

which the hon. member has exercised in reaching this determination.

The hon. member for Skeena, in remarks he suggested were not exactly germane to the main topic of his speech, said that the reason we are debating this particular resolution today can be related to amendments made to the Bill of Rights. That is not precisely the case. The reason we are debating this resolution is the result of the anxiety of the government to have this subject debated and considered in this House and in the nation at the earliest possible moment. Had the government chosen to follow the letter of the law, as required in the Bill of Rights, it could have waited 15 days to table the Order in Council in the House of Commons and then, on motion of 10 members, a convenient date for the debate would have been selected. However, this course was followed on the initiative of the government, that is, seeking the unanimous consent of the House for a special debate. I think this is a significant fact and one that ought not to be ignored. The government has taken this course, and we are debating this not because the government was obliged to follow that course, but because it wanted the debate at the earliest possible moment.

I think there is common agreement amongst all sides of the House on a number of issues. Many people have spent a great deal of time reiterating these. Certainly, we have nothing but the utmost sympathy for the families of Mr. Cross and the hon. Mr. Laporte, and for them as individuals in this particularly trying time. We do hope that whatever action has been taken or will be taken will result in their safe release and return.

We are all in agreement I think that Canada, and the province of Quebec particularly, are faced with a very perilous situation. We have the assessment of the federal government, voiced by a number of members of the treasury benches, and most particularly the emphatic assessment of the very knowledgeable Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand). We also have the provincial assessment as set out in Prime Minister Bourassa's letter to the Prime Minister which appears as an appendix to yesterday's *Hansard*. We likewise have the assessment of the city of Montreal and the director of the Montreal police department. We have also had the assessments of numerous backbenchers on both sides of this House who are familiar with this situation.

I will not attempt to catalogue those from this side of the House who have spoken from their personal knowledge of the situation that exists. However, I would say that I have watched this debate throughout and I have noted the silence with which hon. members of the official opposition from the province of Quebec have greeted the speeches of their colleagues. It is indeed regrettable that in their caucus they could not have convinced their fellow party members that the situation is as it is, and that the reaction must have been as they have indicated.

The hon. member for Ste. Hyacinthe (Mr. Ricard) has not spoken in this debate, but I think he probably will. His other three colleagues, the hon. member for Charlevoix (Mr. Asselin), the hon. member for Sainte-Marie (Mr. Valade) and the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La

Invoking of War Measures Act

Salle) have all spoken, and certainly one would find difficulty in relating the content of their remarks to the speeches by their leader, and the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), or indeed any of the other members of their caucus.

● (6:50 p.m.)

I think we are all agreed, too, that the government has taken a grave step. This has been admitted by the Prime Minister, by the Minister of Justice and by the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion among others. There is no question of the seriousness of the step or that it was taken reluctantly. There is no question that information is not generally available to those on this side of the House who are not on the treasury bench any more than to those on the other side or to the general public, on which we are able to assess the government's decision to take this step. We can only accept that this government has been a responsible government, and that its record in the matter of civil rights is such that this is not something it would have done without the deepest soul-searching and without, as the hon. member for Skeena who spoke immediately before me pointed out, hedging very substantially in respect of the request for emergency powers that came from the government of Quebec and the city of Montreal. So, I think those of us on the backbenches on this side of the House must share the apprehension of all people who do not have the opportunity to know fully the facts that have been the basis for this decision.

We share that apprehension, but we also share the consensus, which is overwhelming throughout this nation, that it was a right decision. We share the opinion of the nation that this is not an act this government would be disposed to permit to continue beyond the time that is absolutely necessary. I believe there is general consensus on all sides of the House that the existing powers under the Criminal Code were inadequate. This appears to have been admitted every place. People ask: Why was action not taken on the evidence given by Mr. Saulnier before the Broadcasting Committee a year ago. Of course, the administration of justice is a provincial function. If Mr. Saulnier had the evidence he alleged he had, and the evidence which the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert read, I ask why did not the police force of the city of Montreal or the Quebec provincial police start the prosecution? The federal government had no right to exercise police powers competent to deal with the matter in the circumstances. It is as simple as that. If the evidence existed, and if in fact prosecution was desirable at that time, then indeed the onus was on municipal and provincial authorities to exercise their jurisdiction. They had not only the right but the obligation to do so.

Another area of disagreement here is something that was summed up by the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) in four words, "Too much too late". The timing certainly has been challenged. Perhaps 100 years from now some historian, with access to all the information, may be able to second-guess that assessment and say that it should have been done a week ago, a month ago, a day ago or a day, a week or a month from