

December 16, 1970.

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. J.R. CROSS
DECEMBER 5, 1970.

Explanatory Note

During his flight to England on December 5th, 1970, Mr. J.R. Cross kindly consented to answer a number of questions that were put to him by the undersigned concerning the impressions he had gathered of the FLQ.

Travelling on the flight were:

Mr. Cross
His daughter Susan
Lord Dunrossil of the British High Commission
Mr. J.M. Déry of External Affairs
Mr. D. Cornett, External Affairs
Constable R. Bennett, RCMP
Mr. J.M. Davey, PMO

The interview took place at a table in the front of the plane in the presence of Lord Dunrossil and Mr. Déry, who themselves asked one or two questions. Constable Bennett joined us briefly and also asked one question.

The conversation was recorded, but because of the background aircraft engine noise, it is of poor quality. An attempt has been made to transcribe, as faithfully as possible, the recorded remarks, but in one or two cases it has been necessary to make an interpretation of what was actually said. A certain number of repetitious remarks have also been edited out.

The transcript is, I believe, as complete and as faithful as possible, but if there are any doubts it can be checked against the original.

After Mr. Cross had answered the specific questions that were put to him, a more general conversation took place amongst himself, Lord Dunrossil, Mr. Déry and myself on events in Quebec. This was also partially recorded and an attempt will be made to provide an edited version including all significant facts relating to the FLQ as soon as possible.

J. M. Davey
J. M. Davey.

P.M.

70

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Kidnapping of
James Cross
- Secret

JB

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT OF DISCUSSION WITH MR. J.R. CROSS

DECEMBER 5, 1970

DAVEY: We now have a pretty good picture of why events in Quebec moved from where they were, starting with the kidnaping of yourself and Mr. Laporte, to a major crisis. There were many elements involved, and we have put some of the pieces together. What we would really like to get is the best possible understanding of the kind of people they were, the things that motivate them, their ideological beliefs, the possibility of orders from above, how they reacted to Laporte's murder, the War Measures Act, inquest proceedings, what their plans might be for the future, their mentality. It is essentially things of this order.

CROSS: Well, I think the most interesting thing for me, and possibly for you, is the question of their political beliefs. I discussed this a great deal the first few days. After that, I'm afraid, I became very tired - my French isn't good enough really to conduct long, involved, philosophical discussions in French. After the death of Laporte, I didn't really want to talk to them very much.

I would say that there are two main streams, two main influences, on their political thought. The

CROSS: (Cont'd)

first one is a reading of Quebec history. They are very full of all the events of Quebec history. They have studied it. One of the girls particularly, I think probably had a history degree. And they see the total of Quebec history as the series of two centuries or three centuries of oppression, the first by the Seigneurs of France, since 1759 by les Anglais, and now by the Americans. They see the Quebec people as an oppressed colonial people who are now struggling for national liberation. And I would have said that this is the spark plug of the group I was with. How far this is true of the other groups, I don't know, but I would slightly go away from your area of feelings, I would say that this is the driving force rather than the international side.

The second driving force is what I would call, for want of a better term, revolutionary Marxism, and revolutionary Marxism in terms not of Russia, which they regard as state capitalism. Not so much of China, about which they seem to know very little, but about the peasant revolutions of Cuba, and particularly of Algeria. And it's from Algeria that they draw their main intellectual background. This may have started because the work in Algeria is in French and therefore it's easier for them to read.

CROSS: (Cont'd)

The literature they gave me was firstly Vallières' book, which they seem to regard as a very good statement from the Quebec point of view; and secondly, the works of Franz Fanon on the Algerian position. They also gave me some stuff on South America, and one of the things they showed me was an article in Ramparts by one of the Brazilians who is now in Algeria.

So that if I were to define their aims, they are to create an independent, socialist Quebec, socialist in Algerian terms, and an independent socialist Quebec which is brought about by violence. Now violence is an essential theme of this, and what I would like to do when I get to London is try and find out from our people whether Fanon's book, "The Damned of the Earth", is available in English because I read it in French. It's a difficult book to read. I don't know enough of Algerian and North African history to take up his allusions and I may have missed some of the points. But from what I understand, the argument is roughly thus. A colonized people, and these people define the Quebec people, and when I say the Quebec people I mean the French, the Québécois, as a colonized people, are full of complexes and neuroses - I don't know the right term - which are created by their environment, their social, political, economic environment. It's because of this

CROSS: (Cont'd)

that you have among colonized peoples a very high rate of violence, a very high rate of murder, a very high rate of family crimes. You have things like outbursts of tribal war, you have secret societies like the Leopard men, you have the release of violence in tribal dances. Now the sole way to cleanse the soul, to liberate these people, the sole way to achieve a catharsis, to make them a free people, is to achieve a revolution by violence. A revolution by peaceful means, if this is not a contradiction in terms, a change of power by peaceful means, is a betrayal because all it does is replace the metropolitan bourgeois by a local bourgeois who has been trained in the metropolitan image. And all they do is adopt the metropolitan institutions. And because they are less efficient than the metropolitan bourgeois, you are merely in a worse situation than before.

So therefore the aim of the FLQ is, by violent means, to bring about an overthrow of the Government in Quebec and the establishment of an independent Quebec. They do not, I think, see themselves as able to do this by masses of armed men in the streets. They never believe that this is possible. But what I think they believe is that by acting as the spark plug at pressure points,

CROSS: (Cont'd)

by acting in the same way as the Bolshevik terror squads, the Irish Republican Army, the Irgun Zvai Leumi, or probably even more the Stern Gang - I don't know how far you're familiar with them, but they combine some of these. I was in Palestine in '46 in the King David Hotel when it was blown up, so I have some experience with this. They would regard themselves in the role of either the Stern Gang or the Irgun Zvai Leumi in this situation. By dramatizing, by forcing, the situations which arise, like the taxi, like the struggle for a French language, like the workers of St. Henri, like the Gaspé situation, to make the situation worse, to force the Government into repressive operations, and to create a situation in which the anglophones would give up and clear out, and therefore a change would take place. They do not, I think, see themselves, - I made jokes about meeting them when they were Ministers and receiving them in London and giving them diplomatic banquets, because I know very well the British government would shake hands with anybody. All we need is time. The moment they arrive with a contract for ten fighters, they would be received at Buckingham Palace - but I don't think they see themselves as taking power, but they see themselves as the Messiahs of power or as voices crying in the wilderness, the people who will, by forcing the situation, create a position

CROSS: (Cont'd)

in which this independent Quebec can come about. But with violence as the essential ingredient. And that really, I think on the broad political level, is the fundamental approach which I got.

I tried then to go on to discuss their Marxism. I think they claim themselves to be Marxists, but my feeling is that their intellectual basis in Marxism is very weak. They have read very little in some things, they have probably read the Communist manifesto. But they didn't seem to know anything very much; they had the ABC of Communism in the place, but they seemed to know very little really of the fundamental developments of Communism. They had very little idea of how the new independent Quebec state was going to be organized. They sort of mouthed parrot phrases from Vallières book about autogestion of factories and things.

DAVEY: Did they regard Vallières as the intellectual leader of this group?

CROSS: Well, I wouldn't have said necessarily intellectual leader, but a man who expressed their thoughts and whose statements should be referred to as an expression of FLQ thoughts. But when you tried to get down to ask them, I mean, how are you going to run the factories,

CROSS: (Cont'd)

who's going to run independent Quebec, they had no real idea. They resembled, I think, very much the anarchist syndicalists in Catalonia in '36 and '38. This was their sort of great weakness when one tried to get into an intellectual discussion. They hadn't got to the second stage; they had got to the revolution stage, but they hadn't got the dictatorship of proletariat stage and they certainly hadn't got to the organization of the state stage. And that really is the gist. If you ask me questions, other things may come back to me. But that is the gist of my appreciation of their political thought.

DAVEY: What impression did you form of their organization as such? I mean did you get the impression it was a large number of cells who were working, that there was a hierarchy? Were they taking orders from anyone, or were they operating on an independent basis?

CROSS: All I can give you is an impression. My impression is that there is a network of individuals and possibly other members of the cell do not necessarily know, and that there are certain broad guidelines laid down. Kidnapping was laid down, shall we say, as the target for 1970. And that within this, certain cells will go

CROSS: (Cont'd)

off and do things. And once they decide to do it, it's left pretty much on their own whether they will use for security reasons other cells for communication. There was obviously communications between Chenier and Libération; there was communication, I think, with another, then another communications cell. But that there is no, as it were, in a detailed sense, a general council of the FLQ which would be meeting and then decide what we're going to do next.

DAVEY: The targets of say kidnapping in 1970, by what means would those objectives be arrived at?

CROSS: Well, I think that some early time in the year somebody laid these down, perhaps three or four people meeting together who then went off and passed messages to other people. But this was all sheer deduction on my part from vague things. I heard very little really of what they were talking about.

DAVEY: How did they react, for example, to Mr. Laporte's murder?

CROSS: They knew about it. They knew he was dead, before it came on. You'll find in the police record two contradictory statements. On the Friday night, and I can't remember who made the statement on the Friday night,

CROSE: (Cont'd)

whether it was Trudeau or whether it was Bourassa, or whether it was Bourassa, or whether it was both of them, but after one of the statements, the girl, Cosette-Trudel, said - I heard her clearly - "Laporte est mort.". Now it's impossible for me to really judge the terms in which she said it, whether she said, "Laporte est mort?"; or whether it was a statement of fact. I took it to mean, because there was then some talk of Laporte used, that a plan had been worked out between the two cellules that in certain events, certain things would happen and that if there was a complete rejection, Laporte would be killed. I mean I deduced this after, that I would be held. On the other hand, certainly when Laporte's death was announced, it was no surprise to them. They knew it. On the other hand, one of them, whom I now think to be Lanctot, or now know to be Lanctot, told me that he was sick to his stomach when he heard of Laporte's death. These are two, in a sense contradictory statements, and now I can't reconcile them.

DAVEY: If the first statement were made on the Friday night, Laporte didn't die until the Saturday.....

CROSS: Are we sure of this? The police didn't seem, when I talked to them, to be terribly clear. There is some doubt as to whether the folding of the body in the trunk might affect the post mortem. But this is something that you'll want to check.

DAVEY: Going back to one of the other things you said, you said that there seemed to be some understanding of what would happen after Laporte had been captured and various events....

CROSS: No, not from the beginning. I think this was established during the week of Laporte's kidnapping.

DAVEY: There must have been communications?

CROSS: Oh there was communication. I heard about how Laporte was being treated about Monday. I was told that he was being much worse treated than I was, that he was babbling away all the time and finding difficulty in keeping control of himself.

DAVEY: How did they react to the War Measures Act, to such massive response. Did they expect this?

CROSS: No, I don't think so. Their response to almost every reaction of the Government in a legal sense, every police action, was fascinating. It was to claim that this was

CROSS: (Cont'd)

contrary to British justice. And I found this the most amazing statement and I kept on pointing it out to them. But they were most indignant about what they regarded as retroactive legislation which they regarded as contrary to British justice.

DAVEY: How did they react to various personalities like Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Bourassa....?

CROSS: They laughed at them.

DAVEY: What about René Levesque?

CROSS: Oh they had respect for Levesque, but they weren't going to take any notice of him. They regarded Levesque, to go back to our previous analogies, I suppose rather as the Irgun Zvai Leumi regarded the head of the Jewish agency.

DAVEY: And the Claude Ryans, and the Laberges, and people like that?

CROSS: They laughed at them, really. They regard Claude Ryan as someone who has sat on the fence so long,they laughed at the Archbishop.

DAVEY: Chartrand? Michel Chartrand?

- 11 -

CROSS: Oh they thought Chartrand was a good chap, but not much more. My impression was that they thought people like Chartrand and Lemieux were people who went around shooting their mouths off....

DAVEY:Robert Lemieux?

CROSS: Robert Lemieux.who weren't really in the organization. This would be my guess. But is is only an impression.

DAVEY: How did they react to the inquest proceedings?

CROSS: They were fascinated by the whole thing and followed it terribly closely. They didn't give any great response or reaction.

DAVEY: Did you get any sense of factions or dissent at all in the FLQ ranks in terms of what was happening?

CROSS: There were a whole lot of heated arguments but I couldn't follow them, they were too fast. I think they were mostly about tactics on communiques and things and about what they should do next. But I can't tell you that. It was in very fast French. But Madame Cossette Trudel kept on. She was a very violent bitch. She kept on shouting at the others on occasions and screaming. But it was difficult to sort of follow. It's terribly hard. My French is poor and when people talk fast it's very, very tiring and I reckoned that my business was to keep my strength up and to keep alive and not really worry about what they were up to.

- 12 -

DAVEY: What impression did you form of them as just human beings?if this is possible outside of the situation?

CROSS: Personally, they were very kind to me - except for that woman. She was, I think, as so many female revolutionaries are, so dedicated that she allowed her personal feelings to mix with her political feelings. The rest were very kind to me, treated me politely, but they were absolutely dedicated. They had committed themselves to this and they had committed themselves, I think, to go to death in this cause. And in some ways I think they would have been happy to have been killed in the cause of being sort of martyrs of the revolution.

DAVEY: And yet in most of the other cases, immediately the FLQ have been surrounded by obvious, by superior forces, usually they have given in fairly quickly.

CROSS: Well, here again....there are all sorts of contradictions in this and I can't resolve them.

DAVEY: Could you just say a few words about each of the personalities who were there, Carbonneau.....

CROSS: No, I can't, because remember until two o'clock on Thursday morning I couldn't distinguish who was who. I mean it's very difficult to distinguish voices in a foreign language. Lanctot, I think now, was the man who did most of the negotiations with me. He, I would say, is somebody - I don't know what his father was - my guess is that his background would be very similar to Vallières', someone brought up in a working-class background, with great frustrations in his life, unable to achieve what he wanted. Funnily enough, and now it comes back to me, one morning they brought in to me two words in English. Now what the hell were they? The words will come back to me. They were something like embittered - two words which would describe a man who has attempted to achieve something and has failed and is embittered against the whole world. They were trying to get me to translate these into French. And I would have said that this was, in a sense, Lanctot, that he was, he tried to do various things and things that failed on him, and he had a terrible bitterness against the whole establishment in Quebec. And they were all - it reminded me very much of arguing about Communism - they were all full of sort of parrot phrases about, which appear all through the communiques, about big bosses in Westmount, Power corporation and these sprinkled their conversation all the time.

DAVEY: Do they have any sense of humour at all?

CROSS: Oh, yes. It was strange in the midst of the worst situations, one burst out laughing. I was just telling Susan. At 3 o'clock on Thursday morning as we were all sitting there with a thousand police and soldiers all around us, they were writing out the message that they threw out, and each of them, you know, added a few words, say this, say that, say the other. And then as they finished it, somebody said, "Ah, but put in nous vaincrons." And at that moment we all burst out in a howl of laughter. It seemed so absurd in the situation. And there was another occasion, I don't know if you remember, when the police arrested the wrong Bernard Lortie in Hull. And I turned to them and said, "Ah, you see what's gone wrong, you've arrested the wrong Mr. Cross." And you know there were roars of laughter on that occasion. There was a lot of humour about the situation. Particularly when people would come on and make statements which were, in the circumstances, absurd, you know, that I had departed to Switzerland or that Lanctot was in Mexico, or that I was kept gagged, bound, amongst machine guns and bombs tied to my feet. There was a lot of humour. It was one of the things that kept me going all through. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't have stayed sane.

- 15 -

DAVEY: How many people were you actually dealing with?

CROSS: To the best of my knowledge, I was dealing with six people, four men and two women, one of the women who left some weeks ago.

DAVEY: How many did you see on a regular basis?

CROSS: I never saw anybody - their faces - but all of them would come into the room sometime during the day and at nights they would pretty all be sitting in the room, except, I think, they probably always left one outside. Except for Carbonneau, who I think came to the house about two weeks after the kidnapping.

DAVEY: When you say you didn't see their faces....

CROSS: I never saw their faces in the house. I told the police this, so I don't think you'll need the details of the actual modalities of my holding.

DAVEY: But that would mean pretty rigorous mentality and discipline....

CROSS: Absolutely rigorous discipline. There were always two people guarding me, at least two people guarding me every 24 hours a day, day and night.

DAVEY: OK.

CROSS: Fine, unless you want to go on while I'm in stream.

DAVEY: All right....

DAVEY: So that when I was saying at the beginning that these people had more in common with the Maoists in Vancouver than with the PQ, what I was implying was in the revolutionary sense. As they would say of the PQ in much of their own literature, it's just substituting an Anglo American bourgeois for a French Canadian bourgeois. And you find in many of their documents that they are contemptuous of the PQ.

CROSS: I didn't get that impression that they were contemptuous of the PQ. I think they would regard the PQ as an instrument, I think that as I said, as a John the Baptist, who would serve its purpose in one of the measures of drawing attention to the problems of Quebec.

DAVEY: Did they have any sense of plans for the future beyond the short term? Was there any sort of timetable in their minds for achieving the things they are aiming at?

CROSS: No. The long term plan, they said to me, we don't know that we will see independence in our time, but perhaps in our children's time. The short term, the only thing I did notice, and I mentioned this to the police, I think they are working on parcel bombs, to be sent through the post to people. They showed me some boxed games which they were working on, booby traps with batteries inside. They had a little game, sort of Parker game, or some sort of thing and as you opened it a light came on and that had a battery inside.

RCMP CONSTABLE: We found that.

CROSS: This terrified me, the thought of that being opened by kids on Christmas morning.

DERY: Latin America, which you mentioned. Did you form any impression they were patterning themselves on what was happening down there? On Marighella or Guevara?

CROSS: Oh, yes. The name of Marighella wasn't mentioned to me nor Ché Guevara. But they gave me one book on the Brazilian thing and they obviously had studied the Brazilian kidnapping situation.

DAVEY: Who did they acquire their beliefs from? To be pretty well indoctrinated in that way, to think in that way, they must have done a fair amount of studying. Does this trace back to any location like in the University of Montreal or circles in Montreal.....

CROSS: Oh I don't know. My impression is that at least one of them had been to university, one or perhaps two, but I couldn't say. I don't know whether Lanctot was ever at university. I wouldn't know.

RCMP CONSTABLE: Jacques Lanctot had his political beginning with the Socialist Labour League in Canada. Did he ever mention his participation with the Socialist Labour League in Canada?

CROSS: No.

DAVEY: The youth in the CEGEPs and in the universities are very much a focus of attention of these people. Did you get any sense that they were concentrating on them at all?

CROSS: No, only in the sense that they were terribly pleased with these measures of support from CEGEPs. I mean, this was one of the things they were aiming at. But I would have thought that they would regard themselves as an action cell and it would be other people's job to, as it were, you know actually go out and do the stirring up.

DAVEY: You say that they laughed at Trudeau and Bourassa and these people. Do they make any connection at all with them, do they have any sort of feelings other than total dismissal?

CROSS: Total dismissal. Establishment figures who have no sense of the reality of Quebec.

DAVEY: Have they respect for any people outside of their own group in Canada or any people in Canada or the States?

CROSS: The only person I thought they might have a bit of respect for was René Levesque.

DAVEY: Would you say that they were an entirely Quebec-dominated movement in their mentality?

CROSS: As far as I could gather. To come back to my original point, I think the dominant feature is Quebec nationalism to which something else is added, rather than international Communism with a national flavour. This would be my guess.

DUNROSSIL: So, otherwise, they are a sort of avant garde in a vacuum, aren't they, unless you really know what they're an avant garde for? Did you get a feeling of their being an avant garde at all, that something was going to happen after they'd done their work, or....?

CROSS: No, I mean I don't think they'd got beyond this. I think their timescale as I said was a fairly long one.

DUNROSSIL: Strictly an operation?

CROSS: An operation to achieve Quebec independence.

DAVEY: To what sort of things would they be sensitive if you wanted to get back at them?

CROSS: I don't think they're sensitive to anything. I mean they are committed to revolution, and how do you re-commit revolutionaries. The only people you could talk to on this are our chaps who did brainwashing in Malaya who claimed that they reconverted communists. Whether they did or not, whether they just went underground, I don't know. I don't see any measure that you're going to convince these people....

DAVEY: Did they give you any indication from earlier conversation, talking about revolutionary action, did they receive any hope eventually to get moral or physical support from revolutionary states, like Algeria? There have been reports that they have been to Algeria to seek support and to Cuba. Did they at any time mention even hopes?

CROSS: I wasn't talking with them in these terms. I was talking with them in terms of trying to find out their political beliefs. The only thing I did know, and I think it is clear, that one of them, two of them, had visited the Cuban consulate in Montreal. They knew the name of the ex-Cuban consul, the chap who was there some months ago. They knew about the Cuban consulate in Montreal.

DAVEY: How did they regard the French from France?

CROSS: No real interest, no real contact. They roared with laughter when people suggested that de Gaulle was responsible for all this. They roared with laughter when people suggested that the Deuxième Bureau had organized the whole affair. Lanctot told me that he had spent three months in England, and enjoyed it enormously, and he said to me, "I suppose the British Government will never let me back in now."

DAVEY: What about this British sense of justice? You mentioned that they didn't like the idea of retroactivity. Was that in the sense that some trick was being pulled on them, that this was a game that you were involved in, or was it just something that was going to make things more difficult?

CROSS: No, I mean, it's clear that they just thought that the rules of the game are that you have British rules of law and order and you chaps have gone and changed the rules of the game, and this bloody well wasn't fair.

DUNROSSIL: In other words, their type of activity won't flourish where British justice flourishes because they are the chaps who are shaking up the box.

CROSS: I don't think they've gone that far. You're in the game, and then these are the rules of the game and somebody changes the rules. You can change the rules. It's bloody unfair. The Government is supposed to behave differently from us.

DAVEY: I think that's great.

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