

Emergencies Act

This is the terrible situation that the Emergencies Act is designed to help in recovery. This will be a national emergency crying out for and demanding a national response. This legislation provides the framework and allows for the regulations required by the Government of Canada to carry out its mandate, its responsibilities, if a national emergency arises. Unfortunately we must say, realistically, "when a national emergency arises".

We must respond with a sense of urgency to these circumstances. Our past legislation has been completely unsatisfactory. We have a compelling need to deal effectively and fairly with national emergencies in the future. The Government has now proposed a carefully constructed and remodeled Bill. This is legislation which vitally affects all Canadians. We must now join the ranks of the other western democracies which have had modern legislation to deal with emergencies in place for years.

This is a meritorious Bill. We have had debate in the House. We have had qualified advice from knowledgeable witnesses who appeared before the committee. We have had careful review in committee. We have had cogent, incisive amendments which the Government has accepted and adopted as needed improvements.

The Government made a promise. The Government has kept that promise. The time has come for us to act. Canadians across the country in each of our constituencies are waiting for us to put in place the law we need to deal with national emergencies.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that Members on both sides of the House feel that we can now come together, in unity of purpose, and make the Emergencies Act the law of the land, for the protection of Canadians, young and old.

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, in the course of this very interesting debate today the Parliamentary Secretary, the Member for Haldimand—Norfolk (Mr. Bradley), stated, in introducing the legislation, said that it is intended to prevent abuse of the executive power or, in other words, to ensure that abuse of executive power will not recur. That seems to me to be the nub of this Bill and the principle behind its concept, at least in good part.

In the case of the Japanese Canadians, history has already amply demonstrated that there was abuse of executive power at that time. As was shown on a television program recently, the same happened to Americans of Japanese descent. Twice on this continent in the same period of history there occurred the phenomenon of executive power taking action with respect to citizens in their own country.

I refer to Canadians of Japanese descent and, south of the border, to Americans of Japanese descent. They were removed to camps from their homes, villages, towns, and from their property. This blatant infliction of injustice on them on a personal basis as well as a collective basis remains with us today, and other Members have quite rightly referred to it.

We disagree, however, in this debate on the assessment of what happened in 1970 in Montreal. It may be that not enough time has elapsed for everyone to have developed a sufficient detachment from the occurrences of that time. If you agree with me, Mr. Speaker, that there is a role for the state on behalf of society in cases of kidnappings to protect the collective rights and at the same time to resolve the serious and tragic predicaments of individuals in that society, you will understand why I reject the intervention made earlier by the Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) and elaborated upon by his colleague, the Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap).

Either they are misguided, their historical memories are short or, as I suspect, they are historically wrong, their facts are incorrect and they are trying now to appear to be on the side of the angels, namely, on the side of individual rights, forgetting what was going on at that time both in this House and in Quebec, particularly in Montreal.

Therefore, I object strenuously to the statements made by the Member for Nickel Belt and the Member for Spadina because they seem to forget that at that time not one but two residents of Quebec had been kidnapped. I would like to ask them rhetorically what they would have done if they had had the responsibility to govern. Evidently they have never had the responsibility to govern.

It is interesting to remember that the NDP was split on the vote, as was indicated to us earlier by the Member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn). Two Members in their group voted for the legislation at that time. Evidently those two were able to put themselves, intellectually and politically, in the position of the Government of the day.

The conclusion at which I must arrive is that no Party in power at that time, considering the situation, would have been able to reject the requests of the Mayor of Montreal and the Premier of Quebec to invoke certain measures.

• (1620)

I do not object at all to the role and the responsibility of the Opposition to disagree and even to criticize the Government for certain actions, but it is important to put that historical situation into the right context to understand why certain steps were taken. Bill C-77, as I understand it, has been an important step. I congratulate the Members involved who evidently have worked very well together, but it is not a measure to be used to prove that executive powers in 1970 were abused by the Government of the day. As I said, I would challenge anyone in this House at any time to deny that to reject the request made of the federal Government by the then mayor of a city and the Premier of the province involved—one of its partners in Confederation—would be an act of indifference.

What is in the process of Confederation, I ask, if in circumstances of tragic need the Government in charge of Confederation is not available and does not come through in answer to a request of one of its partners in Confederation? It would be a very serious blow to the cohesion of Confederation in a