

Trudeau's bleeding heart

Comment is an opinion column open to members of the university community who wish to present an informed opinion on a topic of their selection.

by Mark Simkins

Pierre Elliot Trudeau to Tim Ralfe, CBC TV reporter in an off the cuff interview on Parliament Hill on October 13, 7 days after the War Measures Act had been proclaimed: **Trudeau:** (in reply to a question on what kind of society we should have) Yes, well there are a lot of bleeding hearts around who 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 weakkneed people who don't like the looks of...

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

Trudeau: Well, just watch me.

Question: At reducing civil liberties? To what extent?

Trudeau: To what extent?

Question: Well if you extend this and you say O.K., you're going to do anything to protect them, does this include wiretapping, reducing other civil liberties in some way?

Trudeau: 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 representatives of the people, I think that power must be stopped and I think it is only, I repeat, weak kneed bleeding hearts who are afraid to take these measures."

Far from a "Just Society", Trudeau's words of an October just seven years ago, hopefully, are haunting him. His over-reaction to the kidnapping of Richard Cross and Pierre Laporte is a major factor in the success of the Parti Quebecois success in the November 15, 1976 election. If every government in the world suspended the civil liberties of its citizens every time a kidnapping, bombing or demonstration took place in its boundaries the world would be one totalitarian regime.

We must recall those fall days of infancy in Quebec to deal with the crisis we face now. John Robarts, now co-chairman of the task force on Canadian Unity, said on October 14, 1970, "There is no way we can yield to these terrorist demands. . . . By Jove this has got to be a law abiding country where you can bring up your family without fear . . . the demands are wrong—morally wrong and socially wrong—we have to stand and fight. It's war-total war."

The key demands of the Front de Liberation du Quebec cell holding James Cross, British Consul, were "publication of the FLQ Manifesto, release of consenting political prisoners and their transportation to Cuba or Algeria, the immediate suspension of all searches, raids, arrests and tortures on the part of the fascist police forces . . ."

These demands were eventually met but Pierre Laporte, kidnapped by another FLQ cell was strangled on his St. Columbus medallion chain when the federal authorities wavered in negotiations.

The federal and provincial governments knew political kidnappings were eminent but took no preventive action.

The demands of the FLQ were not the complete overthrow of the government but the chance to air their views, the release of 23 criminals, and safe passage to Cuba and

Algeria. Canada was not in a state of war or "apprehended insurrection." Nevertheless Trudeau reacted to the situation that way.

The Trudeau government broke off talks with the FLQ and brought down the War Measures Act on October 16, 1970 at 4 a.m.

It grants unrestricted authority to the federal cabinet to make orders and regulations it deems necessary to deal with the emergency it has defined in the proclamation. The powers special to the situation were that the FLQ used crime to make government change in Canada. Any support for such action was to be punishable with up to 5 years in prison. Attendance at meetings was to be taken as proof of membership, housing members was liable to a \$5000 fine. The law had the power to arrest suspected persons and to search places without warrant, to

seize property, to deny bail (unless with the Attorney-General's permission), to hold without charge for twenty-one days and without trial for ninety days.

In December of 1970, this application of the War Measures was lifted on the passage by regular legislature, Public Order (Temporary Measures) Act 1970 which retained with some refinements of the original, the same measures. These statutes are on the books ready to be used to this day.

Two defences on October 16 were given by Pierre Trudeau one in the House of Commons and on television.

He based his defence on letters from Quebec City and Montreal requesting assistance and evidence of insurrection, stolen dynamite and stolen small arms and rifles in Montreal in the past year and the

actions of the FLQ. He stated in the October 16 House of Commons debates that the actions of the FLQ "placed the government in a position of immobility whereby all the action in terms of public opinion was left to a band of renegades."

Trudeau stated on network TV that night, "to the kidnappers," he insisted, "their identity is immaterial," the hostages may be, "you or me, or perhaps some child or innocent members of your family, or of your neighbourhood." Unfortunately everyone, Cross, the FLQ, the police, admitted that the only effective political kidnapping was of a diplomat or official. Twenty-four hours after Trudeau's decision to sacrifice the lives of the two hostages, the body of Pierre Laporte was found in the trunk of a car in the Montreal suburb of St. Hubert.

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