

TERRORISM - AN INTEGRAL

A Quebec Special Service Report

from Canadian University Press

The firebombing of three Montreal armories on March 8, 1963 was the first political act of the Front de Liberation du Quebec. Three days later, in paid commercials on local French radio, the Front promised a campaign of "systematic sabotage" directed against federal institutions (especially the Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), all information media in the "colonial" language which discriminated against Quebecois and did not use French, and finally factories which discriminated against French-speaking employees. In the two and a half months which followed, the FLQ lived up to its word. It defaced the lieutenant-governor's mansion in Quebec City and pulled down the Wolfe monument on the Plains of Abraham. It bombed the Black Watch Armory, a Royal Canadian Air Force technical service building, an RCMP garage, and an Army technical regiment headquarters, all in Montreal. It was responsible for the death of a 65-year-old night watchman at a Montreal Army recruitment centre when a bomb exploded in his face. It planted a 22-stick device at the foot of a communications tower used by Montreal police and by a major anglophone radio station, only to see the bomb dismantled by police in the nick of time. It terrorized the rich Anglo-Saxons of suburban Westmount by dropping bombs into streetcorner mailboxes - an Army bomb-disposal expert was maimed for life while removing one such device.

The response of the established order to these acts was first a shrug of disbelief and later a flash of anger. Marcel Chaput, leader of the right-wing separatist Parti Republicain, hypothesized that the FLQ was a bunch of English agents provocateurs and / or communists. A month after the bombings began, the province's police forces held a joint meeting on the problem, but still couldn't decide what to make of it:

CRANKS, FANATICS BLAMED BY POLICE FOR BOMB THREATS

Top police officers here said today they doubt whether an organized terrorist group actually exists in Quebec, and suggested that recent bombings, bomb scares and propaganda releases appeared to be the work of mentally deranged people and Communist sympathizers." (Montreal Star, April 11, 1963)

But if the police had no idea what the FLQ represented, the nascent independentist movement did. Sympathy for the FLQ, although still very limited was growing. On the evening of April 19, a few hundred students marched on RCMP headquarters in Westmount and burned the Red Ensign. This gesture of support for the terrorists, followed the next night the bombing death of night watchman Wilfrid O'Neil, hardened the Establishment attitude. Quebec premier Jean Lesage came up with "two concrete cases" of foreigners refusing to invest in the province because of the terrorism. His cabinet posted a \$50,000 reward for information about the terrorists on May 20. By June 3, an informer's tip-off had led to the arrest of nine active FLQ members; by the 7th, 17 had been rounded up and a police spokesman announced, "We've got them all."

Once the FLQ was in custody, public sympathy for its members became tolerable. The "raceless communists" turned out to be young French-Canadians (only two were foreign-born), mostly "slight of build" and several "wearing glasses" as they appeared in court. Most of the suspects were students, some from very respectable families: also in the group were an apprentice industrial designer, a house painter, a Le Devoir proofreader and an elevator boy. 80 per cent of them were members of the Rassemblement pour L'Independance Nationale, a left-leaning separatist party. In these ordinary youths, middle-class French-Canadians saw their own sons. Thus when the suspects were held for days without being allowed to contact lawyers, and later when they were forced to incriminate themselves by testifying under the Coroner's Act, a storm of protest arose in the press. La Presse editor Gerard Pelletier (now Canada's Secretary of State) and his friend Pierre Trudeau were two of the strongest voices demanding that the authorities respect the law. The issue caused polarization between the French and English communities, at least on the level of the press: the Gazette and the Star began to run detailed critiques of FLQ coverage in Le Devoir and La Presse. The French press, for its part, did not tire of printing windy analytical pieces that took the tone of parents asking themselves why their kids had turned out bad. Epithets like "strayed brothers" kept turning up, and

many commentators thought the separatist movement had been "discredited for all time" by FLQ actions. In fairness, however, several journalists and intellectuals on the French side did attempt to examine the social and ideological roots of the terrorist phenomenon in an intelligent way.

What were the politics of the 1963 FLQ? In the words of a communiqué, it believed Quebec independence would be achieved by "the violent struggle of farmers, laborers, students and intellectuals against Anglo-Saxon colonialism and its flunkies of the Quebec bourgeoisie. National independence will be social revolution." National liberation, to the FLQ, was a form of class struggle. However, the Front chose as the main symbols of colonial oppression not the apparatus of economic power - the American and English-Canadian corporations which exploited Quebec

workers - but rather the apparatus of political power: the Army, the RCMP, even the lieutenant-governor! An unsuccessful attempt to bomb the offices of a mining company represented the only FLQ attack on capitalist enterprise. (The Westmount mailbox bombings might be considered a form of class warfare only until one realizes it was postal workers and chance passersby who stood to be the victims.) Moreover, Front members seemed to operate under the delusion that the apocalypse was nigh - the people merely awaited their command to rise in armed revolt. "To arms! The hour of national revolution is at hand! Independence or death!" was the rhetoric of one communiqué.

Some of the group's naiveté and ideological confusion might be explained by its composition. Its guiding light was 33-year-old Belgian-born Georges Schoeters, who after a stint at the Université de Montréal had spent three years in Cuba working as an agricultural economist. Most of those he recruited were politically inexperienced campus RIN types. One reported in court that he'd been asked upon recruitment whether his politics were socialist, communist or fascist (!). Another told a journalist in the course of a clandestine inter-

view, "Yes, we're fascist, we're revolutionary. The English dominate us, they've got to get out." Still another avowed to a judge that he was really apolitical and got involved in the Front "just for kicks". Given this motley crew, it is scarcely surprising that FLQ actions did not suit FLQ theory, and positively flabbergasting that the group was not betrayed sooner.

Despite protests against the abridgment of civil liberties and charges that police had beaten at least two of the young suspects, the Courts had little trouble disposing of the FLQ cases. The ringleaders got about ten years each; the middle-class college kids got off much lighter, a few even having their sentences suspended. During the months that followed, abortive attempts by some horsemen of the apocalypse to organize an Armée de Liberation du Québec did not prevent the established order from thinking it had the terrorist problem licked. The following report not only reflects that cosy view but also testifies to the extraordinary prophetic talent of the colonial élite in this historical period:

SHAW SAYS FLQ LIKE BEATLES - FAR OUT, NOISY

Quebec terrorists are some-

thing like the Shaw, Deputy General of the Fair, said here.

"There are four of them, they're making a lot of talk about the threat to civilization that we think," Mr. Shaw told interviewers.

"Like the face of the earth by He was republishing a press conference to publicized separatists might fr away from the (Montreal Star, Feb. 22, 1964)

(We need only that Mr. Shaw, now active vice-principal of the University, was referred to as "sub-ape")

If the FLQ temporarily disappeared, Quebec left was alive and well. A number of groups formed which emphasized political work among the working class: L'Action Sociale Etudiante, (especially in the sector), the Mouvement Populaire (an orth of the socialist-independ review Parti Pris), and Comité des Chômeurs. They organized, picketed, demonstrated in support of workers' demands for decent living conditions for the right to unionize, fought alongside workers, Gilbert Ayers, LaGrande, International Environmental Sanitary Refuse and Debris Textile. They were beat alongside workers when bosses brought in scabs for the protection of union thugs and often could only swallow the government kept off and "public opinion" silent. Only after having diligently with in workers, and having seen cases ignored the law and it, did they turn

It was thus experienced groups of milit which formed the 1966 Front de Liberation du Québec. The targets of the bombings were all factories where striking workers had been oppressed. The reasons for the attacks were explained in propaganda releases, and were phoned in where might be endangered, the FLQ's propaganda in La Cogne was published before direct actions were not feasible. It was a longed strike at the shoe factory which housed the Front's Command. On May 5, 1964, an explosion killed the La-Grenade secret the Mo-

