

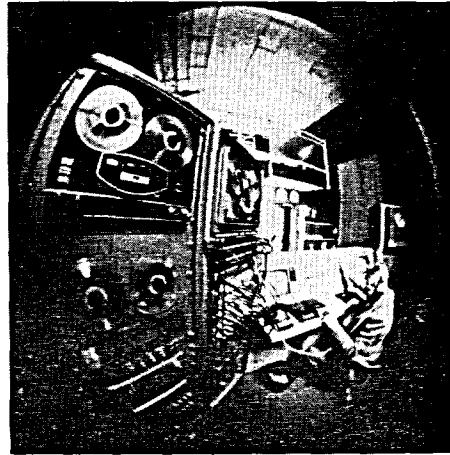
The Operations Centre of the Department of External Affairs

IN the first days after the kidnapping of James Cross, the British Trade Commissioner in Montreal, articles appeared in Canadian papers describing the activity generated in political and official circles in Ottawa by the abduction. One such article, by Anthony Westell, appeared in the *Toronto Star* and other papers. "In the new Operations Centre on the second floor of the East Block," the story said, "the federal task force assembled to cope with the Cross kidnapping.... Amid the forest of cables and wires uniting the Centre to Canadian missions abroad and, for this crisis, the Quebec Government, officers kept tabs on all rumours, developments and reactions in Canada."

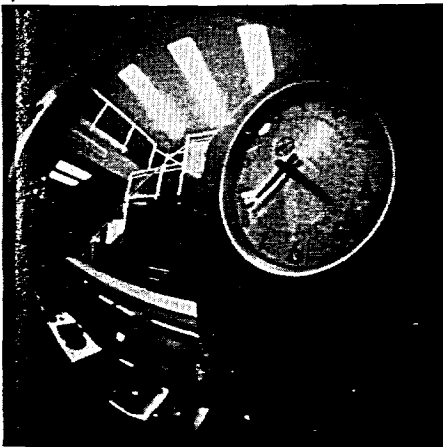
These stories were the first to give publicity to a new organ of the Department of External Affairs known as the Operations Centre. In conception and execution, the Centre, as the article makes clear, was unlike anything that had existed in the Department before. It came into being about a year ago in order to fulfil an urgent need that had existed for some time — to have one focal point for crisis management, a place where, in times of tension and in routine times, pertinent information from all sources could be monitored, assessed and distributed rapidly to those in the Government and the Department who should have it, and where a specially-appointed group charged with handling a crisis could be constantly in touch with those developments affecting decisions they were called on to make.

Time Element

In this age of instant communications, the amount of time the Department, and the Government, have to assess a situation and make a decision is continually dwindling. It is the job of the Operations Centre to see that those who need the latest information have it,



Watch on the World



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