

The October Crisis

Appendix I

Newspaper Opinions (13-17 October 1970)

I. The Montreal Gazette on Wednesday, 14 October 1970, published the following excerpts:

“Here are some excerpts from editorials in English-language dailies on the Montreal kidnappings:”

1) Toronto Telegram – “Execution of two innocent men would constitute a massive political blow to the entire FLQ position, quite apart from its unspeakable barbarity.

“... It would be tragic if Canadians in the other nine provinces were to view these outrages of fanatics as another expression of Quebec grievances. The FLQ is counting on such a development, determined as it is on polarizing French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians.”

2) Calgary Albertan (Tuesday) – “The kidnapping of Mr. Pierre Laporte on Saturday deepened, rather than lessened, the air of unreality generated a week ago by the abduction of Mr. James Cross. Could such things be happening in Canada? It seemed, at first, incredible ... There was, and is, no room for submission to, or material compromise with blackmail. The only effective way of defending the nation’s institutions and its leading personages against terrorist tactics of this sort is to prove the tactics won’t work.”

3) Calgary Herald (Tuesday) - “Canadians today are confronted by the appalling fact that their capital city of Ottawa is in a state of siege and their largest city Montreal, clothed in an atmosphere of fear and tension. All of this because of the acts and threats of small cells of anarchistic terrorists ... The two governments concerned have taken firm stands against yielding to the kidnappers’ attempts at blackmail. There is every indication that the public approves this position. Blackmail cannot be allowed to pay off. Let the FLQ win this dastardly round, and it will lose little time in embarking on further rounds of extortion...”

4) Toronto Globe and Mail (today) – “No politically responsible group or individual in Canada could regard this unhappy episode as anything but raw gangsterism. There is every sign that the repugnance felt in Vancouver is matched in fact, may be more unifying than divisive.”

5) Toronto Star (Monday) – “To yield to extortion in any degree is to invite more extortion of the same kind...yet there is no safety either in standing adamantly on principle.”

“The governments can now confront the FLQ with a hard choice by offering to exile some, but not all, of the 23 terrorists whose release has been demanded. The basis of any deal should be that the kidnapped men are returned unharmed before the governments keep their part of the bargain. The terrorists should be in the position of relying on the governments to keep their word.”

6) “**The Montreal Star** said in a special edition Monday : ‘the preoccupation now is to think of the safety of Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte without a total abrogation of lawful and civilized rules of human conduct.’

“This inevitably means that the government, inhumanly difficult as its position is, cannot open the door to future blackmail of this kind, for if it does, then we are on the slippery slope to anarchy.”

“Editorials published in Montreal and Quebec City French-language daily newspapers yesterday were generally in favor of the Quebec government’s stand in the terrorist kidnappings.” -

7) “Claude Ryan of Montreal **Le Devoir** writes that Mr. Bourassa’s Sunday speech, in which the premier asked FLQ terrorists to negotiate their demands, ‘was opening the way to a positive solution’.”

“It was at last asserting a political sensitivity.”

8) “**Montréal-Matin** says the government, ‘after consultation with other party leaders in Quebec, made the only decision it could make.’”

9) “Quebec, **Le Soleil** says ‘our leaders are facing a terrible dilemma and they must solve it under difficult conditions.’”

“‘Time will tell if they have made the right decision’, it adds.”

10) “In Britain, the **Times** of London says in a lead editorial yesterday that French-English relations in Canada will suffer a sharp setback, whatever the outcome of the current kidnap drama.”

“In an editorial titled ‘dangerous days for Canada’, the Times sees Prime Minister Trudeau as being trapped in a cruel dilemma by the crisis.”

“‘If Mr. Trudeau should adopt a hard-line stand that resulted in the murder of Pierre Laporte’, the Times says, ‘many in Quebec could be persuaded, disastrously, that Ottawa had shown more regard for political doctrine than humanity when a French Canadian life was at stake.’”

11) “The Paris paper **Le Figaro** says that if the worst happens in the Montreal kidnappings, the FLQ would end up with nothing more than ‘a bad notoriety’ around the world.”

“‘Kidnappings in countries where instability, underdevelopment and misery prevail can be understood and explained, if not condoned’, says Le Figaro.”

“‘But the Quebec Liberation Front lacks any such excuse for its action’, the French daily says.”

II. The Montreal Star, Oct. 16, 1970

“Emergency action was inevitable. The first violators of civil liberties in the current wave of trouble in this province were those who resorted to bombs as a means of social protest; the second were those who turned peaceful demonstrations into acts of increasing violence; the third were those who resorted to the taking of hostages and threats of murder. The end was inevitable – a determined social reaction by governments at all levels.”

III. By the Canadian Press, as selected by L’Action, 17 October 1970.

Editorial extracts drawn from Canadian newspapers, commenting on the exceptional measures that the federal government has taken with respect to the situation in Quebec: (My translation)

1) Ottawa Citizen

‘ For the moment, reasonable people must abstain from making a judgment and should support the government. When the crisis has passed, the Canadian people will have the right to a detailed report justifying these exceptional measures.’ (16 October 1970)

2) Ottawa Journal

We are all, of course, concerned and want that these powers be strictly limited to the necessities of the situation. But, it is also a time for the public, understandably unaware of the inner dangers and circumstances of the crisis, to abstain from criticizing those powers. We are not yet in a police State, but anarchy and terrorism have caused our state to meet them with strength. (“An Emergency Demands Emergency Powers”, 16 October 1970)

3) Red Deer Advocate, Alta.

At this serious moment the country can only suppose that the leaders know what they are doing. Heaven help the leaders if they are mistaken.

It is now of the utmost importance that the “insurrection” which threatens is resolutely crushed, so that we will not be chronically subjected to this state of affairs.

Seeing the way in which the Prime Minister faced the crisis up to now, we can only reasonably conclude that it was calculated cold logic which inspired his actions and not panic.

The country must remain calm and can do nothing better than to give its moral support to the Prime Minister and to acknowledge that he has a mandate to resolve the crisis. (16 October 1970)

4) Winnipeg Free Press

Undoubtedly there will be adverse reaction to the federal government’s drastic step, on the ground that it is over-reacting to the FLQ threat. Against this, there will be overwhelming support of the action by Canadians generally. In a situation such as now

exists in Quebec, to vacillate is worse than to do nothing...But, there are times when some of the rights we hold most dear must be placed in suspension. This is one of them. (16 October 1970)

5) Le Tribune, Winnipeg

The decision to apply the War Measures Act is as judicious as inevitable. The right to criticize and to call on subversion and violence has been abused. (16 October 1970)

6) Toronto Telegraph

The invocation of the extraordinary War Measures Act this morning by the Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau constitutes, on the part of the government, an unprecedented gesture in peace time. The measure has been taken with the support of the Leaders of the Opposition in Ottawa, the Government of Quebec and the administration of the City of Montreal.

All Canadians, who were surely shaken this morning by the news, will massively support Mr. Trudeau's action...

...We cannot permit a small group of terrorists to take shelter behind democratic institutions all the while trying to destroy them. (My translation)

7) Toronto Star

The Star would have much preferred to see the Trudeau government justify this drastic step to Parliament before taking it, and to claim only those powers under the Act which are absolutely necessary to deal with the Quebec situation.

The civil liberties of Canadians are not to be lightly suspended....

In invoking the War Measures Act, the government's position faced with Quebec's volatile public opinion is greatly strengthened by the fact that the Bourassa government and the city government of Montreal asked Ottawa to do so.

But a request by these governments is not, in itself, sufficient justification. (16 October 1970)

8) The Standard-Freeholder, Cornwall

Either Ottawa, who hid itself for the last two weeks behind the government of Quebec for fear of political repercussions, has panicked and has gone too far, or the situation in Quebec is really more serious than we have been led to understand publicly (16 October 1970).

9) Edmonton Journal

Many Canadians can mourn that the federal government has gone too far in considering the kidnapping of two men of State as a state of apprehended insurrection. But we do not have the information at the disposal of the government.

We can only take for granted, for now, that the measures adopted were necessary for peace, order and good government in Canada. The members of the federal Cabinet know better than other Canadians that the powers invoked today are only tolerable in cases of real national emergency. (16 October 1970)

10) The Victoria Times

The reasons for these very extreme measures, even considering the kidnappings, are not clear...it seems, according to the reaction of the government in the face of these events in Quebec, that the democratic institutions in Canada are more threatened than we have been told publicly. If this is the case, the government has a duty to communicate these dangers to the Canadian people. (16 October 1970)

11) Vancouver Sun

...And at last, government has armed itself to fight fire with fire and match ruthlessness with ruthlessness. Both the chance for the honorable release of the hostages of the FLQ and the chance for the Canadian nation to return to stability, law and order have been enhanced by this total rejection of the cowardly and self-destructive course of compromise. (16 October 1970)

IV. L' Action wrote on 17 October 1970

“It would appear that the provincial government would not have recommended the application of the War Measures Act, if the situation had not deteriorated on Thursday when groups of workers and students began to descend into anarchy in their meetings and by declaring to be in favour of the terrorists. The strikes which began in some institutions, the teach-ins foreseen in others, the virulent declarations that were made by certain supporters of the left, greatly intensified the already charged atmosphere and increased the danger of violent confrontations. After having weighed all these facts, the provincial government came to the conclusion that there was a real danger to the security of society and that there could be an insurrection, which justified requesting the proclamation under the War Measures Act. From the time when the law entered into force, the police forces, assisted by the army, could also intensify their efforts to discover the hiding places of the kidnappers of Messrs Cross and Laporte.” (My translation)

V. W.A. Wilson, The Montreal Star, 17 October 1970

“No choice. Once the Quebec government insisted to Ottawa that it must have broader powers to meet its responsibilities, I do not see how Mr. Trudeau and his cabinet could have refused these powers without opening this chasm with the full disaster that would have entailed. Where police considerations alone would not, it seems to me, have justified such drastic measures, this fundamental consideration, upon which all else depended, does. Although they will no doubt be greatly criticized by liberal-minded men whom we all respect, the action of the federal cabinet members must be defended by those who care both for liberty and the future of this country.”