

Invoking of War Measures Act

fact remains that some of us have to attend to other unavoidable commitments. I do not want any ambiguity as to my position and the reasons for adopting this position. That is why I am participating in this debate.

The main points of argument have been put forward very clearly by the various parties in this House. I have listened to these speeches exceedingly carefully. I do not think I have missed a speech since this debate began. I wish to sum up the reasons why I would vote against this motion. It amounts to endorsing and showing confidence in what the government has done by invoking the War Measures Act at this time.

I want it to be abundantly clear that the members of my party do not deny that the government of Quebec needs the extra powers for which it is asking. Nor do we deny the fact that this government has every right and responsibility to see that they get these powers. We have known for a long time that there is a cancer eating at the vitals of the province of Quebec, a cancer which is very likely to spread to other parts of the country. I am not talking about one province versus another. We know this has to be dealt with.

I want to give the reasons why we think the way in which the government is dealing with this matter is wrong. It is far too dangerous a method for those of us who respect Parliament to accept. I could not vote for this motion because it asks us to blindly approve the government's action. We have not been given the facts indicating why this motion is necessary. We have heard about sticks of dynamite, cells of the FLQ and other things. I have no doubt that these are the facts, and a great deal more could be alleged.

The members of this House have not been given a proper analysis or outline of the complete situation. This is our right. Why could there not have been a special in camera session during which the government could have briefed hon. members if there are other matters which we do not know about? If there are facts that in the opinion of the government warrant this action, why haven't the responsible elected members from every province and district in Canada been informed of these? As the representatives of the people of this country, this is what we have a right to expect. We have not received an answer to that question. Why were we not approached days, weeks or months ago with regard to this particular need?

An hon. member this morning very cogently indicated, with documentation, that for well over a year the city of Montreal and the province of Quebec have been in a state where they wanted help from the federal government. No action or insufficient action was taken to meet the need. Why was this not done? Why was it necessary to have a hurry up, middle of the night performance about which we were informed only after it occurred? It has now been more than ten days since Parliament resumed. Why could we not have been informed earlier about this proclamation to help the city of Montreal and the province of Quebec?

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

● (2:20 p.m.)

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) says this act is stronger than is needed at the present time. We want to know why we cannot have legislation of the kind which is needed, not far-reaching provisions which are sweeping away every vestige of hard-won civil liberty across Canada. What is needed now is a measure to deal with the particular emergency in Quebec. I have read carefully the letters of the Premier of Quebec and the Mayor of Montreal, but nowhere can I find a request that the War Measures Act be invoked. The idea did not come from them, or at least it does not emerge in the letters. The Prime Minister says he does not need all the powers contained in that act. Very well, let him ask for the powers which are in fact required. The explanation that it is necessary to pounce quickly upon suspects is not sufficient, in my view, to justify the action which has been taken.

The Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) failed to explain yesterday why amendments to the Criminal Code could not have handled this emergency in Quebec. Why were such amendments not proposed? We in this party would have supported amendments designed to strengthen powers of search and confer other powers for dealing with terrorists. But this was not the course taken. Instead, a statute was invoked which had been designed to deal only with a situation in which the country was in a state of war or insurrection of a kind no one has yet referred to in this House. No reply has been made to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) and others that a statute be drafted rapidly to meet the situation and replace the sweeping powers conferred by the War Measures Act. The only answer we got was that we must have faith in the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is a fine man, an upstanding man, a lover of his country—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. MacInnis: Why cannot we rest our confidence there? I want to say that if the angel Gabriel appeared to me in person and asked me to turn over the functions of Parliament to him because he was a clean-living, fine angel, my answer would be, no. To do so would be to negate our very reason for being here as representatives of the people.

There are altogether too many unanswered questions in this situation. Those of us who come here believing we have a duty to represent the people cannot be fobbed off by excuses, or persuaded to give in to a small group of members, in fact, in the ultimate instance, to the wishes of one man over an issue which will affect this country for a long time to come.

The Prime Minister promised he would consider drafting such a statute as I have described but there is nothing to compel him to do so. Between now and next April he could, if he wished, extend the powers he presently has beyond April 30. There may be members on the other side of the House who are prepared to abdicate their responsibility to the extent of approving the inten-