

In a Calgary speech on October 20, Liberal MP Patrick Mahoney said that the statement by ten Quebec leaders (the Ryan-Lévesque statement) urging the exchange of 23 prisoners for the kidnap victims prompted the government to invoke the War Measures Act because these statements tended "to give leadership in the direction of eroding the will to resist FLQ demands."

Anthony Westell confirmed the motivation:

"Only a few weeks before, Lévesque's separatists had been extremists on the Quebec spectrum. With the emergence of terrorism as the new extreme, the perspective changed. Suddenly Lévesque was appearing with Montreal editor Claude Ryan, a nationalist, on a platform urging peace with the FLQ—a new, moderate centre, as it appeared to some.

"For Trudeau, the moment for decisive action to stop the drift in opinion was rapidly approaching."

In a democratic society, drifts of opinions are supposed to be countered by other opinions. Opinions are legal. But the opinions of Québécois who did not support the FLQ but shared some of the views the FLQ and the left have been voicing for years were apparently not to be tolerated.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau had to suspend democracy. He could not triumph in Quebec by moral leadership or by the reason of his position. He had to suspend the laws of the country and the constitutional rights of citizens to combat a drift in opinion.

On Thursday, October 15, 7,500 federal troops moved into Montreal.

At four in the morning of the next day, the War Measures Act was invoked.

## The purpose

In the last week, the Trudeau government has written a new and still more implausible chapter into this already strange history. This is the affair of the provisional government.

Rumors that some prominent French Canadians had planned to set up such a government just before the passage of the War Measures Act had been circulating in Montreal police circles for a week, but there was no public mention of it until Sunday, October 25. Mayor Jean Drapeau, who has just swept into a fifth term as Mayor with control of all 52 City Council seats, referred vaguely to the danger of a "provisional committee" that had planned to seize state power in Quebec.

The next day, the Toronto Star published a story saying the Trudeau government had implemented the War Measures Act because it was convinced "a plan existed to replace the Quebec government of Premier Robert Bourassa."

The story quoted "top level sources" saying "... a group of influential Quebecers had set out to see whether they might supplant the legitimately elected provincial government with what they conceived as an interim administration having enough moral authority to restore public order."

The Star credited the story only "from our Ottawa bureau"; there was no byline. However, the next day Toronto Telegram columnist Douglas Fisher wrote that "both the run of rumour among reporters and the internal evidence of the style and material in the story suggest that it was really the work of Peter Newman, now editor-in-chief of the Toronto Daily Star." Other sources confirm that Newman, a major Liberal Party confidant, was in fact the author of the story.

Drapeau's story now had to be taken more seriously. In an interview with an American reporter the same day, the mayor said "conversations had been held" by influential Quebecers of "good faith" to set up a regime. Although these men of good faith did not intend to open the door to the FLQ, Drapeau said, they would be used by the FLQ.

Predictably, Robert Stanfield was on his feet in the Commons the next afternoon asking the Prime Minister to account for the reports. Was this part of the unrevealed information that had led the government to invoke the War Measures Act? The Prime Minister said no. But he also refused to repudiate the rumors unequivocally, saying it was not the government's "habit to deny or confirm such reports."

Other journalists report that Newman not only went to "top-level sources", he went to the top source of them all, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and that the basic outline of the story, at least, came from him. Other cabinet ministers and high civil servants were only too happy to confirm the story to their favorite reporters. There appears to be little doubt that the story got out not only with the Liberal government's knowledge, but with its active encouragement.

Newman's story did not name names of people involved in the supposed provisional government plot, but it was clear he was implicating the "influential Quebecers" who had signed the statement of October 14 calling for an exchange with the FLQ. Claude Ryan and René Lévesque both denied the report Wednesday morning. Ryan in an editorial in *Le Devoir*. Lévesque in his column in *Le Journal de Montréal*.

Ryan strongly denounced the government for playing the game of the deliberate leak. "This is so gross," he said, "that the more one tries to untangle it, the more it appears ridiculous and stupid. I was going to write: malicious. I am not sure of that. Mr. Trudeau and his friends are out to get certain dissidents. I nevertheless don't believe them capable of such

baseness. I would rather believe that they were carried away by panic."

The next day, a far more plausible version of what had happened appeared in several newspapers, and has been confirmed by the Last Post's own sources. The alleged plot to overthrow the Bourassa government was in fact, a plot to save that government.

Just before the passage of the War Measures Act, there was widespread concern in Quebec about the position of the Quebec government. All the direction in dealing with the Cross-Laporte kidnappings was coming from Ottawa, which was imposing a hard line in refusing to negotiate with the FLQ.

In addition, Bourassa was facing extreme pressure from the Drapeau-Saulnier administration in Montreal. Most of the intelligence upon which government decisions were based was provided by the Montreal police force and their go-between, Michel Coté, the city's chief legal counsel. Earlier in the week, the Montreal police had arrested lawyer Robert Lemieux and seized all his confidential legal documents, in defiance of the provincial government. Montreal police were operating independently of the provincial government, while the Drapeau équipe consulted directly with Ottawa.

Bourassa was left with the feeling that he had virtually no control over Quebec's most powerful police force, while being faced with a Trudeau-Drapeau axis that was calling all the shots.

Within Bourassa's own cabinet, there was considerable support for the idea of making a deal to save Laporte, but, reports Dominique Clift in *The Montreal Star*, most of the political heavyweights—Justice Minister Jérôme Choquette, Education Minister Guy Saint-Pierre, Finance Minister Raymond Garneau, and Health Minister Claude Castonguay—supported the hard line. Choquette even placed his resignation on the table as a gesture of determination, Clift says.

Bourassa, who privately shared the doubts about the hard line and the concern about the position of his government, was caught in the middle. This was the reason for his ambiguous public statements during the crisis, carefully designed to pacify both the hard-liners and those who wanted to negotiate.

It was in this context that proposals were made that Bourassa open his cabinet to include a broad spectrum of Quebec leaders, to enable it to deal more credibly and effectively both with the FLQ and with Ottawa. Claude Ryan broached the idea to many people who, along with him, might be included in such a cabinet.

Clift concludes that treating the suggestion as a plot to overthrow the government "was in fact a smearing and dishonest representation of Ryan's proposal which had nothing subversive in it but had been naively inspired by vanity and misplaced sense of his own political importance."

The idea of opening his cabinet came up in one conversation between Bourassa and a friend after troops had already entered Montreal and just hours before the passage of the War Measures Act. "I thought of that," Bourassa said, "but it was too late."

What concerned Ottawa when it heard about the proposal, however, was that it might indeed have worked, that such a Quebec government might have been able to deal firmly with Ottawa and take its own course in dealing with the FLQ. There was nothing unconstitutional about the proposal, but it was one more indication of the degree to which Ottawa was losing control over opinion in Quebec. Like Lyndon Johnson, faced with the prospect of a democratic, left-liberal government in Santo Domingo, Pierre Elliott Trudeau moved in.

LBJ had his lists of "known Communists" to justify the invasion. But the New York Times found that several of the "known Communists" were in fact dead, others were out of the country, still others were in jail.

Trudeau's revelations of conspiracies are of the same order. He will no doubt come up with documents to "prove" his charges: such documents have been popping up for years. On October 29, the Toronto Telegram came up with an Alice-in-Wonderland report of terrorist plots to assassinate five hundred prominent Quebecers; these reports will recur.

But the real coup d'état this October was carried out by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who with one stroke effected a vast shift of political power. Trudeau "seized the opportunity of the Cross-Laporte kidnappings," says Parti Québécois economist Jacques Parizeau, to carry out "the inevitable confrontation which had to come sooner or later between Ottawa and Quebec." He set back political dialogue in this country ten years, even beyond the stage of "what does Quebec want?" to "what kind of people are we dealing with?"

Initially, Trudeau attempted a policy which depended on broad support in Quebec. The policy failed because that support did not exist. The result was a new policy—a policy of making a virtual desert of all opposition in Quebec, radical, liberal, nationalist, even, in some cases, conservative. The instrument of that policy was the War Measures Act.

This policy too depends on public support, this time the blind, uninformed support of English Canadians. It cannot succeed without their support. They are being used as pawns in a cynical and destructive game.

English Canadians must decide whether they are willing to be used in that way.

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