and a violation of the various Charters that have sought to bring about world peace, and
- (2) such action is against the interests of the whole of the people in this Commonwealth.

Mrs. BLACKBURN (Bourke) [4.31].—Some weeks have elapsed since I submitted this motion.

By the word “action”, mentioned in the second paragraph, I mean the action of committing an injustice to a weaker people, a betrayal of our responsibility, the violation of treaties and the breaking of our promises. By such actions we lower our moral standards. To-day is a most appropriate occasion on which to discuss this subject. This is May Day—a day of celebration and review for labour peoples all over the world. It is also a day when we decide on what we should do and should have for greater freedom, liberty, and justice for the people. On May Day throughout the world plans for the future are made. In the past, many honorable members on this side of the House have taken part in May Day processions, celebrations and demonstrations for the liberty and freedom of the individual. Therefore, this is an appropriate day on which to remind honorable members that there are still oppressions and injustices to be overcome, that here in Australia we have a voiceless minority, and that so far we have failed to achieve any measure of justice for those who comprise it. We should remember this when we take part in our May Day rejoicings.

Since I submitted this motion I have achieved considerable encouragement. Increasing numbers of people from all parts of Australia are becoming interested in this subject. A dignitary of one of our leading churches said that never in his entire experience of travelling in Australia had he known of a matter

which aroused such widespread concern as this one has. He told the Prime Minister (Mr. Chifley) and me that this concern is increasing, not only because Australians object to the proposal to establish the testing range for guided weapons in Central Australia, but also because they are opposed to inconsistency on the part of this Government. The people believe there is inconsistency when the Government, through the Minister for External Affairs (Dr. Evatt), supports charters and signs documents at home and abroad in respect of trusteeship plans for the welfare of our native races. When it suits us to use fine and fair words about trusteeship we do so; but we do not consider ourselves to be bound by those words when matters which, we think, are of greater interest take pride of place. Some people claim that this testing range for guided weapons is for defence purposes, and that those persons who object to it are uttering mere sentimentality. This view has been expressed in many quarters and in some newspapers. My answer to that criticism is that if this protest is sentimentality, the whole basis of the Charter of the United Nations is sentimentality. Whenever this House assembles we profess to deliberate for the true welfare of the people of Australia. This means, I assume, for the whole of the people of Australia. The question has been asked: What is the attitude of the people of Australia to the proposal to establish a testing range for guided weapons in Central Australia? The people have not been consulted, and I do not believe that they would be in favour of the project if they were consulted. Recently, a meeting was held in the Melbourne Town Hall for the purpose of discussing this proposal, and from the vote which was taken on the two motions submitted, I have no hesitation in saying that the people of Australia do not approve of the establishment of this range, either because of the danger that it constitutes to aborigines, or because of the danger to Australia itself of proceeding with military measures on this enlarged scale.

MR. BLAIN.—What is the danger to Australia?

Mrs. BLACKBURN.—The danger to Australia is in expending more money on

defence measures than is reasonable in peace-time. Probably, all honorable members will have received from overseas a pamphlet on international conciliation, containing the proposed Bill of Human Rights. When we speak of the defence of this country, and the need for establishing this testing range to conduct researches in defence weapons—so called, because I do not concede that the guided projectiles are defence weapons—we should look again at the subject of human rights. In article 3 of the proposed Bill of Human Rights these words are used:—

The exercise of a person's rights is limited by the rights of others, and by the just requirements of the democratic state.

When we are considering the establishment of a range for testing guided weapons our ideas of our own defence had better be limited by our feelings for the rights of others—the rights of the black men and women who live in Australia and from whom we took this country. The best defence of Australia is wise expenditure on defence measures, and not in an inflated expenditure on further preparations for war. Some people contend that sacrifices must be made for the protection of our people, including the coloured people. The law of civilization is not the law of the sacrifice of the weak, but the law of sacrifice in order to protect the weak. It was a Nazi principle to sacrifice a weak minority for the preservation of a stronger majority. We can defend Australia only by making it civilized, and we have not shown, by our treatment of the native peoples here, that we have the right to call ourselves a civilized nation. We have degraded the dark-skinned people wherever we have come in contact with them. The aboriginal women have been subjected to much offence by the white man. It is worth emphasizing that when a child is born of a native woman it is most difficult to get the white man responsible to pay anything towards the training and upkeep of his half-white offspring. This kind of thing has happened in the past. It cannot be denied that when white people have come into contact with the natives disaster has overtaken the latter. I believe that if the proposed guided weapons range is constructed the same

thing will happen again. It has been contended by some people that an alternative range should be provided. I should not be honest or sincere if I did not say that I do not believe that these tests should be conducted in this country at all. If such tests must be made—though I do not agree that they are needed—they should be conducted where people are not likely to be injured. I suggest that there is probably no locality which would fall within that description, except Antarctica.

Mr. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr. Rankin).—Order! The honorable member's time has expired.