

Invoking of War Measures Act

● (12:30 p.m.)

Yesterday the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert outlined some of the actual facts contained in their submission. They referred to the fact that political kidnappings would be one part of the FLQ strategy. Had action been taken on the advice of Mayor Drapeau, we would not have Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte where they are today, wherever they are, in the land of the living or not. These are the things which concern me. It is all right to say now that it was necessary to implement The War Measures Act, but why was some action not taken before? Last Tuesday I asked the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet to commit such officers of the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces as are necessary to ensure the speedy apprehension of those responsible for these heinous crimes. I asked them to explore every feasible way in which this could be done. Had they done this they might have been in a position to have acted in a more constitutional way than they have now.

I wish to make clear again that I do not object to what has to be done in respect of apprehending those who are dedicated to the overthrow of our way of life. I merely object to how it is being done. On the one hand, the government might have acted a little earlier had they listened to the facts. Surely the security files revealed this situation a long time ago. But they did nothing. A lot of what we hear today about the protection of law and order in this country is a smokescreen, on the one hand for the inactivity and indecision of this government and, on the other hand, is a cover for the real implications of what the War Measures Act really means to this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thompson: Yesterday the Minister of Justice said that this resolution was brought before Parliament to test the will of Parliament. It is all right to test the will of Parliament in respect of the action taken, but some kind of justification is demanded and that is why we are here today. If in the next week or days ahead the people of Canada do not understand what we on this side of the House are trying to say, I am convinced they will later on. Again, having commended the government for taking action, late as it was, I should like to ask this question. Why is it necessary to take away the civil liberty and freedom of Canadian citizens living in Alberta or Newfoundland because of a situation which exists only within the province of Quebec? Surely there must have been some other way to do it. The period is indefinite, as the regulations are in force for six months with power to extend.

What I am about to say is not a popular thing to say but I shall say it in any event and do it at the risk of being criticized. I am old enough to remember what happened in Germany in the early 1930's. I can remember a voice we listened to on radio which pleaded for the support of the German people for the very same reasons—the maintenance of law and order. Tragically, the public responded to the plea. A few did not. Many of those who did not lost their lives because a few years later they even dared to complain.

[Mr. Thompson.]

Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask this question as well. Is it wisdom to entrust unlimited power to the Prime Minister under such a stringent measure as this because of a localized emergency which might have been controlled otherwise? I have spoken to many members from the other side, some of whom approached me at the close of the session last evening. I give them full credit for being just as sincere and dedicated to Canada as I think I am. They said: Look, regardless of the past and regardless of whether or not the government was slow in taking action it was obviously necessary that this kind of action be taken now. I do not disagree with that.

However, this morning I should like to ask these members why it was necessary that it be done in the way it has been done. Why could the Prime Minister not have said: Look, we had to take this action; we were slow in not taking action before with regard to a situation in respect of which I cannot give you all the details at this moment. He could have said that they took the action they did but that it has been taken for only a temporary period of time, perhaps only for a month. I would not have objected even to six months if the government could have said that within that period, or as soon as it is possible, legislation will be prepared to amend the Criminal Code or that new legislation would be brought in that would adequately take care of the situation after this emergency has passed. I do not think any of us on this side of the House would have objected to that. I believe that would have been assurance to us that the government was intending to use this only as a limited emergency power. The government, however, has not done this.

This extraordinary power has been granted for a period of six and a half months and the Prime Minister has reserved the right to extend the time if he wishes to do so. He has the same right or authority to extend the time as he had when he brought in this measure in the first place at four o'clock yesterday morning. Why could we not now have from the Minister of Justice and our Prime Minister a statement which would unequivocally commit the government to bring in the necessary legislation to limit to a shorter period the time in which the War Measures Act will be in effect? I would hope the Prime Minister would do this.

I have a good deal of confidence in the Minister of Justice. We have come to know each other very well in the years during which we have sat together in the House. I have confidence in his motivation. If I can have confidence in that regard I think we can differ and differ honestly. But having that confidence I should like to hear him commit the government unequivocally to the use of this measure strictly as an emergency measure for as short a time as possible and that beginning tomorrow work will commence on legislation to cover the specific situation. I grant that it will take some time to make sure that the proper legislation is brought before the House of Commons either as an amendment to the Criminal Code or in the form of a separate piece of legislation. We would give support to that.