

Task Force on Kidnapping

Now that the former Senior British Trade Commissioner in Montreal, Mr. James Cross, is safe, the officers and others who composed the special interdepartmental task force have returned to their regular duties. The task force was established as soon as the Department of External Affairs was informed of the kidnapping of the British diplomat and, during the weeks of round-the-clock operations, was directed by Mr. Claude Roquet, a foreign service officer with the Department of External Affairs. Headquarters for the task force was the External Affairs Operations Centre in the East Block of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

Both the personnel of the task force and the facilities of the Operations Centre were made available to all agencies of government concerned with the kidnapping, including those of the government of Quebec, during the 61 tense days and nights, and particularly the period following the kidnapping of the late Quebec Minister of Labour, Mr. Pierre Laporte.

The editors of Canada today/d'aujourd'hui, the monthly publication of the Canadian Embassy, Washington, subsequently interviewed Mr. Roquet, and Mr. Allan Rowe, one of the task force members; a transcript of the interview follows:

What was the task force?

The task force was created within minutes of the kidnapping; it was an informal group of officials which functioned in a very elastic manner in the Operations Centre of the Department of External Affairs. The Operations Centre is designed for just this kind of "crisis management" function. Its permanent staff and special facilities and equipment supported the task force operation in a variety of ways.

The task force was interdepartmental. The Department of External Affairs provided the facilities, the head and a number of members of the group; but several other departments also participated — the Prime Minister's office, the Privy Council, the Solicitor General's office, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the National Defence Department, the Justice Department and the Transport Department. Its main function was to provide a base with ready access to all the information media and all decision-making centres involved in the crisis. By combining the receiving, distribution and analysis of all information on the crisis, it also became a useful centre for consulting with all the federal and provincial authorities who played major roles in the crisis. Of course, it was not the only centre of concern and activity in this field.

While the task force was interdepartmental, it also represented the particular interest of the Department of External Affairs in the matter because, of course, the kidnap victim was a foreign representative and, as things turned out, the essential safe-conduct had to be arranged with a foreign government.