



Quebec – The October Crisis

The October Crisis

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- The October Crisis refers to a chain of events that place in Quebec in the fall of 1970. The crisis was the culmination of a long series of terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Front de liberation du Quebec (FLQ), a militant Quebec independence movement, between 1963 and 1970.
- On 5th October 1970, the FLQ kidnapped British trade commissioner James Cross in Montreal. Within the next two weeks, FLQ members also kidnapped and killed Quebec Minister for Immigration and Minister of Labour Pierre Laporte.
- Quebec premier Robert Bourassa and Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau called for federal help to deal with the crisis. In response, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau deployed the Armed Forces and invoked the *War Measures Act* – the only time it has been applied during peacetime in Canadian history.

The October Crisis – Background

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- The FLQ formed in 1963 during a period of profound/radical political, social, and cultural changes in Quebec
- Those changes were called the Quiet Revolution
- The objective of the FLQ was to destroy the influence of English colonialism by attacking its symbols. The FLQ hoped that Quebecers would follow their example and rise up to overthrow their colonial oppressors.
- Between 1963 and 1970 the FLQ was responsible for over 200 bombings and dozens of robberies that left six people dead
- One of the main targets of bombs were mailboxes – when people opened their mailbox it would explode
- The FLQ also targeted a wealthy, anglophone area of Montreal; several Canadian Armed Forces armouries and facilities; the head office of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) in Montreal; a federal government bookstore; McGill University; the resident of Drapeau, the provincial Department of Labour; and the Eaton's department store in downtown Montreal
- In February 1967 the FLQ bombing of the Montreal Stock exchange injured 27 people

The October Crisis – Beginning of the Crisis

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- By 1970 there were over 20 FLQ members in prison for the acts of violence
- In the fall of 1969 the remaining FLQ movement split into two factions or cells in Montreal
- The South Shore gang – became the Chenier cell – led by Paul Rose
- The Liberation cell – led by Jacque Lanctot
- Around 8 a.m. on 5th October 1970, three armed members of the Liberation cells, one disguised as a deliveryman, kidnapped British trade Commissioner James Cross from his home in Montreal
- The cell issued seven demands for Cross' release – these included the release of 23 FLQ “political prisoners,” the broadcast and publication of the FLQ manifesto, \$500,000, and safe passage to either Cuba or Algeria
- The Quebec government was given 24 hours to comply – the government rejected the demands but indicated they were willing to negotiate



James Cross

Born – 29th September 1921 in Ireland

Died – 6th January 2021 in the UK aged 99

The October Crisis – Beginning of the Crisis

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- The following days saw 30 people arrested and multiple French newspapers printing the FLQ manifesto
- The manifesto was a diatribe against established authority
- The FLQ extended their deadline to 10th October at 6 p.m. – shortly before the 6 p.m. deadline Quebec justice minister Jerome Choquette announced that if Cross were released the Liberation cell would be granted safe passage out of Canada but no other demands would be met
- Shortly after the 6 p.m. deadline two members of the other faction – the Chenier cell – kidnapped Quebec cabinet minister Pierre Laporte while he was playing with his nephew on his front lawn in Saint-Lambert – they were able to find his address in the phone book



Pierre Laport

Born – 25th February 1921 in Montreal

Died – 17th October 1970 in Saint—Hubert,
Longueuill, Quebec

The October Crisis – Crisis Intensifies

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- On 11th October the Chenier cell issued a communique – they threatened to kill Laporte unless all seven FLQ demands were met by 10 p.m.
- Shortly before the deadline Bourassa announced on the radio that he would not meet the FLQ's demands but that he was open to further negotiations – the Chenier cell responded by delaying Laporte's execution
- 12th October saw Trudeau ask the military to deploy soldiers to Ottawa to protect high-profile people and locations
- The next day, 13th October, CBC reported Tim Ralphe questioned Trudeau at the front of the Parliament Buildings
- <https://youtu.be/XfUq9b1XTao>

The October Crisis – Crisis Intensifies

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- On 15th October the military was deployed to Quebec after Quebec formally requested assistance – 1000 soldiers were deployed at key locations in Montreal within an hour
- In the afternoon about 3000 students attended a rally in support of the FLQ – they called on the government to meet the demands of the FLQ
- That night the Quebec government announced that they would release five FLQ prisoners on parole and guarantee the two cells safe passage out of Canada in exchange for the return of the hostages

The October Crisis – War Measures Act

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- 16th October – at the request of Bourassa, the municipal government of Montreal, and the Montreal police force, the federal government invoked the War Measures Act to confront the state of “apprehended insurrection” in Quebec
- Under the law the FLQ were outlawed and membership became a criminal act; normal civil liberties were suspended, and arrests and detentions were authorized without charge
- There were dissenting voices – including PC leader Robert Stanfield, former PM John Diefenbaker, and NDP leader Tommy Douglas
- Douglass likened the move to using “a sledgehammer to crack a peanut.”
- However, public opinion polls indicated a clear majority supported invoking the Act
- Within 48 hours of invoking the act, more than 250 people were arrested
- On 17th October at 10:50 p.m. Laporte’s body was found in the trunk of an abandoned car near the Saint-Hubert airport – an autopsy revealed he had been strangled

The October Crisis – The Manhunt & Cross's Release

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- 18th October – warrants were issued for the arrest of Marc Carbonneau and Paul Rose for the kidnapping and murder of Laporte
- 6th November – one person was arrested – Bernard Lortie
- More arrests were made in December
- Finally on 3rd December police had negotiated for the release of James Cross in exchange for safe passage of all members of the Liberation cell to Cuba – all of the people who left eventually returned to Canada and were sentenced for different crimes
- After being held in a room in a Montreal North apartment for 59 days, Cross had lost 22 pounds but was otherwise in good health. He had not been harmed and described his captors as courteous
- The last arrests were made near the end of December
- In January Paul Rose was sentenced to life imprisonment for kidnapping and murder
- Francis Simard was sentenced to life for murder
- Bernard Lortie was sentenced to 20 years for kidnapping
- Jacques Rose was acquitted of kidnapping and murder but was sentenced to eight years for being an accessory after the fact in the kidnapping of Laporte

The October Crisis – Aftermath

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>
- The tactics of the RCMP – such as break-ins, thefts, and electronic surveillance without warrants – were later condemned as illegal by the federal McDonald Commission and the Keable Inquiry in Quebec, both of which issued their reports in 1981
- The McDonald Commission called for the creation of a new civilian security agency, separate from the RCMP; this led to the establishment of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) in 1984
- In 1988 the War Measures Act was repealed and the Emergencies Act was created – the new Act created more limited and specific powers for the government to deal with security emergencies – Cabinet orders and regulations must be reviewed by Parliament and are subject to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Bill of Rights – the Emergencies Act has been used during the pandemic
- On the 40th anniversary of Laporte's death a monument was unveiled near Laporte's home in Quebec – the inscription reads "No one lives for oneself. No one dies for oneself." – this was on 17th October 2010
- Cross returned to the United Kingdom and continued working for the civil service; however, he was no longer assigned overseas. He was prohibited by the government to sell his story of the events. He eventually retired to Seaford, East Sussex where he died in January 2021 due to complications of Covid. His wife (2018) and daughter (2015) both predeceased him.