

Trudeau's "Just watch me" Interview

Impromptu interview of Pierre Elliott Trudeau with Tim Ralfe of the CBC and Peter Reilly of CJON-TV on October 13, 1970

Q: Sir, what is it with all these men with guns around here?

A: Haven't you noticed?

Q: Yes, I've noticed them. I wondered why you people decided to have them.

A: What's your worry?

Q: I'm not worried, but you seem to be.

A: So if you're not worried, what's your ... I'm not worried.

Q: I'm worried about living in a town that's full of people with guns running around.

A: Why? Have they done anything to you? Have they pushed you around or anything?

Q: They've pushed around friends of mine.

A: Yes? What were your friends doing?

Q: Trying to take pictures of them.

A: Aha.

Q: Is that against the law? A: No, not at all.

Q: Doesn't it worry you, having a town that you've got to resort to this kind of thing?

A: It doesn't worry me. I think it's natural that if people are being abducted that they be protected against such abductions. What would you do if a Quebec minister - another Quebec minister were abducted or a federal minister?

Q: But isn't that one of the ...

A: Is your position that you should give in to the seven demands of the FLQ and ... ?

Q: No, not at all. My position is completely the opposite.

A: What is your position?

Q: My position is that you don't give in to any of them.

A: All right. But you don't protect yourselves against the possibility of blackmail?

Q: Well, how can you protect everybody that is going to be a possible target without a much bigger military force, without putting somebody on everybody in the country, and turning it almost into a police state?

A: So, what do you suggest - that we protect nobody?

Q: How can you protect them all?

A: Well, you can't protect them all but are you therefore arguing that you shouldn't protect any?

Q: That's right.

A: That's your position?

Q: Right.

A: All right. So Pierre Laporte wasn't protected and he was abducted. If you had hindsight, would you not have preferred to protect him and Mr Cross?

Q: Well, second guessing is pretty easy, but you can't do it.

A: Well all right, but I'm asking you to first guess now.

Q: No, because it's impossible.

A: It would have been impossible to protect cabinet ministers of the provincial government or diplomats?

Q: I would suspect so, with all the diplomats there are in this country.

A: Well, we've got a big army.

Q: You're going to use it up pretty fast at this rate.

A: What do you mean at this rate?

Q: Six and seven. [Reilly now questioning]

Q: If I could interpolate something here. You seem to be thinking, in your statement in the House this morning - you seemed to be saying that you thought the press had been less than responsible in its coverage of this story so far. Could you elaborate on that?

A: Not less than responsible. I was suggesting that they should perhaps use a bit more restraint which you're not doing now - you're going to make a big news item of this I am sure.

Q: Well, the papers - it is a big news item.

A: Yes, but the main thing that the FLQ is trying to gain from this is a hell of a lot of publicity for the movement.

Q: A recognition.

A: Yes and I am suggesting that the more recognition you give to them the greater the victory is, and I'm not interested in giving them a victory.

Q: ... the proposition that perhaps it would be wise to use less inflammatory terms than "bandits" when you talk about a bunch of people who have the lives of two men in their hands?

A: You don't think they're bandits?

Q: Well, regardless of what I think, I don't think I would be inclined to wave a red flag in their face if they held two of my friends or colleagues with guns at their heads.

A: Well, first of all, I didn't call them bandits. I called the people who were in jail now bandits, who had been tried before the law and condemned to a prison term and I said that you people should stop calling them political prisoners. They're not political prisoners, they're outlaws. They're criminal prisoners, they're not political prisoners, and they're bandits. That's why they're in jail.

[Ralfe now questioning]

Q: But with your army troops you seem to be combatting them almost as though it is a war, and if it is a war does anything that they say have validity?

A: Don't be silly. We're not combatting them as if it's war but we're using some of the army as peace agents in order that the police be more free to do their job as policemen and not spend their time guarding your friends against some form of kidnapping.

Q: You said earlier that you would protect them in this way but you have said before that this kind of violence, what you're fighting here, the kind of violence of the FLQ, can lead to a police state.

A: Sure. That's what you're complaining about, isn't it?

Q: Well yes, but surely that decision is yours, not the FLQ's.

A: Yes, but I've asked you what your own logic is. It's to let them abduct anybody and not give any protection to anyone - call off the police, that seems to be your position.

Q: Not call off the police. Surely the police's job is to catch people who break the law.

A: Yes, but not to give protection to those citizens who might be blackmailed for one reason or another?

Q: Which must be half of the population of the country, in one way or another. I explained it badly I think, but what you're talking about to me is choices, and my choice is to live in a society that is free and democratic, which means that you don't have people with guns running around in it.

A: Correct.

Q: And one of the things I have to give up for that choice is the fact that people like you may be kidnapped.

A: Sure, but this isn't my choice, obviously. You know, I think it is more important to get rid of those who are committing violence against the total society and those who are trying to run the government through a parallel power by establishing their authority by kidnapping and blackmail. And I think it is our duty as a government to protect government officials and important people in our society against being used as

tools in this blackmail. Now, you don't agree to this but I am sure that once again with hindsight, you would probably have found it preferable if Mr Cross and Mr Laporte had been protected from kidnapping, which they weren't because these steps we're taking now weren't taken. But even with your hindsight I don't see how you can deny that.

Q: No, I still go back to the choice that you have to make in the kind of society that you live in.

A: Yes, well there are a lot of bleeding hearts around who just don't like to see people with helmets and guns. All I can say is, go on and bleed, but it is more important to keep law and order in the society than to be worried about weak-kneed people who don't like the looks of ...

Q: At any cost? How far would you go with that? How far would you extend that?

A: Well just watch me.

Q: At reducing civil liberties? To what extent?

A: To what extent?

Q: Well, if you extend this and you say, ok, you're going to do anything to protect them, does this include wire-tapping, reducing other civil liberties in some way?

A: Yes, I think the society must take every means at its disposal to defend itself against the emergence of a parallel power which defies the elected power in this country and I think that goes to any distance. So long as there is a power in here which is challenging the elected representative of the people I think that power must be stopped and I think it's only, I repeat, weak-kneed bleeding hearts who are afraid to take these measures.

Q: Excuse me, sir, you have been largely silent on this whole case and understandably so. If you had anything to address to the abductors at this point, what would it be?

A: I think Mr Bourassa stated the position yesterday, and I repeated it in the House, with which we agree completely. There is only one thing now that we are prepared to talk to them about. It's a way in which Mr Cross and Mr Laporte can be effectively released. This mechanism has to be dealt with first and foremost.

Thank you, sir.

Source: John Saywell, *Quebec 70. A Documentary Narrative*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971, pp. 71-74 (Originally published in the *Canadian Annual Review*, 1970)