

the santa domingo of pierre elliot Trudeau

In the peak of the hysteria about "apprehended insurrections", "coups", and "armed uprisings" that was being cried from Ottawa, one reporter remarked, in the wry wit that sometimes comes out of frightening events, that "This is the first time in this country we've had a counter-revolution before having had a revolution."

The remark won't stand in stead of cold analysis, but it has a grain of truth in it, and at least it underscores some of the unreality of the events that exploded on the cool morning of Monday, October 5.

It had been a singularly quiet year in Montreal, which has been accustomed over the last few years to rushing mass demonstrations in the streets, gunfights at the Murray Hill garages, police strikes, student strikes and occupations.

The most significant political event was the April 29 election, in which the liberal-separatist Parti Quebecois of René Lévesque won one quarter of the popular vote and a tenth of the National Assembly's seats. But that has been an electoral battle, fought in the ballot box. The streets have been quiet, relatively. The largest demonstration this spring in eastern Canada had been in Toronto at the American consulate after the invasion of Cambodia, and nothing approaching it occurred in Montreal.

Much of the organized left was in disarray, the rest of it was either working the Parti Quebecois or working with citizens' committees. The rise of the citizens' committees, which reflected the left's shedding its student image and working in clinics and with labor unions reflected a very peaceful form of political activity.

Quebec's novice Liberal premier, Robert Bourassa, hopped down to the U.S. to make his first major plea for American investment and for loans—a reflection of his assessment that things were cool and that investors would be more prepared to shell out in the apparent climax of stability in the province.

In Ottawa, Prime Minister Trudeau delivered a glowing Throne speech at the opening of parliament, expressing his confidence in the state of Canadian confederation.

Parliament was gearing for its first major debate on the most immediate critical issue—pollution.

Then, the whole balloon began to burst.

In the early morning of Monday, October 5, James Cross was kidnapped, whisked away from his home on wealthy Redpath Crescent by four men in a cab. Hours later, the police announced that it had received, via a popular French radio station, a communique from a group that claimed to be a cell of the FLQ, and that James Cross would only be released if the government released 23 men jailed for terrorist and other activities, read the FLQ's manifesto on the crown's television network, delivered \$500,000 in gold bars, released the identification of an informer who had turned some previous FLQ men in, and rehired the Lapalme postal delivery men whom the government fired for striking.

The government, in a series of statements that culminated the following Saturday with the televised speech of Quebec's Justice Minister Jérôme Choquette, said "no".

Within half an hour of Choquette's speech (too soon for it to be a response to his speech), Pierre Laporte, the Labor Minister of the Quebec Government, and Bourassa's number two man, if not the strongest of the Liberal government, was kidnapped by four other men outside his home in suburban Montreal.

The confusion in government circles in Ottawa and Quebec City following this resulted on Thursday, Oct. 15, in the entry into Montreal of 7,500 federal troops armed to the teeth, reportedly to "aid the police" by guarding principal buildings and people. The troops were later called into Ottawa's exclusive Rockcliffe Park section to guard members of parliament and cabinet ministers.

On Oct. 16, at 4 o'clock in the morning the Trudeau government invoked the War Measures Act, the most powerful document at its disposal, giving it next to dictatorial powers.

On Saturday night, following a curious set of events no one has yet been able to explain, the body of Pierre Laporte was found by the police in the trunk of a car near the St. Hubert air force base in suburban Montreal.

A nation's hysteria is unleashed.

Suddenly we are back where we were five years ago. A cold civil war is being fought along national and linguistic grounds. The country is polarized, but not on social issues, on issues of language and race.

The political life of this country is never going to be the same. Quebec is never going to be the same.

What happened to so disturb the calm of a listless October and so hurl a nation into a tortured vortex of political explo-

sions, so violent a shift of the forces in this country, so sudden an alternation of the stakes of the political game? Who wins, who loses?

What happened between October 5, and today?

Who was making what decisions?

What were their strategies?

What may be the fruits of their strategies?

Was it a hunt for kidnapers and terrorists, a hunt that went wild, or were there more basic, long-term motives that directed the men in power over the first four weeks?

With an urgency that cannot be underestimated, we must begin to piece together the beginnings of answers to these questions.

THE PLOT

Of all the strange answers that have blown in the October wind, none has been stranger than the coup d'état that never took place. This supposed plot—or these plots, for the exact details depend on which government spokesman you happen to be listening to—has been referred to again and again since October 16, and it is worth examining closely.

The most recent version of the conspiracy theory is that of Defence Minister Donald MacDonald.

According to MacDonald, we are on a "revolutionary timetable", and the kidnappings are part of a "well-known revolutionary formula." In a CTV interview, October 25 he said that "on the whole, you had a pattern of incidents here which, given the revolutionary ideology we're talking about, in other situations and in other countries has escalated itself up into a state of disorder in which it will be virtually impossible to carry on the normal processes of government and which would provide, if you like, a situation ripe for revolutionary action."

Another important characteristic of the FLQ is "the fact that they're not organized. If in fact there had been a highly structured organization it would have been even easier for the police to break."

On October 15, however, Montreal police chief Marcel St-Aubin, said he was having difficulty investigating the FLQ because of "the internal organization of the movement, as it is divided into numerous small cells." It was St-Aubin's statement, along with covering letters from Mayor Drapeau and Premier Bourassa, that was used in the House of Commons the next day to justify the invocation of the War Measures Act.

According to Nick Auf der Maur, a CBC Montreal broadcaster and member of the Last Post editorial co-operative, who was arrested under the Act and spent three days inside Quebec Provincial Police cells, the police in their questioning appeared to believe that every demonstration, bombing, and strike that had happened in Quebec in the last two years was part of the conspiracy. He says they see the FLQ as being organized along the lines of the Mafia, and they believe that if they could only find Comrade Big the game would be up.

St-Aubin said the kidnappings are "only the beginning" of "seditious and insurrectional activities." But Bourassa the next day said the FLQ had reached the "final stage" of its plan. The first three stages of the plan had already been carried out: violent demonstrations, bombings, and spectacular kidnappings, in that order. "The fourth step—the most important—is selective assassinations." The government had "every reason to believe" the FLQ was now prepared to carry these out. He added that "already" political leaders had received assassination threats.

There were hints at more than this. Federal Justice Minister John Turner said October 21 that "it might not ever be possible to disclose to the public the information on which the government made its decision."

Prime Minister Trudeau, however, said in the House October 26 that "the facts on which we did act are known to the people of Canada and indeed to this House." When Opposition Leader Stanfield immediately pointed out the apparent discrepancy between Trudeau's statement and Turner's, the Prime Minister said there was in fact no discrepancy. There may be information, he said, that the public doesn't know. But that is irrelevant, since the known information was what the government had acted upon.

Perhaps the fullest exposition of the conspiracy theory came from Jean Marchand, once a prominent Quebec labor leader, and today not only the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion in the Trudeau Cabinet, but also the man charged with keeping an eye on his five million restless countrymen who live in Canada's second-largest province.

"Those who are well-protected behind the Rockies or even in the centre of Toronto don't know what is happening in Quebec."

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