

Invoking of War Measures Act

why the act was proclaimed at four o'clock in the morning. It appears that the element of surprise within the context of this extraordinary move has had its effect. I have read in the press and heard in the House about the wholesale arrests that have been made. Mr. Speaker, the government is responsible to the people of Canada; it must take and is prepared, I am sure, to take full responsibility for its actions. Having imposed the stringent and extreme War Measures Act on us, it follows that the government had the responsibility of placing before Parliament in the time that had been bought, legislation which would take the place of the War Measures Act now in force. I think that is a reasonable expectation. I also feel that many of us are rather surprised the government has not, up to this time, made such a move.

The government has said that it will consider bringing in new legislation. On the basis of this vague undertaking, it asks Parliament to endorse this measure which would give it broad and sweeping powers until April 30 next. I think that is an unreasonable position for the government to take. I appeal to the government to reconsider that position before the vote takes place. We all wish to take a responsible attitude towards this measure. Indeed, we sympathize with the position in which the government finds itself. Nevertheless, in my view the government has made an unreasonable request of Parliament. It has asked Parliament to provide it with these sweeping powers unconditionally. As I say, that is an unreasonable position for the government to take.

• (7:30 p.m.)

The government should have placed before Parliament legislation to give it the powers it so desperately needed under the War Measures Act, legislation that would have addressed itself more particularly to the crisis in the province of Quebec. Instead, we must continue to operate with our constitutional rights suspended, not only in Quebec but all across this country. That is the position we are in at the present time. This measure applies to every province and region of Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia. I am sure once that aspect of this measure is fully appreciated by the people of Canada, they will react. At that time the government will be in a very awkward position to explain why it has found it necessary to ask for these broad, sweeping powers for such a long period of time.

I feel that the amendment placed before this House by the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates) is reasonable. It merely suggests to the government that it be granted these powers under the War Measures Act until October 31, 1970, instead of April 30, 1971. In the two weeks before the end of October, the government would have ample opportunity to give careful and studied consideration to whatever legislative means it feels would be effective in giving it the powers it now has under this measure to deal with insurrection and the crisis in the province of Quebec.

The members of this House, as the elected representatives of the people of Canada, have a tremendous and

[Mr. McGrath.]

onerous responsibility. It is probably the most momentous responsibility we shall ever have. Certainly, we have to exercise that responsibility. In my view this can be done in two ways. First, I suggest that we should exercise vigilance. We should be very vigilant of this government to make sure they do not abuse the powers they now have. We must watch carefully to ensure that these powers are exercised in the way in which they have been spelled out in the regulations presented to Parliament by the government. That is our responsibility as long as the War Measures Act is in effect.

Our second responsibility, which is concomitant with the first, is that while being vigilant over the use of these powers by the government we must at the same time continually press the government to introduce legislation that will replace this measure. These are the responsibilities that we now have. We must exercise them.

I find no problem in supporting the amendment before the House. However, I find it difficult to support the resolution asking Parliament to concur in granting these powers to the government for a period of six months. As we meet in this moment of crisis, I think it is only fair for us to expect the government to be reasonable. The government should not force us into a position where we have to take an extreme stand. I think most hon. members want to support the government. If the government wants to be reasonable, it will meet the provisions set out in the amendment. In my view, two weeks is ample time to prepare the necessary legislative measure to give the government the power it now has, but it must be specific and narrower in its application.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, at the very beginning of my remarks, I would like, though quite briefly, to extend to the families of Messrs. Laporte and Cross the assurance of our prayers. I also wish, that during this debate they will feel reassured because our thoughts are with them and their suffering is ours.

I now sincerely appeal to the kidnappers. I ask them to admit they have failed and to hand back their hostages, never forgetting that the safe-conducts offered by the political authorities are still valid. Let them remember that the French-speaking people of Quebec would never forgive them the death of Messrs. Cross and Laporte.

This should start them thinking, but I know they could not care less since they have already rejected the democratic process. Let them remember however that the people will have their day and when they do even those who are seeking today drastic political changes in the institutions of the province of Quebec through democratic means will, in the long run, be the first to feel the disastrous effects of the changes they seek.

To govern is to choose. Democracy is freedom for people to choose. The people of Quebec, of Montreal and of Canada have made their choice. Until proof to the contrary is available, the various governments are taking their power from those same Montrealers, those same Quebecers and those same Canadians. The exercise of