

Before I discuss with you what the Government did, I have to make clear to you what I mean by my use of the general term "Government". I don't have to tell you that Canada is a federal state with powers shared between the federal and ten provincial governments, and I shall certainly spare you a seminar on Canadian constitutional law. In criminal matters, the law is made by the Federal Government and administered by the provinces. So, in the case of kidnappings, responsibility was shared by the Federal Government and the Government of Quebec. This could have led to added difficulty but did not, since from the beginning the two governments acted in close co-operation. When I use the term "Government" today I mean the Federal and Quebec Governments acting in concert, each within its own sphere of responsibility. Where it is necessary, I shall identify the particular government to which I refer.

The kidnapping of James Cross, compounded by the kidnapping of Pierre Laporte, faced the governments concerned with an agonizing dilemma. Two men, one with the privileged status of an envoy, the other a Minister in the Quebec Government, were in the hands of terrorists known for their lack of regard for human life, who were threatening to murder them if certain demands were not met. The Government was under the greatest possible obligation to secure their safety. But there was an equally grave obligation to secure the safety of other diplomats, individual Canadian citizens, and of the state itself. The Government also realized that to accede to all of the terrorists' demands would be the first step upon a slippery slope upon which it would become increasingly difficult to find a firm footing. The demands were something new in the Canadian experience, the first challenge to the Government to act in contempt of its own principles. There could be no compromise; the only time to stop the rot was when it first appeared.

The fact that Canada had been relatively free from violent civil disturbance was not, as has been said, just a matter of luck. It resulted from 100 years of consistent and even-handed, but democratic and compassionate, enforcement of the country's laws. The terrorists were driven to the dramatic and highly-publicized acts of kidnapping by the failure of their earlier efforts -- efforts frustrated by their total failure to attract any popular support and by the patient and unrelenting work of the police in bringing those responsible for acts of violence to the bar of justice. In their demands, the terrorists called for the freeing of 23 persons they chose to call "political prisoners", persons who, in fact, had been convicted in the normal course of justice of common crimes -- murder, manslaughter, bombings and armed robbery. To meet this demand the Government would have had to turn its back upon a century of experience of how best to protect the freedom and safety of its people. This it was not prepared to do. I won't go over all the demands made by the terrorists. One was met: the reading on television and publication of a manifesto they had prepared. This could be done, since Canada has no fear of opinions, and indeed encourages the freest possible expression of everyone's point of view.

One other thing the Government did was to offer safe-conduct to the abductors to any destination of their choice. This was done to protect the lives of the hostages by removing from the terrorists any temptation to murder them to further their own chances of escape.

The kidnapers' ploy, which made some impression on a small proportion of even relatively moderate people in Canada, was to suggest that the