



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 1970 IN CANADA

An Address by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. André Ouellet, to the New York State Society of Newspaper Editors, New York, February 15, 1971.

Canada enjoyed a brief spell of unusual publicity in the United States and the world in the last few months of last year. They say in show business that all publicity is good publicity. I am not sure that the same holds true in the life of nations. If it was painful for Canadians to have the tragic events of last October front-page news throughout the world, they did, at the same time, take pride in the steadfastness shown by their Government and in the orderly way the great mass of our citizens carried on their normal lives, even in the city of Montreal, where the events had their focus.

I am grateful for this opportunity to address this influential group and to try to shed some light in what Churchill called "the twilight between the full glare of newspaper publicity and the cold light of history". Above all, I should like to try to put the events of October into their proper perspective, to look at them as dispassionately as I can and to see where Canada is now and how the future appears.

I should like to make clear that FLQ terrorism did not burst upon the scene last October. What happened then was a sudden escalation in terrorist activity that had already a seven-year history. It began with bombs in mail-boxes in 1963, increased through periods of violence, alternating with periods of relative inactivity, to bombing attacks on buildings belonging to the federal and provincial governments and other institutions regarded as symbolic, such as the Montreal Stock Exchange. In the course of these bombings five people were killed, the last less than a year ago, a middle-aged French-Canadian woman communicator at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa. That so few lives were lost was due to good fortune rather than to any particular care on the part of the terrorists to avoid murder. Prior to the kidnapping of James Cross, the police were able to foil plans to snatch two other diplomats.

It was against this background of escalation of violence that the Government had to evaluate the situation and evaluate the threats of further escalation that accompanied the kidnappings, including the threat of selective assassinations.

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

Government was threatening the lives of the hostages by refusing to meet the terrorists' demands. The lives of James Cross and Pierre Laporte were threatened by the terrorists and no one else. For its part, the Government could only go so far in yielding to terrorist demands. Otherwise, by providing encouragement, manpower and funds to the terrorists, it would have invited new waves of violence which would have put in jeopardy the lives of individuals in all walks of life. In the circumstances, the hazard to the lives of the hostages remained considerable. There also was a time-factor of unknown weight.

It was a time of crisis. Two men's lives hung in the balance. Threats of further kidnappings and violence were multiplying. No one knew whether or not another group was ready to pounce. Thousands of pounds of stolen dynamite were unaccounted for in the Province of Quebec. The atmosphere in Montreal was volatile in the extreme.

The city of Montreal and the Government of the Province of Quebec, so far unsuccessful in getting any real lead on the terrorists, fearing further kinds of violence and aware of the growing anxiety of their citizens, called upon the Federal Government to invoke the War Measures Act. This Act, as its title suggests; contains powers to which no democratic government would have recourse except in situations of the gravest emergency. It was, however, the only statute to which the Government could turn. Given its peaceful past, Canada had no public order act; to have drafted such an act and put it through the legislative process would have taken far too long.

In introducing in Parliament the regulations promulgated under the Act, the Government placed very precise limitations on the powers to be put into effect, and limited the period of effectiveness to six months. The Government also announced its intention to bring a more limited legislative measure before Parliament at the earliest possible date.

The regulations promulgated under the War Measures Act made membership in the FLQ, or any other such organization undertaking specific acts of violence against the state, illegal and gave to the law-enforcement authorities broader powers than those normally at their disposal, in two specific fields:

- (1) to enter upon premises, seize evidence and arrest persons without warrant;
- (2) to hold persons in custody without charge for periods longer than those provided for under the criminal law.

With these two exceptions, the rights of all Canadians, including those arrested and detained under the Act, remained unimpaired. Due process, as you say in this country, was observed. Charges had to be laid in accordance with normal procedures, trial to be by jury in the established criminal courts. The right to representation by counsel in trials under long-established rules of evidence and jurisprudence was unimpaired.

The Public Order (Temporary Measures) Act later adopted by Parliament is limited in application to the FLQ crisis. It reduces the periods during which persons can be detained without charge and expires on April 1, 1971,* unless specifically continued in force by Parliament.

* The Act duly expired on this date.

This, then, is how the Canadian Government met the threat to peace and order in Canada. As you know, the release of James Cross was secured. Pierre Laporte was murdered. Those charged with the crime are now being tried in court. I am satisfied, and every evidence indicates the vast majority of Canadians is satisfied, that the Government acted with courage, determination, skill and humanity.

I should now like to deal very briefly with three common misapprehensions about what happened that have been given wide circulation.

The first of these is that troops of the Canadian Armed Forces were deployed under the War Measures Act and were used to enforce its provisions. Not so -- the troops, most of them French-speaking, were deployed, at the request of the Government of Quebec, as part of their normal function in support of the civil authority before the Act was invoked and under the normal law of the land. Support of the civil authority, when requested, is a recognized duty of the armed forces in every country I know, including your own. Their duties were confined to the protection of prominent individuals, public buildings and essential installations. There was no single incident of a soldier harming a civilian. And, to the best of my knowledge, not even an unpleasant incident between troops and civilians. The fact that our troops have specific instruction, training and experience in peacekeeping operations, which necessarily involve close but non-aggressive contact with civilian populations, is a source of strength and reassurance in circumstances like these. Any notion that Quebec was under military occupation is nonsense.

The second misapprehension is that Canadians, for a time at least, lived under martial law. I think that what I have already said gives the lie to this idea. Martial law involves abrogating the constitution, even if only for a time, putting the whole apparatus of democracy into escrow and ruling by fiat, the use of summary courts-martial and other like measures, none of which Canadians would have stood for.

The third misapprehension, one of special interest to this audience, was that there was some form of press censorship. No one who lived through those days in Canada could support such a proposition. The FLQ themselves were able to use the media for propaganda purposes and did so with a modicum of skill compounded into a great success by the gullibility and predilection for sensationalism of the media themselves. Their every word was amplified on the air and blazoned in the press. Attacks upon the Government and its policy were given the widest publicity and a few leading editorial writers, who disagreed with the Government's policy, wrote their views freely and forcefully. The Government was aware that publicity was one of the FLQ's main objectives and aware that the press, knowingly or not, was giving them the greatest assistance.

The Attorney-General of Quebec publicly called upon the media to exercise more responsibility in their coverage of the crisis. As he might have foreseen, this resulted in loud complaints about censorship and absolutely no increase in responsibility. You will understand that I am referring only to certain elements of the media. In general, the press in Canada acted responsibly. The fact that reporting events in a crisis like this in accordance with normal editorial judgment tends to play into the hands of the terrorists is something that should, I believe, concern us all -- the press, government and citizens alike.

How does the future look for Canada? I don't think anyone is naive enough to imagine that we have heard the last of the FLQ, or that violence, which is a growing threat to society everywhere, will leave Canada unscathed. I think we have given notice to the FLQ, and any other groups of like mind, that the Government of Canada is not an easy mark, and that the governments and people of Canada will act together swiftly and firmly to deal with terror wherever it appears, without at the same time allowing our democratic system to become warped in the process. We have been reminded in a tragic but unforgettable way that freedom is written in the blood of those who down the centuries have resisted terror, that freedom does not issue from the muzzle of an assassin's gun.

Terrorism in society is akin to a virus in the blood-stream. The virus must be identified and neutralized. At the same time, the weakness in the body that permitted the virus to take hold must be diagnosed and the necessary measures taken to increase the body's immunity.

The FLQ terrorists do not represent the people of Quebec or their aspirations. They are not so much Quebec separatists as extremists verging on anarchism. They are sometimes identified as neo-Marxist revolutionaries. I have no idea what that term really means, but I can tell you that what we know about the aims of the FLQ strongly suggests that they are rather short on ideology of any kind. They are determined to destroy the ordered society that is the underpinning of civilization as we know it, but they offer only vague generalities in its place.

I have likened the FLQ to a virus in the system and implied that there are weaknesses in the Canadian body politic that have allowed the virus to take hold. Long before the crisis erupted, the Canadian Government had been dealing with the very real problems in Canadian society. Some of these we share with the rest of the Western world; some are native to Canada. Western society everywhere has to come to grips with the very real threats posed by partly-alienated groups -- ethnic and racial minorities, the poor and under-privileged, the impatient young. Affluence and permissiveness, widespread though they may be, are not universal in our society. Poverty and frustration are still the common lot of millions. Our young people are not prepared to be patient, not prepared to accept that intractable, embedded problems call for long-term, gradual solutions. Here is injustice, they say -- remedy it. Our institutions are not yet sufficiently geared to rapid advance; we lack the answers to many of the problems we face. Even when we do know what to do, the right decisions made today may take months or even years to show results. This is particularly true in the economic field.

In the meantime, alienated groups, particularly among the young, are questioning the adequacy and relevance of our institutions -- the churches, the judicial system, even democracy itself. They are questioning the values our institutions exist to protect. They are questioning the human worth of Western civilization, of the acquisitive, so-called "consumer" society. What worth, they ask, has a system that cannot guarantee to all its people a decent life and reasonable chance of fulfillment?

These are very pertinent questions. They have always been asked; the difference now is that the explosion in communications brings the whole world together. The process of government is no longer arcane, it is patent.

The comfort of the well-to-do is known to the poor; the sufferings of the poor are seen by the rich. I do not raise these matters to offer easy solutions but to remind you of the social background against which urban violence in all our societies should be seen.

In Canada, the problems are compounded by two factors:

- (1) the strain imposed upon national unity by separatist sentiment in Quebec in particular and regional disparity of opportunity in general;
- (2) the current high rate of unemployment, particularly among the urban young.

The Canadian Government is fighting these problems with determination and a sense of very real urgency. Quebec's "quiet revolution", which began in the Sixties, has brought dynamic and far-reaching changes in Quebec society. The French language has gained equal recognition with English. Only last week a federal-provincial constitutional conference of prime ministers and premiers achieved a breakthrough that can lead to a renewal of our constitution to bring it into line with the reality of modern Canada. The Government is determined to achieve a Canada in which every Canadian -- English, French or of other origin -- can feel at home and make a decent life without feeling limited to one geographical area or one ethnic group. Canadian foreign policy is now a true expression of a bilingual and multicultural Canada.

The present high level of unemployment will diminish, but a sustained effort has to be made to ensure that the unemployed young and new arrivals on the labour market see ready opportunities for leading useful and fulfilling lives. None of this is easy, but all of it will have to be done, done quickly and done effectively. One thing we do not have is time.

This is the background against which the cruel and criminal acts took place. But it is not the cause. The FLQ have no cause. Canada is an open society; any individual or group can work openly and freely in pursuit of any political purpose. The FLQ have chosen another route. They walk that route alone, despised equally by all Canadians. They have found that it leads only to darkness and death. For their sake, and for the sake of us all, I hope they have learned their lesson well.

S/A