

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 29, 1970

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. MacDONALD (EGMONT)—INFORMATION LEADING TO INVOKING OF WAR MEASURES ACT

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege of which I have given you notice in accordance with paragraph 17(2) of our Standing Orders. It is one which affects the rights and privileges of all members of this House. It has to do with conflicting and misleading statements made by the Prime Minister and other members of the government with respect to the factors indicating a state of apprehended insurrection in the province of Quebec which necessitated the invocation of the War Measures Act. If it is the view of the House that there is in fact a prima facie case of privilege, I shall move that the question of an apprehended state of insurrection in Quebec and other matters related to the War Measures Act be referred to a special joint committee of both Houses of Parliament for a comprehensive inquiry, with a report to be made to both Houses with all possible dispatch.

The question relates to the information which led the government to invoke the War Measures Act. Replying to a question by the hon. member for York South, the Prime Minister stated, as reported in *Hansard* of October 28 at page 654:

I am just saying that we acted on the information which is known to the House, which is known to Premier Bourassa, which is known to Mr. Drapeau and is known to ourselves as well as to all members.

A little later he said:

I have answered repeatedly, Mr. Speaker, and I repeat again, that the information we had is available to everyone.

In an attempt to resolve the substantial difficulty which has arisen, particularly during the past few days, in connection with this matter, I asked the Prime Minister yesterday afternoon whether, having regard to the apparent state of confusion existing in the country with respect to the information which had been given, he or the government would consider setting up an independent commission to ascertain the facts. The Prime Minister replied as follows:

I repeat for the umpteenth time that the facts on which we acted are known to the people.

He added that the only people who were confused were some politicians.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the same day as the Prime Minister gave that answer to the House, one of his own ministers stated in the city of Montreal, as reported in this morning's press, that a large amount of the intelli-

gence gathered on the current Quebec crisis would "probably never be made public." The statement is attributed to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien). The report continues:

A lot of information we have on hand comes from informants, some of them highly placed. It would endanger their situation as well.

We have good and sufficient reasons for invoking the War Measures Act. There are other reasons as well, and we will probably never be able to make them public.

If this had been the only such statement or innuendo made during recent days in connection with the grave steps taken by the government, one might be willing to overlook it as a ministerial slip. But members of this House as well as the people of this country have been faced over succeeding days with comment after comment from minister after minister indicating that there was, in fact, a large amount of information which could not be made public at this time. Indeed, in his opening statement on the question of the invoking of the War Measures Act the Minister of Justice said, as reported on page 212 of *Hansard* of October 16:

As I said earlier, this has to be a question of judgment based on the information available to members of the cabinet. Needless to say, some of that information, because of the current state of affairs, is not information which necessarily can be made public.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Later in the same speech the Minister of Justice said, as reported at page 215:

It is my hope that some day the full details of the intelligence upon which the government acted can be made public—

We in this House, Mr. Speaker, are charged quite literally with the basic institutions of law and order in this country. We have in some measure been asked by the government to give our support to the invoking of the most serious form of legislation possible affecting the ordinary rights, privileges and responsibilities that are exercised in this country. But in terms of why it was necessary to take this action and why the House should give its support, we have been treated over succeeding days to conflicting information and rumour both inside the House and outside.

For example, just the other day, not in this House but on a well-documented radio program, the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) introduced into a most critical municipal election campaign suggestions concerning one legitimate political party in the city of Montreal.

There have also in recent days been rumours circulated in this House in regard to the kind of opposition—the kind of parallel power, to use the Prime Minister's