

Remember the October Crisis

by Kent J. Bruynool

This June marked the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Quiet Revolution; so named by Québec's Liberal leader Jean Lesage while parading under the slogan, "we need a change." This was quickly followed by slogans like "masters in our own house" and the ever-popular, "je me souviens."

The provincial Liberals were a nationalistic party then, and led the charge that morphed into the Parti Québécois to the Bloc Québécois and to our current BouCharestian lull in the debate over Québec nationalism.

No right thinking observer would believe the struggle is over and no one wants to repeat the past. Thirty years ago, the splintered and disconnected Front de Liberation du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped British trade commissioner James Cross and murdered Pierre Laporte, then Minister of Labour. The FLQ were the impetus for the imposition of martial law, under the War Measures Act, throughout Québec. There were several different factions within the FLQ itself, the more militant side being responsible for Laporte's death. Cross was released after escape routes were planned for the kidnappers.

The FLQ were a disjointed and disrupted force that was trumped by a government they underestimated; at least they underestimated the Pierre Trudeau government in terms of capacity for force. Trudeau did not mind soldiers on the streets of Montreal. The memory should fill easily, if you are Canadian, of Trudeau on the attack in some CBC interview boasting "just watch me" in response to how far he would go to stifle the uprising. To the "bleeding hearts", Trudeau said, "go on and bleed."

It was the one and only official time in our history where the

citizens were absent their rights. We realise that there are other grievous examples during war times—specifically the internment of Japanese Canadians. (The WWII internment is perhaps the single most frightening dossier in the Canadian history and is due for further examination here at a later date. The country would do well to ruminate on the possibilities of this happening again).

The Cadre ran only these words (see below), over their inside spread during the October crisis. When I stumbled upon them, and

that issue, I was moved and amazed at both the depth of compassion shown by the university press community during a time when suspected sympathisers were detained and arrested without explanation or warrant, and the sharing of stories which is now so easy but must have been incredibly difficult then. In retrospect the CUP people seemed to have told it right.

Consider the lessons of Réne Lévesque, the ever-smoking patron saint of the separatist movement. He had been a journalist before entering politics—primarily at

radio-Canada in the 50's. Lévesque may have been the second most cult of personality in Canadian political history—and his oratory skills remain unmatched in terms of power of message, and strength of delivery.

The most cult of personality in Canadian political history, Pierre Trudeau would curse the words of Charles de Gaulle, a most non-Lévesque like figure full of the pomp that the PQ leader detested, who ended a speech at the 1967 Montreal Expo with the words, 'Vive Le Québec libre.'

De Gaulle acted moreso, it would seem, out of a sense of unity with Québec, rather than a necessarily hostile attitude towards the country-at-large (though he did, in fact, cancel his plans to go to Ottawa after the speech). De Gaulle seems a tad, well, gauche looking back...his comments did little but stoke embers that were not his, and were not his to stoke.

Lest we forget that a country like ours is made of soft-fabric not steel-wool. Vive le Quebec libre indeed, and L'Isle de Prince Edward, and Columbie Britannique (et les autres). Of course there are those who lean the other way entirely.

Later in 1967 Lévesque left the Liberals to found the Sovereignty-Association Movement. Though eventually his PQ became the official government for the province of Québec, Lévesque died a beaten man, having lost the first referendum badly. Rene-Levesque Boulevard in downtown Montreal always makes us think of ghosts, and cigarettes.

It behoves all Canadians to examine, or at least digest, a decent history of Quebec Nationalism. It has been a mere thirty years since political prisoners were taken in this country; we should never forget. □

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