

Reaction of René Lévesque, President of the Parti Québécois, To the Invocation of the War Measures Act October 17, 1970

[...]

Quebec no longer has a government.

The bit of country over which we had any control has been swept away by the first hard blow. The Bourassa cabinet has stepped down and is no more than a puppet in the hands of the federal leaders.

It is now quite obvious that - right from the beginning of this tragic period which began with Mr Cross' kidnapping - the only part played by the government has been as walk-on. We are unfortunately forced to believe that even while the pseudo-negotiations opened last Sunday by Mr Bourassa were going on he was, according to an agreement, merely acting as the tool of a policy which had been formulated without referring to him and that he adopted a compromising attitude while knowing all the time about the rigid line which Ottawa had chosen; that in fact he had been preparing the necessary climate, meanwhile letting the situation continue and deteriorate while pretending to hesitate, and that, finally, last night, it was he who sanctioned the extreme steps taken by the Trudeau regime, whereby all of Quebec is put under military occupation until next spring.

[...] Nor can we help thinking and saying that this degradation of Quebec was intended - quite consciously by some and instinctively by others.

The guiding factors have taken two extreme forms.

Firstly there is the thoroughly official, legally recognized federal establishment, backed by economic and other forces. It was from here that the first murmur was heard of the likelihood of resorting to all means including military force for the purpose of keeping Quebec, and, if need be, putting it in its place.

For years it has been in this area that attempts have been made to stifle the hopes of the Quebecois, howsoever moderately ambitious they might have been, swamping them in the undergrowth of committees, meetings, and eternal new beginnings. We are obliged to say that from the highest levels of this establishment orders were given for that non-stop flow of propaganda the aim of which was disfigure and ridicule every aspect of democratic nationalism in Quebec at all costs, and which knew no bounds, resorting to the worst type of slander in order to prove subversion and terrorism.

At the other extreme let us hope that those very people who threw themselves body and soul into a career of subversion and terrorism - both of which are so tragically contrary to the best interests of our people - may at least realize now that they have in fact been the forerunners of the military regime thereby endangering the basic rights of all Quebecois.

Finally, we do not know how large the revolutionary army is or was, nor the extent of their power to create disorder and anarchy. Until we receive proof to the contrary - and every responsible citizen should demand this proof and be given it as soon as possible if it exists or else drop out from a self-respecting society - until we receive proof to the contrary we will believe that such a minute, numerically unimportant fraction is involved, that rushing into the enforcement of the War

Measures Act was a panicky and altogether excessive reaction, especially when you think of the inordinate length of time they want to maintain this regime.

The most worrying thing - and this might also reveal quite specific and even more inadmissible intentions, is that the arrests, the detentions (whether preventive or otherwise) and the searches, have taken on the proportions of a full police operation right across Quebec.

We believe that in this respect at least (which is the most urgent) we can call on all Quebecois, especially those who are highly placed, fully confident that at this time of such unprecedented gravity we will find enough solidarity and calm democratic strength to prevent this dangerous climate from degenerating into blind repression [...]

In view of the extremes which have for all practical purposes caused the destruction of our government, Quebec's democrats must overcome their differences of opinion immediately and find the means or the organizations for building the moral power necessary to defend our basic liberties and, at the same time, all our hopes for the future [...]

Source: John Saywell, *Quebec '70: A Documentary Narrative* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971): 96–97. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.