

Invoking of War Measures Act

Mr. Perrault: There is no unity in the hon. member's party.

Mr. Peters: I have known Dr. Forsey for many years and what my colleague has said is perfectly true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Skeena has the floor.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): The point I am trying to get across is that concern for the well-being of Canada does not rest exclusively with any one member, and that applies even to Parliamentary Secretaries. Disdainful thoughts should not be expressed simply because one happens to have a particular view about one matter that is as fundamental and basic as this. We are initially concerned about the safe return of Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte. We are also concerned about retrieving the explosives, guns, ammunitions and other weaponry in the hands of members of the FLQ as well as other insurrectionists.

One aspect that puts a different colour on this matter and is a cause of some wonderment is this: I think the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner), and the Solicitor General (Mr. McIlraith), on the basis of their knowledge of the criminal law and the way in which the police work, will tend to agree with what I am about to say. If the members of what I loosely call the underworld had abducted Mr. Cross, Mr. Laporte or anyone else for that matter, it would have been only a matter of a few days before the police would have discovered the criminals. The police use informers to obtain information about activities in the underworld. The police operate on the basis of approaching informers and making deals. In return for information on certain major crimes, they tend to lessen the impact on the individual and charge him with a lesser crime. They do that for the individual who is giving them information. On the basis of information received, they are able to discover where certain criminals are, where stolen goods are, and the like. This fact gives one reason for wonderment.

What has caused the breakdown of the normal and efficient activities of police forces engaged in obtaining information about activities such as we are discussing? This failure, I suppose, more than anything else indicates that the abductors are a highly organized group of insurrectionists and that they think differently from criminals whether in Montreal, Vancouver or anywhere else. We do not know, actually, whether Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte are even in the country at the moment. Certainly, this is a cause for wonderment.

On the other hand, recent events suggest, perhaps, that the authorities know where Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte are. They certainly suggest that there may be some substantiation for the impression given by Premier Thatcher that the authorities know who committed the abduction. I notice the Minister of Justice looking quizzically at me. May I say that I am not responsible for what appears in the newspapers. I am only alluding to what Premier Thatcher is alleged to have said. Premier Thatcher is reported as having said that, he spoke to a federal cabinet minister who told him the federal government knew

[Mr. Peters.]

who the abductors were. The Minister of Justice shakes his head. I am sorry; I am misinterpreting what the shake of a head means. In any event, Premier Thatcher has said this. Whether he knows what he is talking about in this situation is impossible for one to say. But it seems to me that there is something a bit fishy in the activities of the highly organized police forces. There is something fishy about the fact that neither the police in Montreal nor the Quebec Provincial Police have given any indication as to whether Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte are still in the country, still in Quebec, or still alive. That is a situation about which we have to be concerned.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand), the Minister of Labour and others have said that the government had certain information which necessitated its taking the action it took. This information demanded the invocation of the War Measures Act. Parliament is being asked to participate now with the government and to endorse that action. We are being asked to do that on the basis of a simple declaration; we are asked to have faith in what the government says was the correct course of action. We do not know about that, because no one has indicated yet what that information was or the extent to which the situation was serious. It seems to me that, since the Prime Minister and the government had reason to believe such a terrible situation existed that it necessitated taking such extraordinary measures as removing the civil liberties of all Canadians in this country, and not just of members and supporters of the FLQ, and since the government has asked Parliament to participate in its decision, the government ought to have taken certain selected members of the other parties of the House into its confidence, and revealed to them this information.

But that course of action was not taken. The government simply requests us to have faith in it. It says, "We know what we are doing, and all will be well." I do not think that is good enough. We should not be approached on such an important matter on that basis. I might add as an aside, to put the matter into perspective, that the decision to invoke the War Measures Act was taken—and I think this is essentially correct—on the basis of a provision within the Bill of Rights itself. When the Bill of Rights was introduced into Parliament by the Conservatives, when they were the government, that party asked Parliament to amend the War Measures Act and to include it within the Bill of Rights. Parliament did that unanimously.

• (6:10 p.m.)

Under that section of the Bill of Rights introduced by the Conservative government, the government of today has taken this action. It is rather odd to hear the person who was prime minister at that time, who had authority to take protective measures, if he wanted, with respect to the War Measures Act, complain about the action being taken under a measure for which he himself laid the groundwork. That is really an aside; it has nothing to do with the consequences of the decision we are being asked to make.

We should consider some of the factors which have contributed to the situation in the province of Quebec.