

Invoking of War Measures Act

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I thought there was still a little opportunity left to be heard in this place because, as I said last night, this is the only place in this country where one can now express any kind of political opinion.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is quite right that he should be given the hearing he is entitled to. I would suggest he be allowed to continue.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): It is bad enough that fear and anxiety are now being felt by many people in our society because of this action, but what hits most directly at the vitals of a free society is the obvious reluctance of much of the mass media, particularly in the province of Quebec, to express the kind of views and opinions that enhance and encourage free discussion and free assembly in a society.

An hon. Member: Where did you hear that?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I ask for order and for the co-operation of hon. members. I do not think that the kind of interruptions we are hearing at this time help the debate very much.

Mr. Aiken: It seems that some members are pretty touchy.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): I find that there appear to be two classes of people in the discussion of this problem, those who make their home regularly in the province of Quebec and everyone else. If it will console those who feel that I have absolutely no understanding of the problem, let me say that I spent five weeks in the past year living in the province of Quebec. I do not say that that makes me an expert, but perhaps it does make me a little more understanding of and sympathetic to the problems of all Canadians, and it is with this in mind that I hope I am speaking today.

I do not expect all hon. members to agree with me. Quite obviously I may be in the minority as the majority party seems to support the government action. But what I do expect is that if Parliament is still free to function, I will be given a hearing. That is all I ask at this point; that is all any member can hope for in the forum of Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): But I am deeply troubled by the fact that much of the mass media in the country generally and certainly within the province of Quebec is extremely reluctant at this very moment to offer the kind of free information that they are able to provide in relation to the free exchange of opinions and the exercise of freedom and liberty within our society. There have been reports that not just in the private sector of broadcasting but even in the public sector unwarranted influence may have extended to the higher levels of administration in order to curb the kind of speculation and

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

comment that the government feels would encourage the free expression of opinion that it no longer finds acceptable in that province.

It seems also, by implication, that Parliament itself is to be considerably limited in considering these vital questions. We were told at the outset that the reason the War Measures Act was invoked was that there really was not the necessary machinery within Parliament to deal effectively with this question, that too many other problems would arise, and therefore Parliament was an outmoded and ineffective instrument to deal with this problem.

An hon. Member: Nonsense!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): That is what was said yesterday and I invite the hon. member to look up the record of yesterday's proceedings. Arguments were put forward by both the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) to the effect that it was not possible for the Parliament of this country to make decisions involving the temporary suspension of the Bill of Rights of this country.

Quite frankly I find it passing strange that a number of provincial premiers seemed to respond favourably so quickly to the action that the government has taken. I am not sure what methods were used to elicit this response. But I do think it passing strange that, although we have watched meetings to make changes in our constitution between the provincial governments and the federal government for some two years now, at which the discussion has been long and difficult, with seemingly little progress made to date, suddenly overnight a number of these premiers are willing to let the whole of the constitution be suspended for an indefinite period of time. I cannot accept it and as a Member of Parliament I will not accept it. We must be sure that the people realize the grave and serious measures that have been enacted by the government.

● (11:30 a.m.)

I want to try now, Mr. Speaker, to discover the reasons for the action taken by the government. Why is it being done? I have noticed that even in the editorial opinion this morning of those who, by and large, support the government's position there are reservations about what has happened to force the government into this extreme position. The question is being raised, and I think will be raised increasingly over the next few days, is it panic? Has the government in fact been panicked into taking this serious action?

What happened on Thursday to force the government, in the wee small hours of Friday morning, to bring forth a document suspending the constitution and the civil liberties and human rights of the people of this country for the stated purpose of dealing with apprehended insurrection? Where is this insurrection, Mr. Speaker? When did it occur? What information was available to the government on Thursday and early Friday morning of this week that it did not have in the earlier part of this week, last week, last month or last year?