

P. Desbarats

Anniversary of a crisis

(From yesterday's Final Edition)

On the first anniversary of the kidnapping of James Cross, the CBC's Tuesday Night last night reviewed the events of last autumn in Crisis: October + One, a documentary by Peter Desbarats and Ian McLaren.

McLaren, who produced and directed the piece, says its assembly required the putting in of long hours over several months.

"We must have gotten every piece of film in existence on the October Crisis," he was saying yesterday in Studio 41 of the Radio Canada building, where Hourglass — on which he is a senior producer — is done.

"I'm not trying to pretend that it's a comprehensive documentary," he said. "We had 90 minutes of a finished program and we had to cut 30 minutes out.

"We tried first to recreate the emotional feeling of last fall and get on from there to the specifics of a few things."

By and large, I would say after seeing it, they succeeded at this.

The first 25 minutes or so was given over to a straight chronology of events, relying on newsfilm where available. Where, obviously, no such film existed, as in the abduction of Mr. Cross, events were recreated and oral transcripts of his press conferences following his release were utilized — so that it was as if Cross himself were narrator.

TV & radio

By
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This was cleverly and painstakingly done, with, for example, the producers going to the trouble of digging up for the simulation the exact model of taxicab in which Cross was spirited away.

After this, the emphasis — and the burden — switched to Desbarats' script, in which he sought to treat with the phenomenon of political kidnapping; with whether the prime minister's invocation of the War Measures was consistent with his reputation as a civil libertarian; and with the canard of a takeover of the Quebec government by certain prominent Francophones.

In the matter of kidnappings he reached no conclusions while concerning the prime minister and the rumors of takeover he was on more certain ground.

Mr. Trudeau's behavior he found entirely in keeping with the prime minister's self-proclaimed pragmatism and certain of his writings, notably federalism and the French Canadians.

The plot talk was dismissed without specific assignation of blame either to Mr. Trudeau's office, or to Mayor Drapeau, or to the newspaper which first broke the story — the Toronto Daily Star. Still, the implication of mischief having been committed here was clear enough.

Wisely, at the end, Desbarats sought to make no judgment for history.

And for the most part, the hour was well spent.