

The October Crisis

Appendix R

**“Article in THE BEAVER, the magazine of Canada’s National History Society
(October/November 2000)”**

An example of myths, errors and omissions

Most writers, newscasters, politicians and persons are reluctant to correct errors, myths and omissions. One of the most egregious examples was by THE BEAVER Magazine in 2000 and its publisher and owner, Canada’s National History Society.

“The BEAVER” – “Canada’s History Magazine”, in its October/November 2000 issue, published an article entitled “The October Crisis: Singular Anomaly”, by Lysiane Gagnon.

The publisher and owner of “THE BEAVER” is the exceedingly well subsidized “Canada’s National History Society”.

The article contained a very large number of minor and major myths, errors and omissions. The article is an example of the sort of magazine article writing which perpetuates errors and myths, on the Crisis.

Examples of minor errors

The BEAVER article stated that James Cross lived “**in Westmount**”, and was “**British Consul**”. Actually Cross lived “**in Montreal**” and was “**British Trade Commissioner**”.

The BEAVER article stated that some French Canadians “**were sceptical about the possibility of obtaining sovereignty by democratic means. Six months before the October**

Crisis, in its first election, the Parti Quebecois had won 30 per cent of the vote, but only seven out of 125 seats.” Actually, the 1970 election was **five months before the Crisis, there were **108 seats** in the National Assembly, and the Parti Québécois **got 23 %** of the vote. (It was in the 1973 election that the Parti Quebecois received 30% of vote and six seats and it was only in the 1989 election that there were 125 seats in the Assembly.)**

The BEAVER article also stated that “**armed tanks rolled into Montreal**”. Actually, they were **rubber-tired trucks and personnel carriers**. Tanks would have chewed up Montreal’s already chewed up streets.

Major errors

More importantly, the article made light of the activities of the FLQ and the build-up to the Cross kidnapping and stated: “**Since 1964, there had been several acts of terrorism by various incarnations of the Front de Liberation du Quebec...**” and further on: “**The two deaths [before Laporte’s] were accidental**”.

Actually from **1963**, when the FLQ was formed (not “**1964**”) to the beginning of the Crisis in October 1970, there were **three violent deaths by FLQ bombs and two murders by gunfire. One further violent death occurred** when an FLQ member (a fifteen-year-old) was killed by a bomb he was taking to the scene of a planned bombing. An FLQ member was found guilty of manslaughter for the death of the minor. By the time of the Cross kidnapping, 23 FLQ terrorists (including three convicted murderers) were being held in prison for various violent crimes.

The BEAVER article stated that Prime Minister Trudeau gave in to the demand of the kidnapers “**...and allowed the FLQ’s manifest to be read on the CBC television newscast.**”

Actually it was read first by journalist Louis Fournier on CKAC Radio station on 7 October 1970 and the next the **evening on Radio-Canada TV**. More importantly, Trudeau did not want the Manifesto read at all and in fact had his “chef du cabinet”, Marc Lalonde, telephone Laurent Picard, Executive Vice-President of Radio-Canada, to forbid the reading. Picard refused and then Trudeau telephoned and Picard refused again.

THE BEAVER article further stated that **“Trudeau gave in to another demand of the terrorists when he let Cross’s abductors board a plane for Cuba.”**

Actually the decision was not only Trudeau’s and it was **not made in December** 1970, when Cross was released. In fact, on **6 October 1970**, the day after the Cross kidnapping, **the Governments of Quebec and Canada together** announced that they had agreed to deal in concert with the demands of the kidnappers. Four days later, Jérôme Choquette, the Quebec Minister of Justice, announced that the kidnappers could have safe conduct to a foreign country, in exchange for the release of Cross.

The BEAVER article ignored the role of the Bourassa government during the Crisis and states that: **“Premier Bourassa and his cabinet ...didn’t know what to do and were paralyzed with fear.”**

Actually when Laporte was kidnapped, Bourassa immediately called his whole cabinet together and we all met for three days in his Montreal office at the top of the Hydro-Quebec building, then at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, where we stayed at night and then back to Hydro. Trudeau’s cabinet met much less often and the federal decisions often seem to have been taken by committee or by Trudeau himself.

And no one was paralyzed. After laboriously and carefully weighing all the alternatives, the Bourassa cabinet unanimously came to its most difficult and cruel decision - that a

democratically elected government could not give in to terrorist blackmail. Otherwise, the whole judicial and legislative system would be by-passed and would collapse. If murderers and terrorists could obtain their release outside the law and the courts, could not any criminal, or any labour union or businessman or corporation or group of citizens expect similar treatment? We were one of the first governments in the world in modern times to say “No”.

THE BEAVER article further stated: **“Bourassa, who was only thirty-six and had been in power for less than four months, turned to Ottawa, where at least one man knew what to do. Soon the armed forces were sent and Parliament reenacted the War Measures Act.”**

Actually, Bourassa, at age 37, had been in power for five months. And neither he nor his cabinet were paralyzed, but on 15 October called in the “armed forces” to Quebec, as was a province’s right under the National Defence Act. It was not done by the federal government, which was obliged to act at the request of the Province.

Then Bourassa convened the National Assembly and in one afternoon and evening, Bourassa and his cabinet ministers presented and passed all three readings of the three Bills, which put Medicare into force, allowed opting-out for the doctors and sent the specialists back to work. At midnight on 16 October 1970, we voted on the last Bill and the PQ then made a motion to debate the kidnappings. It was ruled out of order. The House then adjourned.

Bourassa then saw that his letter was delivered to the federal government, requesting the adoption of the War Measures Act Regulations, which came into force at 04:00.

The **“armed forces were”** not **“sent in”** by **“Trudeau”**. Actually, it was the Government of Quebec alone which requested the deployment of Canadian armed forces in Quebec on Wednesday, 14 October 1970, as was Quebec’s right under the National Defence

Act. (Trudeau did call in the Army to Ottawa, two days earlier, on Monday, 12 October 1970.)

Major omissions

The BEAVER article omitted important facts which also added to the Crisis faced by Bourassa and his cabinet.

For example, the article failed to mention that: a) three days after Cross's kidnapping, the Quebec's specialist doctors struck over the introduction of Medicare and the hospitals and medical services were in an uproar; b) added to this was the general "débrayage" and raucous contestation of students and young PQ members supporting the FLQ, who had closed most of the Université de Montreal and the Université du Québec à Montréal and many CEGEPs; c) not mentioned, either, in the article was the incredible press conference of 14 October 1970 and the petition of 16 "prominent Quebecers", being Claude Ryan, Director of Le Devoir, the three top leaders of the Parti Québécois (René Lévesque, Jacques Parizeau and Camille Laurin), as well as the province's seven leading labour union leaders (the Common Front), four social science professors and a leading cooperative leader. They declared that our government should exchange Cross and Laporte for the 23 imprisoned terrorists, whom they called "political prisoners". The influential petitioners added that this was above all a provincial matter, ignoring that under the Constitution, jurisdiction over justice is divided - administration is provincial and security is federal. In particular, they did not blame the FLQ or ask them to release the hostages! The next day, 3000 persons filled the Paul Sauvé Arena, shouting their support of the FLQ, its aims and methods. None of this is mentioned in the article.

The article asked: **"Did Trudeau single-handedly kill terrorism in Quebec by refusing to give in to the FLQ?"**

Actually Both Trudeau and Bourassa refused to give in to the FLQ. Trudeau was firm and yet respected the fact that Quebec had the difficult and major hands-on part in the Crisis. In particular, he delayed putting in force the War Measures Act Regulations.

It was not “**Trudeau**” who acted “**single-handedly**”. Rather only after **Bourassa and the City of Montreal** made the request, did the federal cabinet act.

The War Measures Act was not “**re-enacted**”. Rather a state of apprehended insurrection was proclaimed as was a Regulation under the Act, first drafted, by Montreal and Quebec.

THE BEAVER article talks of “**panic**”, but fails to mention that Bourassa, wisely, took the time to study alternative solutions to each problem, and then acted decisively, avoiding public declarations until it was useful to do so. The Beaver does not describe those who lost their heads and did not keep calm. They were those persons who could not stop talking, opining, speculating and giving advice; in particular, Parti Québécois leaders, and especially René Lévesque (who had a daily newspaper column), and the electronic and written press. They thus added to the general disruption which we faced, and was exactly what the FLQ had hoped for. The BEAVER article fails to mention this.

Most of important of all, “**Trudeau**” did not “**single-handedly kill terrorism**” by refusing to give in to the FLQ. Rather terrorism was killed by:

- a) the joint decision of Quebec and Ottawa not to negotiate the release of the hostages for the 23 jailed FLQ terrorists;
- b) the calling in of the Army on 14 October 1970 by the Quebec Government, which calmed the situation;
- c) the decision of the federal, Quebec, and Montreal governments to bring the War

Measures Act into effect on 16 October 1970;

- d) most important, the brutal murder of Laporte shocked all Quebecers, including many FLQ members and supporters into their senses;
- e) equally important, French Canadians are not fanatics, religious or otherwise, and are quite unlike the religious fanatics on both sides in Northern Ireland, where even today, special troops and police cost £3 billion per year.

THE BEAVER offered only 400 words of correction

THE BEAVER article was 1504 words long, plus photos and headings, or the equivalent of 2200 words, but the BEAVER offered only 400 words of correction on the Letters to The Editor page. I asked for a reply of only 1440 words, was refused and appealed to the Quebec Press Council, which referred the request to the Manitoba Press Council, which declared they did not have jurisdiction over magazines. The Quebec Press Council again refused to hear the case, although it clearly had jurisdiction over magazines and for an article published in Quebec, particularly on a Quebec matter. The BEAVER then refused to publish even the 400 words.

The BEAVER did publish a trivial “Errata Notice” ,which read in its entirety:

“It has been brought to our attention that “October Crisis: Singular Anomaly” [Explorations, October/November 2000] contained some errors of fact. In actuality, James Cross was British trade commissioner and lived in Montreal. In the 1970 election, the Parti Québécois won seven of 108 seats and 23 percent of the vote. As well, the number of deaths attributed to the FLQ prior to the Crisis remains uncertain, with some sources reporting two deaths, others reporting five.”

Lysiane Gagnon

The article was written by Lysiane Gagnon. Ms Gagnon to her great credit on 12 March 2001 advised me, THE BEAVER, Canada's National History Society, the Quebec Press Council and the Manitoba Press Council that my 1440-word reply, which I had submitted, should be published. **"I regret that THE BEAVER didn't publish your letter...."**

For my part, I understand that we all have our good days and our bad days and I acknowledge Ms Gagnon's reputation as a journalist and her command of elegant French and English. THE BEAVER, too, is a favourite of mine and I have been a subscriber for many years and still am, and therefore am automatically a member of Canada's National History Society. Nor do I feel like Bobby Kennedy, who once advised: "Always forgive your enemies, but never forget their names." Rather I feel more like Adlai Stevenson, who exclaimed: "If my opponents stop telling lies about me, I'll stop telling the truth about them."

The monstrosity of the position of THE BEAVER and Canada's Historical Society

THE BEAVER declares itself to be "Canada's History Magazine" and of record. Yet it did not vet the article, or have it corrected or give equal time to another article of correction.

Apart from subscriptions, THE BEAVER and its owner and publisher, Canada's National History Society, receive donations, subventions and benefits annually of nearly \$1,000,000.00 from the Hudson Bay Foundation, from an annual giving campaign, and postal benefits funds.

THE BEAVER and its owner and publisher, Canada's National History Society, are publicly and privately subsidized Canadian institutions but they pleaded that they were not

obliged to make full corrections or give equal time to another view. They also pleaded that they were not subject to either to the overview of the Manitoba and Quebec Press Councils, where THE BEAVER is published and distributed. (There is no Federal Press Council)

The stonewalling of the BEAVER and Canada's National History Society and Press Councils is endemic of bad writing on the October Crisis and that it repeats itself unless corrected. It is also endemic of the human failure to correct one's errors. That THE BEAVER and Canada's National History Society do not wish to correct the record is outrageous. It is particularly unfortunate in respect of such a politically charged national subject as the October Crisis.

I futilely and, in retrospect foolishly, spent nearly two years trying to have this one article corrected, including entering into involved correspondence with the BEAVER and Canada's National History Society, as well as the necessarily voluminous proceedings demanded by the Quebec Press Council. One can imagine the task of correcting lesser errors and myths in lesser journals, by lesser writers. I should add that everyone acted civilly, but correcting the record was not a consideration they wished to accept, especially the permanent staff, who were responsible for accepting the article in the state it was in. I did hear privately from one Board Member, who agreed with me but the Boards of the Beaver/History Society and the Quebec Press Council soon closed ranks.