



Photo: Dave Clark

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 "seditions 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 right now," declared the Quebec expert in the House of Commons a few hours after the War Measures Act had been signed. There were conspirators who had "infiltrated all the vital places of the province of Quebec, in all the key posts

where important decisions are taken." There were at least two tons of dynamite, detonators and electric circuits for setting off bombs, thousands of rifles and machine guns, bombs. "For whoever knows the FLQ right now," said the shuddering expert, "whoever knows this organization well cannot do otherwise than recognize that the provincial state of Quebec and the federal state are really in danger in Canada."

As the startled members of the House of Commons soaked this up Marchand perorated: "If we had not acted today, and if, in a month or a year separation had come about, I know very well what would have been said in this House: 'What sort of government is this? You had all that information in your hands and you could have used emergency powers and you did not do it. It's a government of incompetent people.'"

Just to make sure that the people who lived behind the Rockies, well-protected from the fanatics of French Canada knew what was going on, Marchand re-stated and even elaborated his claims on a British Columbia hot-line show a week after the government had struck. He had a new sensation to offer: the Front d'Action Politique (FRAP), the main opposition party in Montreal's civic election, only days away, was a front for the FLQ, (whose membership had now shrunk to "between 1,000 and 3,000"). There were to be explosions, more kidnappings, perhaps assassinations on election day. Anarchy was then to spread through the province, and after the province the nation. Thrones were to topple as the conspiracy leap-frogged across the continent.

In the end, of course, none of this happened. And perhaps more surprisingly, remarkably few conspirators were turned up by police. Even with the awesome powers of the War Measures Act, with its license to search, seize and arrest on no stronger grounds than mere suspicion, and with so many raids that, after 2,000, even the most conscientious reporters lost count, the police could come up with fewer than 400 captives. And of those, they could hold onto only 150 as October closed.

Is it these 150 people then who have placed the established order in Canada in grave danger? If so, they must indeed be supermen. And the police do not appear to be trying very hard to find out. According to Auf der Maur, Robert Lemieux, the lawyer who had acted as negotiator for the FLQ, was questioned for a total of two minutes during the first eight days of his imprisonment. Pierre Vallières, a leader of the 1966 FLQ, was also questioned for two minutes in these eight days. Charles Gagnon, another leader of the 1966 FLQ, was not questioned at all.

On one occasion, Prime Minister Trudeau observed to a bemused House that Kerensky too had been "pooh-poohing the possibility of an insurrection."

Mr. Trudeau is wrong; Kerensky knew very well that there was going to be an insurrection, and with good reason. For to state the parallel is to see its absurdity. Was Montreal on October 16 Petrograd, where in the Putilov plant 40,000 workers were prepared to go out into the streets, and the Grenade works had its entire work force mobilized in the Red Guards? Or was it Moscow, brought to its knees during the final weeks of the old order by widespread strikes?

Still the government now chose to spread scare stories about a sudden revolutionary upheaval, a notion it had repeatedly dismissed in the past. A year ago, Montreal's Drapeau administration journeyed to Ottawa for the government's investigation into the activities of the Company of Young Canadians. Piles of captured documents were produced to demonstrate that a far-ranging conspiracy was on the move. It was repeatedly noted at the time that, while the documents showed lots of smoke, it was difficult to find any fire. Beyond the well-known fact that FLQ cells existed, and might carry out isolated, anarchistic acts, the rest was vapor. The Drapeau administration's evidence was laughed out of town.

Two previous, abortive attempts (according to the police) at kidnapping people in high places, including the American consul-general in Montreal, had been taken with equanimity. And so, indeed, had the kidnapping of James Cross: there had been no indication in the first week of the crisis that upholders of the status quo had better nerve themselves for the crunch.

Nor did even the second kidnapping, that of Pierre Laporte, bring about sudden fears of insurrection. Why then did the government choose to unleash the vast conspiracy theory on

October 16? Why did it give credence to a picture of the FLQ that could not be believed by anyone who had any knowledge of the situation in Quebec, that it could not have believed itself, but that might conceivably be widely believed in English Canada since the government and the police are the only sources of information?

One clue comes from Jean Marchand's Vancouver interview, for it contains more than the accusations that made the headlines (reaction to his statement about FRAP was so adverse that Prime Minister Trudeau had to dissociate himself from it the next day, and Marchand himself had to back off). Marchand made some other statements in that interview that, in the long term, may be a lot more significant. Having averred that there are between 1,000 and 3,000 members of the FLQ, Marchand says:

"Now all members of the FLQ are not terrorists. But there are enough to create a lot of trouble and a lot of killing and this is what we are trying to prevent."

Not all FLQ members are terrorists!
Then what are they?
Who is the FLQ?
Or more to the point: Who isn't?

If not all members of the FLQ are carrying arms, planning assassinations and stashing bombs, what are they doing? Organizing in the labor unions, perhaps. Organizing demonstrations, or working with FRAP and the Parti Québécois.

Maybe if you're a leftist or a P Québécois, you're in effect FLQ? The net is suddenly a little wider, and out for more fish, than we have been led to believe from the impression that the government was just hunting two or three kidnapping cells.

Is Marchand saying that the FLQ is everyone who is working for a socialist or independent Quebec?

Let's follow more of Marchand's interesting analysis.

He says: "How in a society like ours can such a movement like the FLQ flourish. You knew a year ago, two years ago or even five years ago that there were FLQ members. But as long as they do not recourse to violence, under which law can you do anything?"

None, Mr. Marchand. If they do not resort to violence they are not violating the Criminal Code. But perhaps exactly what Marchand is saying is that we need laws by which the government can arrest and prosecute those that follow their political aims even by peaceful means. This seems incredible, so let's follow what he said further:

He makes the point that "it is not the individual action we are worried about now. It's this vast organization supported by other bona fide organizations who are supporting, indirectly at least, the FLQ."

Mr. Marchand is not worried about the kidnappers, he seems to be saying, but about the people who "do not recourse to violence." People—it's now a "vast organization"—who are supported by bona fide groups.

What are these people doing? Where are they? Marchand refers to "many important institutions in Quebec" that have been "infiltrated" by this strange breed of non-violent FLQers.

If there are so many people, in so many areas and institutions, it's going to be pretty hard to ferret them out. Especially if they lack the decency to commit a criminal act and facilitate the government's job of destroying them.

And so we come to the most distressing statement of all, and Marchand states the aims of the government bluntly.

"Well, if it had been an isolated case of kidnapping I don't think we would have been justified in invoking the War Measures Act because there the Criminal Code would have been enough to try and get those men and punish them. But there is a whole organization and we have no instrument, no instrument to get those people and question them."

Let's summarize the implications of Marchand's logic. There is a vast conspiracy of people numbering from 1,000 to 3,000.

They are not all terrorists, in fact some hold highly respectable and critical positions, and some have the protection of other bona fide groups.

They must be rooted out.

The Criminal Code permits us to root out kidnappers and killers, but not people who commit no crimes.

Therefore we need an "instrument" by which we can go after these people who commit no crimes, and it's not simply a question of kidnappers.

Is the Trudeau government seeking a circumvention of the laws of this country in order to launch a hunt that extends into the highest reaches of Quebec, into the most respected, bona fide groups, in order to ferret out these dangerous people?

Whom is the Trudeau government after?

The politics

The apprehended insurrection-coup-plot-uprising-revolt grows more ridiculous every day, and it is evident that it does so from statements made even by federal ministers. Certainly, as far as armed uprisings of one to three thousand people are concerned, the government never believed its own case. It allowed and encouraged the story to spread in order to use it as currency to buy time and public support to keep the War Measures Act in

force.

It is possible to piece together with some certainty that Trudeau, on the eve of implementing the emergency powers, feared he was losing control of the situation in Quebec, of French public opinion, to the nationalists and moderate separatists.

The Prime Minister had grounds for such fears. Contrary to the early statements by both federal and provincial spokesmen, a significant portion of the Quebec population had not recoiled in revulsion at the FLQ's action. Predictably radical youth, certain labor organizations, and a startling percentage of average citizens were reacting favorably to the content of the FLQ's political analysis, if not to their *modus operandi*. But even while most of the sympathetic repudiated the acts themselves, the FLQ's highwayman élan and the governments' inept responses left many Québécois inwardly pleased.

That much can be established. Whether Trudeau thought the strange events in Quebec were bringing the province as close as it had ever come to separating, however, can only be speculated right now.

What is very probable is that, as hints in the Marchand interview might suggest, Trudeau at least saw the opportunity to move decisively against the separatist-nationalist tide in Quebec and set it back for years, if not stem it forever.

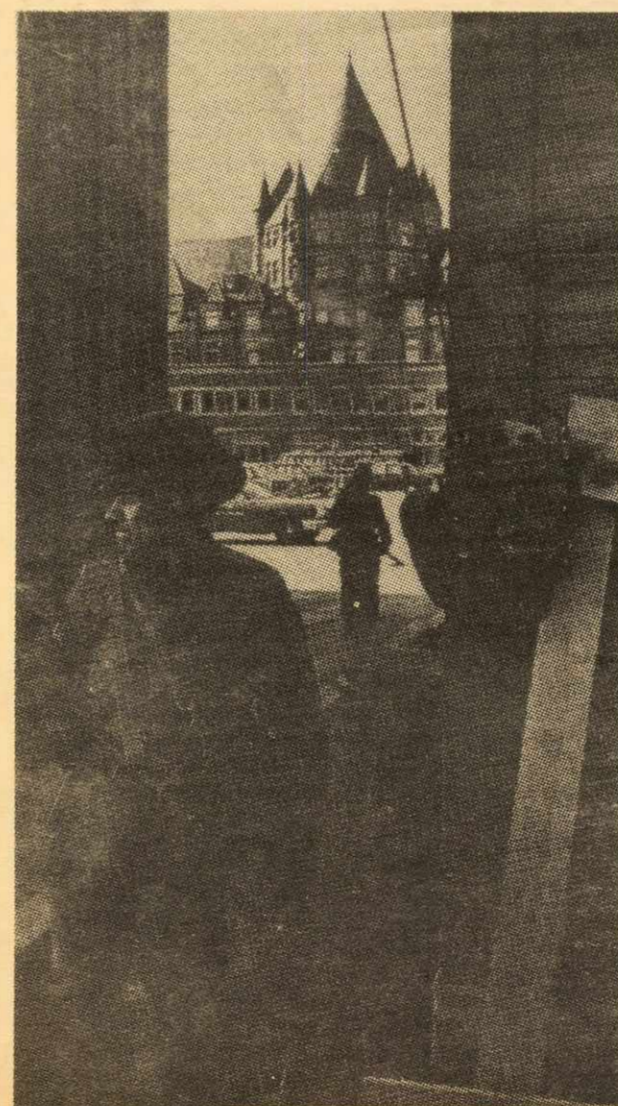
One of the most significant statements of the motives of the Trudeau government, and the steps by which it arrived at making the drastic move on October 16, is to be found in a column by Toronto Star Ottawa editor Anthony Westell appearing the day after the Act was invoked. Westell, a long-time Ottawa columnist formerly with the Globe and Mail, has extremely good sources inside the Liberal cabinet, and, along with Toronto Star editor Peter Newman, is one of the three or four most important Liberal Party intimates in the national press gallery.

Writing under the heading "The Agony Behind Trudeau's Decision", Westell examined the basic premises on which Trudeau approaches the current situation in Quebec:

"The answer begins with Trudeau's analysis of the rise of separatism in the past five years. The decline and fall of the Lesage Liberal government, he believes, left a power vacuum which Union Nationale premier Daniel Johnson did not fill because he never took a firm position for federalism. René Lévesque left the Liberals to lead the Parti Québécois into the void, and win almost a quarter of the votes in the election this year."

The Trudeau administration's entire strategy toward Quebec is to make sure that the vacuum of social contradictions and frustrations is never left as open territory to the separatists, and particularly to René Lévesque. The Trudeau government fell over backwards pumping money and organizational talent into the election campaign of new Liberal leader Robert Bourassa, scarcely concealing the influx of everything from top advisers to Trudeau's personal hairdresser to Bourassa's side. The province was saturated with a well-oiled campaign that reeked of money, and no one had any

Photocell



doubts that much, if not most of it, came from the federal Liberals.

When the FLQ struck, Westell reports, "Trudeau's instinct was to refuse negotiations or concessions to the terrorists. Nor were there any doves in the federal cabinet."

But he stresses that "Trudeau grew increasingly concerned at the threat to Bourassa's fledgling and inexperienced government posed by the new terrorism."

Initially, the threat came from one specific source—the vacillation of the Quebec cabinet in the face of Laporte's kidnapping five days after Cross's abduction.

Trudeau's strategy of strength depended on Bourassa emerging as the strongman, the pillar of fortitude around which Quebec could rally, the dam that could keep the flood-tides of nationalist and separatist feeling from moving into that dangerous political vacuum of which Westell spoke.

"But with the kidnapping of Quebec Labor Minister Pierre Laporte, the crisis changed and deepened. It became at once a terrible question striking deep into the hearts and consciences of Bourassa's own ministers. Many Quebec Liberals owe more friendship to Laporte than to Bourassa, a relative newcomer. In the cabinet pressing around the young minister at the moment of crisis, there were agonized men who wanted nothing more than to save their colleague."

"The pressure on Bourassa was enormous. The danger last weekend that he would cave in, opening a disastrous new power vacuum, seemed terribly real."

It has been reliably reported by several journalists, and Westell carries the information, that Trudeau spent hours on the phone at his Harrington Lake summer home encouraging the premier to hold fast.

Marc Lalonde, one of Trudeau's top advisers, is believed to have rushed to Quebec City to buttress the premier at this juncture, when, according to several reports, Bourassa's cabinet was on the verge of crumbling.

The leadership of the crisis, which had appeared to come largely from Quebec with Trudeau in the background making sure things went as he wanted them to, suddenly began to revert to Ottawa.

Here the crux of the entire crisis developed.

It centres around the way public opinion in Quebec was reacting to the kidnapping. Trudeau made at least one tactical error, and one massive political blunder. Those mistakes proved to be the factors destroying his strategy.

Pierre Desrosiers suggests in the weekly Montreal paper Québec-Press an interpretation that has also been voiced by Parti Québécois economic expert Jacques Parizeau, and backed up by some reporters in Ottawa. It is this:

Trudeau's initial tactic had been to remain firm, in an effort to force the FLQ's hand. They might have killed Cross; Desrosiers and Parizeau suggest Trudeau was prepared to let that happen, betting public opinion would swing to him out of revulsion. But instead, the FLQ upped the ante. It kidnapped Pierre Laporte. Trudeau's tactic to back the FLQ into a corner had failed.

This unexpected response to Trudeau's immediate strategy, however, would only have been a temporary tactical setback, if Trudeau had not made one critical political error of judgement. He totally misread the climate of public opinion in Quebec.

Westell himself makes this point:

"Another minister feared that after the first shock and outrage at the kidnappings, Quebec opinion was being won around to the rationalization that while violence may be wrong, the terrorists were somehow glamorous patriots fighting a noble cause—the same sort of shift of opinion that happened after Charles de Gaulle's 'Vive le Québec Libre' speech in 1967.

"A backbencher close to Trudeau expressed much the same fear more precisely." Westell states, "when he said that the Quebec media—television, radio, newspapers—were heavily infiltrated by FLQ propagandists and suggested drastic action would be necessary to eventually deal with the problem." By "FLQ propagandists", of course, the backbencher meant journalists who were expressing the sympathy felt by many in Quebec for the goals and principles expressed in the FLQ manifesto.

"A Montreal MP, on the other hand," Westell continues, "told the Liberal caucus Wednesday that the FLQ was appealing dangerously well to real grievances among French Canadians, and that it would not stand for repression."

We had confirmed that this "Montreal MP" was Marcel Prud'homme, who was taken aback when he took a poll in his constituency and found that the vast majority of the young supported what the FLQ did, and that the older constituents violently condemned the tactic but frequently expressed some sympathy for the content of the manifesto. Prud'homme communicated these facts to an emergency caucus meeting.

Trudeau himself let slip in the Commons a thought that had been more and more in his mind by now: the media were playing into the hands of the FLQ by giving them too much publicity.

The government was so frazzled by this PR problem that, while the cabinet was planning the emergency regulations, it actually considered press censorship, of which Trudeau was the leading advocate.

Trudeau's aides had initially tried to suppress the publica-

tion of the FLQ manifesto in the Quebec papers, one of them arguing for an hour with the editor of the National Union paper Montréal Matin, in vain, against running the text.

"As the week wore on," Westell reported in the Toronto Star, "the question as to how to quiet the Quebec media came more frequently into conversations around the government."

"This was because the critical battle was seen as the struggle for public opinion. Would Quebecers rally to law, order and a strong Bourassa government, or drift towards a new 'moderate' position?"

Others arguing in support of this thesis report that Trudeau, when he was unable to prevent the spread of the manifesto in the Quebec press, himself ordered the CBC's French network to broadcast the manifesto, as the FLQ had demanded. They argue that this was a sign of Trudeau's overconfidence that the broadcasting of the manifesto would actually cause Québécois to react against its "extreme" language.

In any event, on October 8, the manifesto was broadcast over the CBC's French network in Quebec, as demanded by the FLQ, and subsequently published in most of the province's major commercial newspapers. The document, broadly expressing many of Quebec's long-standing grievances, states that the FLQ is a "response to aggression", emphasizes the foreign exploitation of labor and resources, and voices the need for a mass-based revolutionary upheaval. Its spirit was one with which many Québécois found they could identify, and their clearly established failure to retreat in horror provided the federal government with its greatest shock.

FRAP, Montreal's union-and-citizen-based civic opposition movement, publicly endorsed the objectives of the manifesto, while rejecting the FLQ's tactics. It added that it could not condemn the violence of the FLQ without condemning the violence of the system, and its statement enumerated a long list of labor and political conflicts. It also noted that the FLQ's terrorism is directed not against wage workers but against the violence of the establishment. However, FRAP said it opted to fight with democratic means.

The executive committee of the Laurentian and Montreal Councils of the Confederation of National Trade Unions expressed their unequivocal support of the manifesto.

Montreal Council president Michel Chartrand (now in jail) said the authorities were getting extremely agitated by the possible death of two men but did not seem to be able to summon the same anxiety for thousands of people whose lives were potentially threatened by a walkout of medical specialists.

Later he said "who's scared of the FLQ? Are the workers terrorized by the FLQ? Are the students terrorized by the FLQ? The only people who are afraid of the FLQ are those who should be scared—the power elite. So who says the FLQ is terrorizing the population?"

The union-financed weekly Québec-Press editorialized that the FLQ's analysis was "exact", and that the horror of an armed, clandestine movement should be counterpointed to the horror of the better-armed, equally clandestine established authority.

A survey of opinions on "hot-line" programs on popular French stations in Montreal showed that the vast majority of callers condemned the actual acts of the FLQ, but over 50 per cent supported the spirit of the manifesto.

A CBC interviewer took a survey in front of a French Catholic church after 11 o'clock mass on Sunday, and found that condemnation of the acts was almost universal, but that half the people he talked to expressed sympathy for the things said in the FLQ manifesto.

Student newspapers came out in favor of the FLQ, some with grave reservations about the tactics, others not. At l'Université du Québec, virtually the entire student body went on strike in support of the FLQ's aims. About 30 per cent of the faculty walked out too. At l'Université de Montréal, 1,500 students struck and said they would go into the community to muster backing for the FLQ's goals. Several junior colleges and even some high schools closed down.

Only hours before the War Measures Act was brought in, with federal troops already patrolling Montreal's streets, about 3,000 students rallied at the Paul Sauvé Arena to hear Michel Chartrand, Pierre Vallières, Charles Gagnon, and the undisputed hero of the day, Robert Lemieux. Fists raised, they chanted "FLQ... FLQ!", just as Ottawa was preparing to make their cry illegal.

Opposition was also coming from other, more unexpected sources. On Wednesday, October 14, a group of French-Canadian moderates, led by René Lévesque and Claude Ryan (whom no one had ever imagined as political allies) issued an attack on Trudeau's statements, lambasted the premier of Ontario, John Robarts, for shooting his mouth off, and urged the government to release the 23 prisoners the FLQ wanted transported to Cuba or Algeria. The group criticized "certain outside attitudes... which add to an atmosphere that has already taken on military overtones—(a situation) which can be blamed on Ottawa."

It is a matter of general agreement among the Ottawa press corps that it was this statement that tipped the balance. Trudeau realized he was losing ground in Quebec, that a flood-tide of opposition to Ottawa was rising. With the Bourassa government shaking in the corner, a new alliance of nationalists and liberals and separatists threatened to fill the vacuum.