

Invoking of War Measures Act

simple. As one old-timer expressed it, in those days we did not have many laws in this country and the few we had, the people broke. Arising out of this, Mr. Speaker, I have an impulse of sympathy for those in the opposition who have been opposing this drastic measure taken by the government.

Whatever my impulse may be, Mr. Speaker, I feel bound to follow as best as I am able the fundamental law of common sense. In common sense, this government had no choice except to act as it did. It had a duty to protect six million good citizens of Quebec from a few hundred terrorists. The government had to move swiftly. It could not afford the luxury of prior public debate about its plans.

If there was any way that this government could have announced its intentions days before taking action and still have rounded up any suspects when a new law was finally passed, I have not heard a single member of the opposition explain it to my satisfaction.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. St. Pierre: I have no hesitation in fully supporting the measure, Mr. Speaker, much as I and other members of this House dislike it. If this were all I had to say, there would not be much reason for being on my feet. All the reasons in favour of this move have been given fully and very eloquently by speakers who have preceded me and there is not much point in my repeating them. But there is another aspect to the situation.

We in this House are discussing democracy. Democracy is closely bound with the whole question of the introduction of this measure. This is a time to ask ourselves: How well is this operation proceeding on Parliament Hill? How well does it serve the nation? To what extent should we respond to the mood of the people? To what extent should we react to the strengths and weaknesses of the democratic system? In the few minutes available to me I should like to deal with just one of the operations on Parliament Hill.

There is an operation here which I suggest is not fulfilling its function. Its members are supposedly appointed for merit. All too often I suspect they drift into that body as a reward for long service. They are appointed, Mr. Speaker, not elected. Not for them, the true test of democracy, the test of the ballot-box. They in fact very often claim that their voice is the voice of the Canadian public, but they never put it to the test of the vote. Of course, there are some good men among them—clever, brilliant, distinguished men.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member will realize there is a motion before the House which, to my understanding, does not cover the subject upon which the hon. member now seems to be embarking. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) seems to be mesmerized by the hon. member's comments, and perhaps a few others. I suggest that the hon. member is straying some distance from the matter now before the House for consideration.

[Mr. St. Pierre.]

Mr. St. Pierre: I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that many preceding speakers have dealt at great length with the question of whether democracy is working properly in this country. I am merely following on the path that they have opened.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the War Measures Act has been proclaimed, which makes it possible for the government to bring in other orders to do anything that it wants, perhaps the hon. member will suggest that an order be brought in abolishing the other place. I think we should allow him to develop his case.

Mr. St. Pierre: I was saying, Mr. Speaker, that these appointed persons very frequently claim to speak for the public of Canada. However, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre misunderstands my meaning. He appears to think that I am discussing the Canadian Senate. I am discussing the parliamentary press gallery.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Red is my face, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. St. Pierre: It is perhaps the largest collection of singular, incurious reporters ever gathered in a single place. I stress the word "reporters". In the newspaper business a good reporter is the noblest work of God, a man who can get facts, get them right, often in spite of strenuous opposition, gain them if necessary by subterfuge, but get the facts. Place the significant facts in front of the reporter. This is the one man on which the entire industry depends. He is more than an editor, editorial writer, publisher or columnist. He is more than all of them together—because the reporter digs out facts. Without him, none of the others would have any material with which to work.

Something seems to happen, even to good reporters, when they enter the parliamentary press gallery. All too often they turn into pundits and are never again good for anything.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must confess, if it is in order for the Chair to make confessions, that I had the same misunderstanding as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. If the words of the hon. member had referred to the other place and were out of order, they are equally out of order with regard to the fourth estate. The hon. member should in due course indicate how the remarks which he is making are related to the motion before the House.

Mr. St. Pierre: I can only repeat what I have already said, Mr. Speaker. The operation of the press is a fundamental part of democracy, and I suggest to hon. members that what we are discussing in this debate on the War Measures Act is the essence of democracy. Unless there is a functioning press, we cannot have democracy.