

as hon. members opposite, are going to be scrutinizing with great care the way this country is run under the provisions of that act as long as the government deems it necessary to maintain it in force.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mahoney: I said earlier that the government has a fine record, the Prime Minister has a fine record and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) has a fine record in the area of civil liberties. Members of the Liberal party are as alert to civil liberties as other members of this Parliament and as members of any political party anywhere.

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, the measure before us today is undoubtedly the most important ever to come before the Parliament of this country since the Second World War. Consequently, all of us here charged with the responsibility of representing the people of Canada must search our souls and consciences and ponder upon the action we are about to take. The vote on this measure, Mr. Speaker, without a doubt will be the most important vote ever taken by this House.

We meet this day and night in an air of crisis in Canada, at a time when our government has seen fit to impose the stringent provisions of the War Measures Act. We in this House have a particular responsibility to our constituents at this time. I think it is only right that this debate should continue today. I think it is only right that each member should have a chance to have his say because the measure before us is so important and is so broad in its impact that it places in suspension the constitutional rights and civil liberties of every man, woman and child in the country.

Hence, I feel it incumbent upon me to rise to my feet and speak, as do other hon. members and as did those who preceded me, because this measure affects everyone. It affects my constituents. It adversely affects the constituents of the hon. member for Calgary South (Mr. Mahoney) who just took his seat. It affects us all. So, it is only right that we should be here meeting in this extraordinary session and that we should stay here, all night if necessary, to explain our views and the way that we are reacting to this momentous measure.

● (7:20 p.m.)

Sir, this is an unprecedented measure on the part of the government. No government ought to bring in such a measure without, at the same time, giving the representatives of the people a chance to express their views. I think it is fair to suggest that before Parliament concurs in the measure, it ought to extract certain conditions from the government. I am not any more happy about this move, now that I have heard what the hon. member for Calgary South (Mr. Mahoney) had to say, than I was a few minutes before he spoke, even though he took great pains to explain to us the regulations the government has proclaimed under the War Measures Act and the provisions of the act with respect to which the regulations now in effect remain silent. What concerns me is

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that the government can, at any time, change the regulations. The government can, at its discretion, bring in new regulations. It is asking us now to support a move that would give it carte blanche over our constitutional rights for six months.

I support the view that this is a most critical and emergent situation. This is a great crisis for our country. One would have to be blind not to see that. May I also say this, sir: there were signs from which we could see this coming. I will not repeat what has already been said by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Douglas, Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands) and others who have preceded me. It was obvious to me that the government was preparing itself for this move. They were, if you like, setting the stage when they decided it was necessary in their collective opinion to bring troops in full battle-dress to Parliament Hill and to the cities of Ottawa and Montreal. I knew then that the government was preparing Canada for this drastic move. The government was setting the stage for the proclamation of the War Measures Act.

At that time I thought the government was overplaying its hand. I thought then, and I still think in retrospect, that the government was over-reacting. It was overdramatizing the situation. It is only in the light of the proclamation of the War Measures Act that the dramatic move on the part of the government in bringing in troops makes any sense, in my view. There is always a great danger of over-reacting. This is something about which we should be very vigilant. That is what concerns me at the present time, although I do not diminish in any way the seriousness of the situation facing our country.

When we arrive at a moment when our constitutional and civil liberties have to be suspended, then I believe that we in this Parliament should take on the onerous responsibility of examining carefully the actions of the government and probing into the reasons for that action. This, hopefully, is the reason for this debate. Perhaps before it concludes a little light will be shed on the matter.

It has been said, and I think this bears repetition, that the government obviously had information at its disposal which it has not seen fit to make public. It had to have information at its disposal on which to base its decision. Surely, sir, no government would make such a move as this, no government would take upon itself such a responsibility, without having facts at hand which would clearly, in the collective opinion of government members, warrant the taking of such a move.

The government of course needed the element of surprise, and I subscribe to that view. Considering the situation that exists in Montreal, and considering the communications from that city and the government of Quebec that were sent to the Prime Minister, I can understand the government's position. I sympathize with the government; I can certainly rationalize the moves that took place yesterday morning. The element of surprise was obviously very important, hence explaining