

National Security Measures

Mr. Lewis: I do not intend to do so more than once, Mr. Speaker; but since the parliamentary secretary seems unable to sit still I will listen to his question.

Mr. Jerome: Is the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) saying that he would prefer the government to send a prepared text of a bill to the committee instead of simply giving the committee a resolution? Is that what he is now saying?

Mr. Lewis: I am saying to this House—and the parliamentary secretary is intelligent enough to know what I am saying—that I am opposed to the bill and I am opposed to this motion.

Mr. Jerome: What bill?

Mr. Lewis: I am opposed to any kind of special legislation; and I am opposed to this motion because it underlines the need for special legislation, something that I do not accept. I am saying that if the government wanted special legislation, it would have been more honest and more helpful if it had produced legislation it wanted directly, instead of taking the subterfuge approach of establishing a committee to do it. It is perfectly obvious to me that this underlines the weakness of the position of the government in stating that special legislation is needed.

● (8:30 p.m.)

The Minister of Justice in his brief remarks today tried to place this whole subject in an historical and theoretical context. He talked in somewhat airy terms about our living in an era of confrontation and violence. There is some violence across the world. My reading of history tells me that there is probably no more today than there has been throughout history. I suggest that in every era there has been a response to injustice which was not always logical, democratic or peaceful. There is nothing new, as so many people suggest, about the modern era and confrontation or violence on the streets.

If the members of the House or the people of Canada are to consider the question of public order in the context of violence, then I suggest two things. I suggest, first, that it is important to try to understand the reasons for that violence. It is important to try to understand what produces the frustration that results in violence. Second, it is important to try to understand whether repressive legislation ever did any good.

Having regard to the first, I suggest that one of the major reasons for the prevalence of violence throughout the western and eastern world today—and I am not talking about wars—is the fundamental disappointment of peoples all over the world at the way in which our democratic process functions; the deep disappointment which people all over the world have felt since the end of the Second World War because the hopes for which Hitler and Mussolini were defeated have not been fulfilled. I refer to the hope of the young in particular that the end of World War II would mean more stable, lasting and untroubled peace.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

On almost every continent in the world there is war or the threat of war, and over the entire world hangs the threat of nuclear destruction. I suggest the reason for this violence across the world, particularly in democracies, is that when the Second World War ended there were peoples around the globe, particularly the young, who hoped that the end of that war would also end poverty in the world, degradation, racism and discrimination. The opposite is the case. Young people all over the western world see continuing degradation, poverty, racism and discrimination. They see that the democratic process functions with shamefully disappointing slowness.

That is why you have violence and the threat of violence. The reason is that we have young people in Canada who finish school and are thrown out into the world where they cannot get jobs. Across this country we have university graduates, most of whom cannot find jobs. This is the kind of world our capitalistic, democratic system is producing. This is the kind of world in which violence grows.

I say now what I said on October 16, that this government is merely showing another aspect of its reactionary attitude toward society. It does this by dealing with possible future outbreaks through another piece of repressive legislation which will destroy civil liberties in Canada. It cannot succeed in this way. Whether it is in Quebec or anywhere else, as long as you have the amount of unemployment we have in Canada today, as long as you have a program of regional expansion that is not making the slightest dent on regional inequalities in this country—in spite of what the minister said this afternoon—as long as you continue to have one-quarter of the people in Canada living at or below the level of poverty, and as long as you have young people frustrated about their future you lay the seeds of violence; and no repressive legislation will end that situation or even cure it in the slightest.

If the minister is going to place this question in an historic and philosophic framework, he is talking shallow words, unless he places it in a framework such as I have suggested, I am sure somewhat inadequately. Does repressive legislation accomplish any purpose? I say to the members of this House and the people of Canada, if I may with humility but with emphasis, those of us who expressed our views on October 16 that the invocation of the War Measures Act would simply assist the forces of disunity in this country were, unfortunately, right.

I re-read the speech I made on October 16 and the speech I made on November 5 last, and I am not happy. I am unhappy to find that the words spoken then have proven to be right. Separatism in the province of Quebec has been assisted by the actions of this government. Since the fall I have met literally hundreds of young Quebeckers in various parts of that province, who have pointed to the invocation of the War Measures Act and the injustices that were carried out under it and the new public order act as reason for no longer having any faith in Ottawa, for no longer having any trust in the federal government, and as reason for no longer wanting to be governed in such a way.