

Ontario Department of Labour

Memorial service

for

Martin Luther King

will be held under the combined sponsorship of the City of Toronto, religious, labour and community organizations

on

Tuesday, April 9, 1968 – 12:30 p.m.
Nathan Phillips Square.

All staff members of the department of labour are urged to attend.

Statement given

at

Memorial service

for

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

April 9, 1968

Nathan Phillips Square

Daniel G. Hill
Director
Ontario Human Rights Commission
Toronto, Ontario

It is with a sense of deep inadequacy that I stand with you today to pay final tribute to Martin Luther King. What more can be added to the numerous statements which have already been made about this apostle of peace, of love and justice who gave up his life, and in so doing, has caused all of us to re-examine our own lives and the relationships which we have to our fellow man – black, white and Asian; the immigrant and native-born Canadian; the poor and the rich.

His death is a direct and serious challenge to all Canadians who are actively engaged in securing human rights for the many members of our multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-lingual nation.

Those of us across this land who are entrusted with administering federal and provincial human rights legislation will forever be haunted by the memory of Martin Luther King, if we compromise in Canada – in the human rights struggle – and if we fail to see the overwhelming significance of his life for Canadian Indians, black men and Asians who still suffer discrimination and who have not yet been accorded the full benefits of our society.

For the future, let us remember that Dr. King, a distinguished orator and philosopher, was principally a man of action. Far too many of us enjoy and engage in the rhetoric of human rights – the dialogues, the speeches, the rituals – shying away from directly protesting social injustices. But of King's finest hours were spent in active non-violent protest: in Montgomery, in Selma, in Birmingham, and yes, in Memphis, tragic as it was.

In this chaotic period of the new black racism with its cry to burn, to hate, to separate: we should recall Dr. King's warning that racial fires – black or white – ultimately consume and destroy the torch setter.

Dr. King's life was influenced by the writings and work of Paul Tillich – the renowned theologian – and he returned, over and over again, to the guiding philosophical principles of spiritual love – AGAPE – for one's fellow man as an answer to moral relativism, to shifting social values, to changing ethics in today's world. This prophetic spirit, this modern prince of peace was guided throughout his short life by these words from Tillich: "Love alone can transform itself according to the concrete demands of every individual and social situation without losing its eternity and dignity and unconditional validity. Love can adapt itself to every phase of a changing world."

Martin Luther King's death will serve to remind us that in our relationships with our fellow men we must always be motivated by the highest ideals, the finest humanitarian principles and an underlying love for all mankind.